

the Record

Winter 2020



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

EVERYONE IS

WELCOME





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 in Australia's National Council.

National Council
PO Box 243
Deakin West, ACT, 2600

Phone: 02 6202 1200
Email: info@svdp.org.au
Web: vinnies.org.au

Editor: Toby oConnor
Editorial Committee: Rose Beynon
Judith Tokley
Donna Scheerlinck

Design: Damon Carr
damon.com.au

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.

ISBN 978-0-6487329-1-4

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 conferences located in individual parishes across the country.



Available online:
record.vinnies.org.au

IN THIS ISSUE

3	President's Column	Claire Victory
4	National Council Strategic Plan 2020	Warwick Fulton
6	The Rule: National Council seeks input on proposed new provisions	
7	Our Members are resilient: Rallying around the Illawarra	Robin Osborne
8	Vinnies: Helping refugees and advocating for their rights	Tim McKenna
11	Prime Minister urged to explore options for long term relief for unemployed	
12	People need enough to live on and a place to call home	
13	HomeBuilder package misses the mark	
14	COVID-19 Youth Initiative Victoria	Bao Nguyen
15	Canberra Goulburn Vinnies Youth Members on the Front Line	Gwendolyn Goon
16	The Call to Flexibility	Sr Therese Haywood DC
17	Our Members in WA Thinking Outside the Square: Car Boot Food Appeal	Deanna Watson
18	Vinnies adopts National Catholic Safeguarding Standards	Judith Tokley
19	Queensland Vinnies: Leadership in Challenging and Changing Times: Modelling Vincentian Spirituality	Samantha Hill
20	National Council: Reflecting on our members' good works	Toby oConnor
22	National Council: Emergency Relief	Patrick McKenna
24	Our members walking alongside bushfire affected communities	Rose Beynon
26	Falling between the cracks	
28	The advocacy voice of our members	Rose Beynon
29	Vinnies joins call for bipartisan anti-racism strategy	
30	Overseas Project	Jude Blacklock
32	Anti-Poverty Week - 11-17 October 2020	Toni Wren
34	I get knocked down, but I get up again, and again, and again...	Cassandra Bull
37	Vinnies Victoria certified carbon neutral	Dee Rudebeck
38	Vinnies CEO Sleepout succeeds against the odds, raising \$5.7m for homelessness	

Isolation has built empathy

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

I am an extrovert. I don't mind my own company at all, but I get energy from being with other people. Usually, I am very busy, going from work to meetings to social events, constantly surrounded by or in touch with other people.

The COVID-19 lockdown slowed my life down. A lot. Instead of hardly ever being home – constantly out and about, travelling frequently – I was suddenly spending 23 hours a day inside my house (the other hour being spent walking around my local area; I'd never noticed what a nice area it is). It was remarkable how much, and how quickly, I missed human interaction.

When I went on walks, if I passed someone and they smiled and said 'good morning', it felt amazing. If the postie arrived with a parcel, I raced to the front door in order to try and secure 10 seconds of small talk before he left the package and departed. In the latter stages of working from home, I briefly dropped into a new café to grab a takeaway coffee; the café owner and I chatted for about 5 minutes and it was a highlight of my day. Even now, having emerged from iso and returned to the office, I am experiencing a frisson of excitement when someone initiates chit chat in the lift. I guess the beauty and value of human contact, which I never had to think about before – I always had so much of it – had suddenly become a rare and precious thing that I now revelled in rather than taking it for granted.

I always knew, intellectually, the extent to which so many marginalised people within our community are deprived of those casual niceties in their daily lives; but because of iso I have, for the

first time, felt it in myself and understood slightly better how painful and soul-destroying it could be to be deprived of those positive human interactions constantly, permanently. The joy I felt at such simple interactions reminded me of how devastating the lack of same would surely be.

I have never watched SBS' 'Filthy Rich and Homeless' and so make no judgment on the value or ethics of the program, but the comments I have seen reported from the participants seem to indicate that by far the hardest thing they had to encounter during their time sleeping rough was the feeling of being looked down on, or completely ignored.

Many people in our community are invisible in plain sight. Frail elderly people, people living with disability, people isolated because of mental health issues, people sleeping rough. For many it's not always clear what to say or how to engage. Otherness can be a source of discomfort and alienation.

I think one of the things Vincentians possess is empathy – an intuitive understanding of the value of person-to-person contact, of treating someone as human, of taking the time to be with them and to talk and listen without judgment.

I hope that a lesson all Australians learn from this pandemic is the importance of looking out for our neighbours – not just by ensuring they have food and other basics, but ensuring that no-one has to experience life without eye contact, a friendly smile, a cheerful 'good morning'. ♦



Claire Victory

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

National Council Strategic Plan 2020

BY WARWICK FULTON

The National Council has approved its new Strategic Plan 2020. This plan sets out what the National Council will do, both individually and in conjunction with the State and Territory Councils. Cooperation and collaboration are important aspects of the new plan. As such it will have an impact on State and Territory Councils' strategic plans. The national plan contains a vision for the future of the Society in Australia and should be of interest to all Society members, volunteers, employees and our companions.

Clear boundaries are essential to us all moving forward. In recent years it has not been as clear as it might have been where the boundaries lay between National Council and State and Territory Councils. We hope any lack of clarity has been resolved in this new National Council Strategic Plan.

The plan's guiding principles are informed by the Rule and help us assess where and how National Council might operate. The plan states that National Council has a role in:

- prioritising advocacy and speaking out for the sake of the vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are over-represented among our companions.
- supporting initiatives when there is a national benefit identified and it makes sense to do something together rather than separately.
- promoting subsidiarity so that activity is carried out at the level that is most helpful and logical.
- upholding, updating and promoting the Rule, so that it continues to serve our contemporary society.
- providing representation nationally and internationally.
- effectively creating links and environments to collaborate, coordinate and reallocate resources across Australia.
- mediating only where there are intractable disputes between or within State/Territory Councils.

Whilst these guiding principles are aspirational the National Council has set itself six long-term objectives through to 2028. These are:

A. Supporting our people

We will create the environment of increased Vincentian spirituality, diversity and numbers in the Society.

B. Promoting and Protecting our identity

We will be recognised as a safe, high performing and caring organisation by companions, the community, governments, and agencies.

C. One Society

We will foster productive collaboration across the Society, creating positive outcomes for our people.

D. National Advocacy

We will influence our nation's priorities, by being a voice for people who are experiencing disadvantage.

E. Sustainability

We will build the Society's capacity to effectively operate across the jurisdictions, sharing resources to most effectively meet our Mission and our Vision.

F. International Relations

We will empower National Councils in developing countries to sustainably build their Vincentian vision and we will support CGI to grow the Society's impact worldwide.

Underpinning each of these objectives is a series of goals, measures and timelines that clearly state how these objectives are intended to be met.

The National Council worked on this strategic plan for many months. State and Territory Councils and CEOs were invited to give input into the plan and suggestions were incorporated in the final form of the plan now available to you on the National Council's website.

You will see that most of the timelines in the Strategic Plan run out in 2022. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, most of the state and territory Strategic Plans run to 2022 so it will be an opportunity at that time to align the national and state/territory Strategic Plans. Secondly, Claire Victory's term as National Council President ends in March 2023 so there is the chance for the incoming National Council President and the new National Council to reset the Strategic Plan.

Many of the goals in the National Council Strategic Plan are ambitious and National Council doesn't expect to complete all of them by the end of 2022, but we want to make progress on all of them by then. Because the Strategic Plan is ambitious, we hope that it will guide the Society in Australia until at least 2028 and perhaps beyond.

What's in it for me?

As you can see the foremost long-term objective is to support our members in their spiritual journey and in their work for the Society seeking to diversify and increase our membership. State and Territory Council strategic plans will gradually be aligned with the National Council Strategic Plan so that whatever we do as a Society in Australia is consistent across Australia and directed primarily to serving our members, volunteers, employees and our companions. The end result should be that our people feel valued and properly resourced and our companions feel supported.

We commend the plan to you and hope that you will find it inspirational as you continue along your Vincentian journey. ♦

The Strategic Plan is available [here](#).

Note: CGI is Council General International the peak body for the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Warwick Fulton is the National Deputy President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.



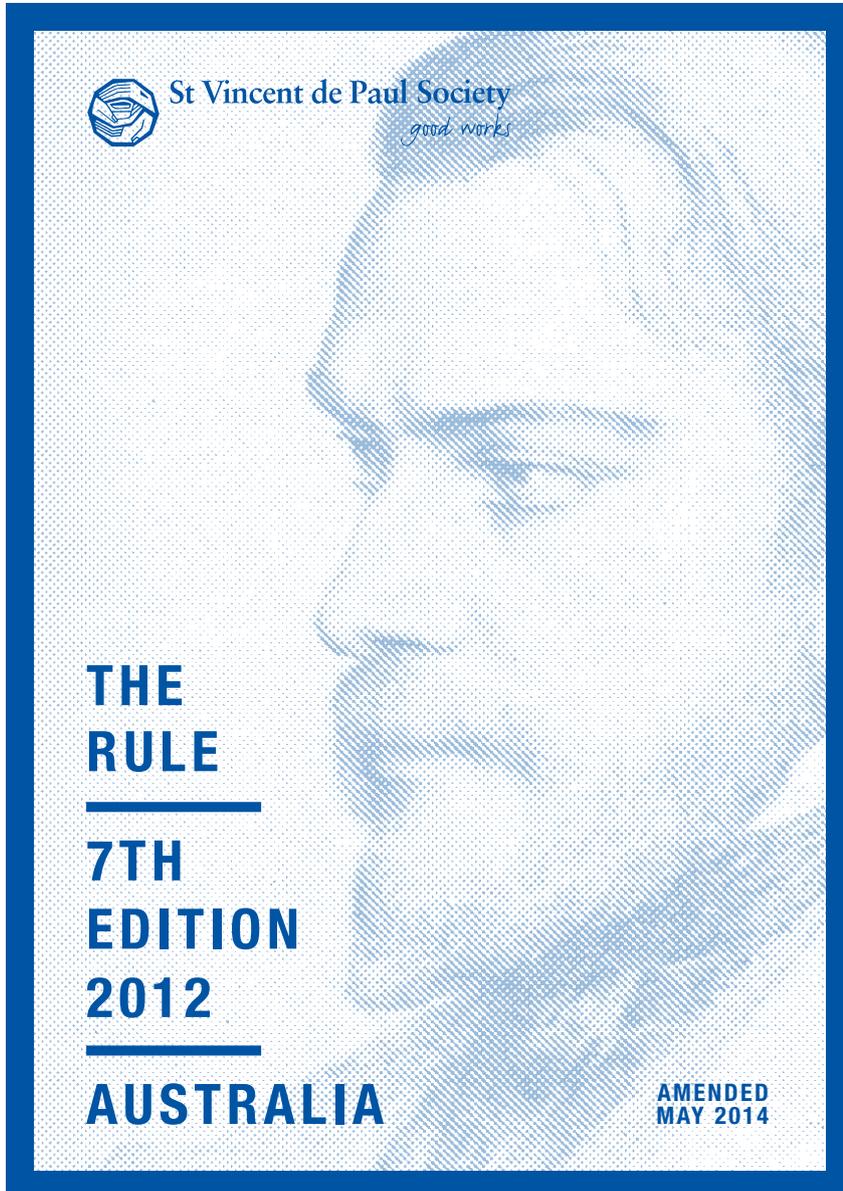
St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia
**NATIONAL COUNCIL
STRATEGIC PLAN**

2020-2023



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

The Rule: National Council seeks input on proposed new provisions



The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council seeks input from members on changes to The Rule Part III which have been proposed in an effort to clarify a number of provisions related to reputational damage.

National Council President, Claire Victory said the proposed changes will clarify the respective powers and responsibilities of State and Territory Councils and National Council to address reputational or other damage to the Society caused by the actions of a person in a lower order council, conference or a special work.

'An issue that arises within a state or territory will generally be dealt with by the State or Territory Council, but where this is not possible, the issue will be referred to National Council for resolution,' Ms Victory said.

'As Vincentians, we must always try to resolve any issue through discussion and consultation to try to reach consensus and understanding of what is best for the Society, its companions and members.

'It is important in those cases where intervention is necessary, that we have clear mechanisms and processes and that a person affected be given a right of appeal if they feel they have been treated unfairly.

'A right of appeal will also lie from intervention by a State or Territory Council to the National Council.

A detailed discussion paper is available on the National Council's website for your consideration – [here](#). ♦

Written comments to the National Council can be made by Monday 21 September by email to kara.gibbs@svdp.org.au.

Our Members are resilient: Rallying around the Illawarra

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

The bushfires affecting many NSW coastal communities took lives, destroyed homes and businesses and caused widespread job losses. Then came the second shock that no one had expected, coronavirus.

Sparked by the rapid COVID-19 lockdown, the Vinnies network of volunteers and staff in the Illawarra Region swung into action, working in accordance with the restrictions of the pandemic to focus on those who needed help, materially or emotionally, in this time of crisis.

When other regional services closed their doors, the Vinnies Coniston Hub in Wollongong remained open five days a week to offer a clean and safe space for people to access food, and case management and to see a friendly face.

Even in normal times the Hub was kept busy helping people sleeping rough or in insecure housing, as well as families and elderly folk struggling to make ends meet. Now, things needed to gear up. From the early days of the pandemic case workers outreached to clients, offering help with accommodation, essential supplies, medical and mental health services.

At a time when disadvantage and social isolation were heightened for the most vulnerable, the Coniston Hub continued providing the compassion, friendship and support that Vinnies is known for across the state.

According to the Coniston Hub's Community Engagement Officer Danielle Jolliffe, "Staff and volunteers made and distributed over 1200 meals and had 1800 visitors seeking assistance from mid-March to end-May. The assistance we offered included finding housing for the lockdown period."

Because of health-related age



The Vinnies van provided a lifesaving service, delivering prepared and fresh food throughout the greater Wollongong area.

restrictions the Coniston Hub had limited volunteers on site. The hard-working Illawarra Shoalhaven Van was still seeing up to 30 people per session, despite lower turnouts because of the COVID-19 threat. The emphasis was on balancing social distancing and social interaction.

The Hub worked with the nearby University of Wollongong to provide food relief to international students, connecting them with support networks and delivering fresh bread to those staying on campus.

Wearing protective equipment, volunteers with the Van continued to deliver meals, sandwiches, snacks, drinks, fresh fruit and vegetables, bread and essentials, four nights a week throughout Wollongong, Warrawong, Albion Park and Bellambi.

"We are so grateful for the amazing support of our many volunteers, including those with the Van, our

staff, partners and donors who enabled us to continue providing these essential services during a truly critical time," said Renee Cooper, Regional Director-South.

"Particularly heartening was the way the Illawarra Shoalhaven community came together with Vinnies in new ways. As the colder weather set in, a group of caring locals started knitting beanies and scarves for visitors to the van.

"We also had help with food supplies from Ozharvest, Secondbite, Aldi, David Jones, as well as local clubs WIN Entertainment Centre, Shellharbour Club and West Leagues Club, who generously provided fresh produce for the Van and hubs. Quilton and 360 also helped with daily living supplies at a time when essentials like toilet paper were scarce and expensive." ♦

Robin Osborne is Communications and Marketing Partner St Vincent de Paul Society Lismore Central Council

Vinnies: Helping refugees and advocating for their rights

BY TIM MCKENNA

The St Vincent de Paul Society has a long history of supporting refugees.¹ This article provides an update on our support to and advocacy for the most vulnerable of these people: those still held by Australia in PNG and Nauru; those in locked detention in Australia and those in our community without Commonwealth Government support during the COVID pandemic.

National Advocacy

July this year was the seventh anniversary of the decision of then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2013 to put in place the policy that ensured no people who arrived in Australia by boat, seeking our protection, would ever gain permanent settlement in Australia but would instead be sent to PNG and Nauru.

On 17 July, the National Council issued a media release highlighting the deteriorating situation for the nearly 400 people still in PNG and Nauru, and the hundreds sent to Australia for medical treatment who are still in closed detention here.² This release has been one of many issued in that last few years condemning this policy. In November last year, the Society was highly critical of the repeal of the Medevac legislation after just nine months, describing the move as a new low in the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees by the Commonwealth Government.³

Recently the Commonwealth Government has acknowledged that COVID risks require the removal of some people from immigration detention in Australia, but its solution is to move those it sees as a threat to the community to Christmas Island. The Society believes the simpler, cheaper, safer and more humane solution would be to release those who are no risk to the community



(including those brought from PNG and Nauru) into detention arrangements in the community.

The Society is also dismayed that the Commonwealth Government, after seven years, still has no plan for the safe and permanent resettlement of many of these people and that billions of taxpayer funds continue to be used to hold them offshore and in closed detention in Australia.

Also, for many years the National Council has been advocating for people who came to Australia by boat before July 2013 and who have since suffered the unfair 'fast track' process. The Council condemns the uncertainty of temporary protection visas and the cuts in Government payments to people on bridging visas. In April this year the Council called on

the Commonwealth Government to extend available payments and support to people seeking asylum, noting that thousands of people on bridging visas have no access to any form of financial support before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, even when they have no other income.⁴

The National Council is a signatory to the Refugee Council of Australia's *Nobody Left Behind* campaign demanding greater support to these vulnerable people.⁵ The campaign is focussed primarily on getting the JobSeeker payment, or equivalent, extended to the roughly 100,000 people seeking asylum currently in Australia, which includes around 16,000 children and young people. The Society has also provided 'on the ground' evidence of the impact of the Commonwealth

Government's neglect of these people at a Senate Committee hearing in July.⁶ This campaign has had an impact at the state and territory level, where most of these governments rightly see temporary visa holders (including asylum seekers) as part of our community and so have provided some assistance to them.

The National Council is assisted in its advocacy by the Vincentian Refugee Network (VRN), a group of members and employees of the Society from most states and territories, who work to support people who have sought Australia's protection, but many of whom continue to be mis-treated by the Commonwealth Government. The remainder of the article gives recent examples of that work.

Supporting People in Our Community

The Society supports many refugees through its network of parish-based conferences across Australia. But the more vulnerable people need support from more specialist groups which Vinnies has in several states and in the ACT. In Adelaide the Society has established the Vinnies Migrant and Refugee Centre to do exactly that.

One of the key injustices of the Commonwealth Government's treatment of people who sought Australia's protection arriving by boat is the 'fast track' process described recently by Claire Victory, our National President as 'unjust and unfair, including denying effective review of decisions on their refugee status determination'.⁷ The Adelaide Centre's Chair, Henrietta Wighton, says the most vulnerable group are people who are still involved with this process or who have had their claims rejected by this process.

'These are the people who hold temporary bridging visas only and

most of these people have had their access to Commonwealth support stopped, leaving them with nothing unless they can find work. The Refugee Council of Australia estimates that there are approximately 12,700 people in this position in Australia at present. To make matters worse for this cohort, some of the bridging visas are only issued for periods of three or six months, after which an application for renewal needs to be made, and some people have no current visa at all. It is very difficult to find employment in these circumstances,' said Ms Wighton, who is also a member of the VRN.

A further injustice of the 'fast track' process is that those who are successful and found to be refugees are only given **temporary protection** visas for three to five years, rather than the safety of **permanent protection**. Ms Wighton said 'of those who have been able to find work, most of the employment is casual, seasonal or part-time. Almost all have lost their jobs due to COVID and while eligible for JobSeeker, none is eligible JobKeeper.' Since March

the Centre in Adelaide has seen a threefold demand for assistance from people on temporary visas, the majority of whom are on temporary bridging visas and not eligible for either the JobSeeker or the JobKeeper allowance.⁸

Supporting People in Australian Detention

Vincentians visit people in immigration detention facilities across Australia. But the arrival of nearly 200 sick people from PNG and Nauru to Australia for medical treatment posed a new challenge. All of these people remain in locked detention, many for a year or more. Almost half are in makeshift accommodation at Kangaroo Point, a suburb of Brisbane.

Rebecca Lim is a Queensland member of the VRN, who has been working with people in PNG and Australian detention facilities for many years, most recently in Brisbane since the end of 2018. Rebecca is part of a group of 15 people who volunteer their professional services across a range

continued on page 10 ►

Just as an example, I was talking to an Iranian man aged in his early thirties yesterday. Vinnies has been helping him for a number of years now. He has been in Australia since 2013 and managed to find full-time work for several years. He was able to rent a nice house, buy a car and was making friends at work and in the community. However, he was denied refugee status under the 'fast-track' process and his visa was cancelled. He lost his job and his access to the SRSS payment was stopped. He has had to rely on friends and charities such as Vinnies ever since in order to live.

He has not been able to find another job, possessing only a temporary bridging visa. When we first had dealings with this young man at Vinnies, he was very personable, confident and full of plans for the future. Several years down the track, he has lost a significant amount of weight and suffers from chronic depression. He has lost his confidence and is worried that, even if he could find work, he may do something 'wrong' and not be able to carry out his duties. Is this how we want to treat people in Australia? ♦

- Henrietta Wighton SA

◀ continued from page 9

of disciplines including health, migration services, community development and education.

Rebecca and her colleagues provide practical support including the provision of sim cards and material aid as needed. This group is the first port of call for the men when they arrive in Queensland.

Ms Lim said ‘all the people are very unwell. They stay in their rooms for most of the day. Counselling is offered by tele-health due to COVID, and the men are disengaging. Many are displaying signs of resignation syndrome. They have no hope of a resolution. We’ve seen notes from men that show the environment of indefinite detention is contributing to their deteriorating mental health.’

‘Because of COVID-19 restrictions all visits have stopped and calls have been made for the men to be moved to safer accommodation in the community with family or with community members who have offered them accommodation,’ she said.

The Human Rights Commission⁹ and infectious disease experts¹⁰ support the release of detainees into suitable housing in the community if they do not pose a significant security or health risk. The Commonwealth Ombudsman also supports reduction in the numbers of people held in immigration detention facilities to address COVID-19 risks.¹¹

Ms Lim asked ‘why is the department choosing detention over other temporary options in the community that are better and cheaper? People can be in the community while their resettlement is resolved. The Government is choosing to spend a fortune on hotel detention when that money could go on other more important things such as aged care and nursing,’ she said.

The Refugee Council of Australia has recently costed locked detention at \$350,000 annually per person. That’s \$70 million per year for the two hundred people still locked in detention after being transferred for medical treatment last year. By contrast detention in the community costs less than a third of that and issuing them with a bridging visa reduces the costs to only \$10,000 annually person.¹²

‘This indefinite detention is no plan for a safe future for these people. Suggesting people who are refugees return home is not a plan and many of them have been rejected by the US. So what is the Commonwealth Government’s plan for them?’, Ms Lim asked.

Supporting People Held Offshore

There are number of Australian community groups supporting the people still held offshore in PNG and Nauru. Vincentians are also involved in this work. I work through a Canberra group, Manus Lives Matter.

Through this work I visited PNG several times, the last time in March this year, just before the first

COVID-19 case was detected in PNG. All the men I met had some degree of mental illness, which cannot be treated in PNG, because the cause of their illness is the seven years of incarceration there.

Men with serious physical conditions that require evacuation to Australia, but which is now highly unlikely with the repeal of the Medevac legislation. So once again, the men must rely on the inadequate medical system that generated the 2018 emergency and which required evacuation of many of their friends in 2019.

Safety is also a concern to all the men. There have been many robberies and assaults when they leave their accommodation. And of course, they were and still are concerned about COVID-19 in a country with little capability to detect the disease or to treat it.

I was most concerned about the many men who have been rejected by the US. After seven years the Commonwealth Government still has no plan for their safe resettlement. ♦

Dr Tim Mckenna is Chair of the Vincentian Refugee Network.

1. www.vinnies.org.au/page/Our_Impact/Asylum_Seekers_Migrants_Refugees/
2. Seven years on – hundreds of asylum seekers caught in Australian purgatory – what is the plan? SVDP National Council media release 17 July 2020.
3. Medevac legislation repeal. SVDP National Council media release 4 December 2019.
4. Support Asylum Seekers and Refugees in face of COVID-19. SVDP National Council media release. 3 April 2020. Media release was issued in the lead up to Palm Sunday when, traditionally, rallies are organised.
5. www.refugeecouncil.org.au/open-letter-covid/ 5 May 2020.
6. 1 July 2020. The Age. Record 1.4 million relying on food charity as recession bites. Includes citation

7. thesoutherncross.org.au/news/2020/07/31/call-for-end-to-unjust-process/
8. Ibid.
9. humanrights.gov.au/about/news/media-releases/statement-christmas-island-immigration-detention
10. www.asid.net.au/documents/item/1868
11. www.ombudsman.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/111235/1-July-2020-Statement-by-the-Commonwealth-Ombudsman-Michael-Manthorpe-on-the-management-of-COVID-19-risks-in-immigration-detention-facilities.pdf
12. www.refugeecouncil.org.au/operation-sovereign-borders-offshore-detention-statistics/6/

Prime Minister urged to explore options for long term relief for unemployed

National Council CEO Toby oConnor wrote to the Prime Minister in July, prior to the economic update, drawing attention to the plight of many Australians affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and the long-term impact on Australian society, focussing particularly on income support.

He noted that in the face of the current considerations about the future of JobKeeper and JobSeeker, the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia strongly recommends that the Federal Government establishes an expert panel to advise the Government on revisions to Social Security payment rates that were originally designed to keep people out of poverty.

In summary, he said an independent panel of experts who could set and realistically index payments would provide the foundation for reflecting society's expectations that payments are fair, equitable and sufficient to meet basic needs.

Predictions about the expected rate of unemployment continue to climb and we know there is currently only one job for every 13 people on Newstart or Youth Allowance.

Recent analysis shows that only a quarter of pre-COVID jobs have been reinstated to date and the hours available for work have significantly diminished.

Until the panel is established, JobKeeper should be maintained and either the current JobSeeker rate should be retained (an additional \$560 per fortnight) or the



payment match existing aged and disability pensions (an additional \$370 per fortnight).

He acknowledged the Federal Government's, swift and decisive action to lift people's incomes during the onset of the pandemic and noted that our members have reported the success of these measures across metropolitan and regional communities.

He emphasised that our people on the ground see daily evidence in the turnaround in the lives of people who have received the higher level of financial support, and those who received access to accommodation and wrap-around services since the advent of COVID-19.

He urged the Federal Government to take advantage of this opportunity to convert the temporary relief into enduring reform with enormous social and economic benefits and he offered the Society's insight and expertise to help explore solutions with the Prime Minister and his relevant ministers. ♦

We've heard lots of reports from our members about the fact that people who have not had the money previously through Newstart have been able to actually pay bills, get to medical and dental appointments, put food on the table, sort out rego for cars etc. I think they've really appreciated that higher amount. We would see this as an opportunity between now and the end of December when job seeker may get reviewed again to call on the Government to appoint an expert panel so that we can actually look at this in an objective manner to see where Newstart or JobSeeker should sit when we get back to business as usual sometime in 2021 or even 2022. ♦

- Toby oConnor ABC News 24

For a series of community polls conducted on the effects of COVID-19, refer to the ANU's Centre for Social Research and Methods, COVID-19 publications.

Vinnies welcomes extension of JobKeeper payments but questions equity

The St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council has welcomed the extension of the JobSeeker and JobKeeper programs by the Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Treasurer Josh Frydenberg as they

delivered their economic update, but warned that the principles of equity and fairness must not be put to one side in the face of this economic crisis. ♦

Read the media release [here](#).

People need enough to live on and a place to call home

The St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council has called on the Federal Government to maintain JobSeeker and JobKeeper until an expert group has been established to provide advice on payment rates that keep people out of poverty.

Either the current JobSeeker rate should be retained (an additional \$560 per fortnight) or the payment should match existing aged and disability pensions (an additional \$370 per fortnight) but people should not be forced back to the old Newstart rates.

In its submission to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 and the Australian Government's response to the pandemic, the Society also called for an investment of at least \$7.7 billion into social housing.

National Council CEO, Toby oConnor said that the turnaround in the lives of people who have received the higher level of financial support, and those who received access to accommodation and wrap-around services, form part of the silver lining to come out of the pandemic.

Speaking specifically about the impact of the pandemic on service demand and the Society's response, Mr oConnor said that in general, people seeking support

during the pandemic are new and have not accessed charitable assistance before.

'They include young people, people living with disability, people on temporary visas, people in casual employment and international students,' he said.

'Service models have changed significantly in response to the pandemic, with an increased online presence and virtual/contactless support being provided,' he said.

In its submission, the Society also called for:

- flexible approach to contract administration during the pandemic;
- suspension of the next stage of tax cuts and exploration of other tax options, such as a review of the GST and superannuation laws;
- development of a national housing affordability and homelessness strategy;
- investment in better energy efficiency and energy management and the Healthy & Affordable Homes: National low-income energy productivity program;
- processes that increase the uptake of state energy concessions for gas, water, electricity and council rates;
- an exemption for charities from the \$50 million turnover limit for the application of the code of conduct for small and medium enterprises commercial leasing principles;
- national minimum standards for renters and landlords for managing tenancy issues;
- access to medical treatment and Medicare and a financial safety net for people seeking asylum;
- bipartisan support to develop a national anti-racism strategy;
- emergency exemptions and provisions to be included in the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines and the Commonwealth Procurement Rules.
- a review of the fundraising laws by the Australian Law Reform Commission as they are no longer fit for purpose. The committee is due to report by 30 June 2022. A copy of the Submission is available on the St Vincent de Paul website. ♦

Read the SVDP submission [here](#).

Read the SVDP media release [here](#).

Report on Adequacy of Newstart provides a blueprint for reform

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council CEO Toby oConnor has urged the Federal Government to seriously consider the recommendations outlined in the Federal Parliament's Community Affairs References Committee's report on its Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart and Other Related Payments.

'If implemented collectively, the 27 recommendations in the report would make a significant difference to the lives of many people living below the poverty

line in Australia and support people into the benefits of fuller participation in the Australian economy,' Mr oConnor said.

'The much higher rate of Jobseeker paid in response to the COVID-19 pandemic recognises that the low rate of Newstart is not acceptable to the Australian community at a time when more people are moving into unemployment. ♦

Read the SVDP media release [here](#).

HomeBuilder package misses the mark



The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council acknowledges the leadership of the Prime Minister and the National Cabinet in continuing to steer Australia through the COVID-19 pandemic. We particularly praise the Prime Minister for looking after many low-income people by providing additional safety nets during these times.

However, the Society expresses disappointment that not one cent of the Australian Government's \$688million HomeBuilder package will go towards strengthening social housing. Investing in social housing would have delivered long-term goodwill beyond the pandemic.

The package, which is restricted to substantial renovations and requires recipients to spend at least \$150,000, also fails low-income home-owners. National Council CEO Toby oConnor said that the Society has been advocating for the last four years for a Social and Affordable

Housing Fund and the development of a National Housing Plan.

'We've been going backwards on the social housing front for the last 15 to 20 years. No national government has demonstrated leadership. Right now, there's an estimated shortfall of at least 438,000 dwellings and that's before the anticipated COVID-19 recession fully hits and unemployment peaks in the next few months,' said Mr oConnor.

'The Society is especially concerned about the welfare of those who have been temporarily housed but are likely to end up back on the streets if nothing is done to address the affordable housing shortage. 'We believe the Government can do better.

'It can boost economic activity in the building sector and address the chronic shortage of social housing at the same time,' said Mr oConnor.

'We and other social housing organisations have land available

and have lined up building and maintenance projects that are ready to go. All we need is the funds. We know we can't do this alone but, together, with governments, industry, the private sector and other charities, we can make this happen,' said Mr oConnor.

'The Society believes housing is a human right and would like to see all governments agree to halve the rates of homelessness and housing shortfalls by 2025. 'Action was taken during the global financial crisis to build 20,000 new social housing units and renovate existing social housing.

'If we could do it then, we can do it now. We remain optimistic our leaders will do the right thing and commit funds to address the housing shortage,' said Mr oConnor. ♦

The Society's 2016 Ache for Home report is accessible [here](#).

COVID-19 Youth Initiative Victoria

BY BAO NGUYEN

The global COVID-19 pandemic has changed our way of life. When the restrictions were put in place by the Government in the State of Victoria, our organisation had to adapt its services in order to keep serving those most vulnerable in our communities. As a result of these restrictions, all child-related activities have been put on hold. One might think that our Youth Conferences (aka Young Vinnies) would go on a hiatus during this time but for a few of us, that simply was not the case. You see, the truth is, Young Vincentians in Victoria do not know how to be quiet. We are a vibrant bunch, full of enthusiasm and always willing to serve but how do you put your faith into action during a global pandemic? The answer is, we had to innovate and adapt like many people to face the challenges in this new kind of world we are living in.

Nicole and I both share the role of State Youth Representatives in the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria and we wanted to find a way to encourage our members to continue to serve those most vulnerable in our communities in a manner that is safe, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak. We both also knew deep down that we simply could not neglect the kids who regularly attend our activities. We knew they would be doing it tough because many of our families are already at risk of facing challenges associated with loss of employment, isolation, mental health issues, domestic violence and homeschooling, just to name a few.

So, on Saturday March 30th, 2020, we both put forward a proposal to State Council of Victoria, to allow Youth & Special Works Conferences to undertake an



initiative to purchase / source material goods (such as books, toys, board games, sporting equipment etc) and have these items delivered to children who are serviced by our Youth Conferences (Young Vinnies) in Victoria. The aim of this initiative is to assist families in providing their children with resources to occupy them at home during the current restrictions due to COVID-19.

Thanks to the endorsement of State Council, we were able to encourage our Youth Conferences (Young Vinnies) to take the opportunity to participate with the COVID-19 Youth Initiative funded by our State Youth Team and we allocated a budget to each conference to spend on the participants who are part of our programs.

However, simply encouraging our conferences throughout Victoria to partake in this initiative wasn't enough and we just had to get involved ourselves. Luckily for the two of us, we both belonged to the same conference and with the help of three of our conference members, we all went

out and got in touch with our local families who we serve. Part of our processes were to call the parents over the phone before we would go out and purchase the items and deliver them because we wanted to add more of a personalised touch. So, we would call the parents to have a conversation with them, check in and see how their family is going and let them know that we are thinking of them during this time. Many of the parents contacted were able to provide insight into what they think their child would benefit from when trying to cope with COVID-19 restrictions. The information was used to go out and purchase the personalised items for the children. Once we purchased the items, whether online or at the local department, we then deliver the items to the family home.

At each child's home, gifts were left on the doorstep in accordance with social distancing requirements. The look of joy on their faces when they accepted their gifts was priceless. Both parents and children were grateful and the conversations

Canberra Goulburn Vinnies Youth Members on the Front Line

shared touched our hearts. A few of the parents opened up about their daily struggles and how their children's mental health and self-esteem suffered because they were struggling with homeschooling. A few children / teens with special needs were severely challenged with home schooling to the point where a few parents reached a breaking point emotionally, spiritually and mentally because they just didn't know how to support their child. At the end of the day, not every parent is a school teacher.

Despite hearing all sorts of struggles from the families there was a silver lining where one particular mother stated over the phone "You called me at the right time and despite having challenges of moving house, working from home, caring for kids with special needs and homeschooling, God works in mysterious ways, your phone call has certainly put a smile on my face and no doubt the kids would be happy to see you! Oh and of course, at a distance!".

When Frederic Ozanam and his friend went out to gather firewood and deliver it to a person in need, it was not just about giving the firewood but more about the conversation he had with the person receiving it. For our COVID-19 Youth Initiative, that principle did not change. Although from the outside, it may have seemed like we were just going out buying gifts for the children, it was actually more than that. It was all about having a conversation with a family going through a tough time and as for the gifts for the kids? Well... just an act of kindness. ♦

Bao Nguyen is the State Youth Representative for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria.

This article was first published by [Council General International](#) on 25 June 2020.

BY GWENDOLYN GOON

It has certainly been a very different experience for everyone involved in the Youth Programs this year. Three summer camps in January were cancelled due to the bushfires, and all holiday camps and weekend activities have been put on hold since mid-March due to COVID-19. Nonetheless, our Youth Conferences continue to find creative ways to stay engaged with our youngies (young people in our programs) and oldies (youth members and volunteers) to provide the much-needed support during these unprecedented times.

The Youth Programs in Canberra/Goulburn consist of St Joe's, VINES and St Nick's, and the primary goal of the programs is to provide access to respite and recreation to approximately 300 young people between 6 and 17 years old. With most public facilities and schools closed during the COVID-19 restrictions, families have indicated the need for additional support to engage the young people at home. There were also mental health concerns, especially for young carers who have additional responsibilities caring for a family member during the pandemic. Hence, during our regular Youth Conference meeting, the members came up with alternative engagement opportunities to maintain support for the youngies. Families were able to opt-in if they wanted to participate in online activities and receive activity packs delivered to their doorsteps.

The oldies organised online watch parties, trivia, and catch-up sessions via Zoom, and put together weekly video messages

to check-in with the youngies. In addition, 22 oldies delivered over 300 activity packs in the last few months to more than 85 families. An oldie, Laura even took the extra mile to drive an hour to deliver several activity packs to youngies in Yass, NSW. Each pack contained instructions and resources for various activities such as arts and crafts, science experiments, baking and gardening. On top of that, the oldies even made video tutorials on the activities!

It was so worth it to see the kids excited about the packs and the family being so thankful.

- Oldie

Thank you so much for the packs, we are struggling so much being in lockdown still especially as we're all high risk and both Marcus^o and his sister, Katie^e have autism. The packs really lightened up the kids especially Katie!

- Parent of a young carer

As the oldies continue to support the youngies, we want to ensure that they are looking after themselves. The Youth Conferences continue to meet virtually, in addition to social catchups and self-care training sessions. The first Youth Programs monthly eNewsletter was also launched in April to keep volunteers updated with program changes and to share positive stories. With restrictions eased in the ACT, we are in the process of putting together a COVID-19 Safety Plan for Youth Programs, with the plan to resume face-to-face activities in August. ♦

Gwendolyn Goon is Manager Youth and Young Adults, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn.

The Call to Flexibility

BY SR THERESE
HAYWOOD DC

These words of scripture that have been on my mind lately:

Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Isa 43:18-19)

They come to me because it seems that we are in times of great change. They remind me that everything changes but that God is in all the changes. These current times of uncertainty and challenge seem to be calling me to greater flexibility. There are many changes large and small in my life right now and I know that I am not alone. We are fortunate that we have a great tradition to draw upon to help us cope with these challenges.

St Louise counselled the early Daughters of Charity about the need to be adaptable to change. In fact, there is among her writings a specific piece on this topic.

The first reason that obliges the Daughters of Charity to accept changes of place, persons and duties is the respect that they owe to the example of the Son of God who acted in this way.

The second is that such changes can and must occur. If they are not accepted, we shall never enjoy the peace of soul that is essential if we are to please God and to accomplish His holy will.

The third reason is that the sisters must take into consideration the difficulties that Superiors encounter in trying to please everyone; in finding Daughters of Charity to send to serve the poor in places where they have been requested; in trying to avoid the many inconveniences that may arise.¹



When I reflect upon these words, I think of these women who were involved in a new form of religious life and were being sent away from their home-towns at a time in which travel was not common. I particularly take to heart the words ‘changes can and must occur’, rarely were truer words spoken. We can struggle with changes, yet they are a part of each day of our lives. Of course, it takes time to adapt to changes but what can trip us up is if we resist them. I don’t know about you, but I can sometimes waste energy wishing that certain changes hadn’t happened. The wisdom of scripture and Louise remind me to be patient and work on accepting the changes as an important part of my life.

In another place, St Louise wrote:

You are well aware that changes are always difficult, and that it takes time to learn new ways of serving the poor skilfully and well.²

Someone the other day posed the question “what have you done in 2020 that you would not have imagined in 2019?” For all of us I am sure that there are many

things that have challenged us to be creative and flexible in our approaches and to find new ways to do things that had been parts of our routine before. I have been inspired by the flexibility and adaptability in our members, staff and volunteers who have risen to the challenge of continuing to serve people in need by finding new ways to do this.

In the midst of all these challenges, it is important to care for ourselves and those around us. These words of Jesus have been keeping me company in recent days.

‘Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.’ (Matt 11:28-30)

We are not alone; we have God and each other. ♦

1. Spiritual Writings of St Louise, 813-814.
2. Spiritual Writings of St Louise, 385

Sr Therese Haywood is National Council Spiritual Adviser St Vincent de Paul Society.

Our Members in WA Thinking Outside the Square: Car Boot Food Appeal



BY DEANNA WATSON

A chance conversation, the efforts and skills of Greenwood Conference members, a network of community support and the reach of social media was all that was needed to help meet the needs of the community during COVID-19.

Covering areas in the northern suburbs of Perth, Greenwood Conference regularly delivers food hampers to many clients experiencing hardship in the community. Earlier in the year, their usually well-stocked pantry was slowly being depleted due to demand.

When the impact of COVID-19 began, restrictions to food supplies meant that replenishing the pantry was becoming a challenge. One suggestion put forward was to hold a car boot food appeal whereby people could drop off donated food items. Conference members soon realised that this idea could be something that was

easily achievable and set about initially promoting it through the local Catholic Primary School and Parish community. The message gathered momentum and spread further afield through emails to friends, and through social media to neighbouring community groups. What Conference members and volunteers were then greeted with on the two Saturday mornings collections, was more than 245 cars filled with boot loads of food and pantry donations.

Unsure how the venture might go, Allan Rose, Joondalup/Wanneroo Regional Council President said he was amazed by the response.

“The generosity from people with their donations was quite incredible considering we had only promoted it for such a short time and due to government restrictions in place such as social distancing. But people showed such wonderful community spirit by being able to contribute and to be involved in such a worthy cause.”

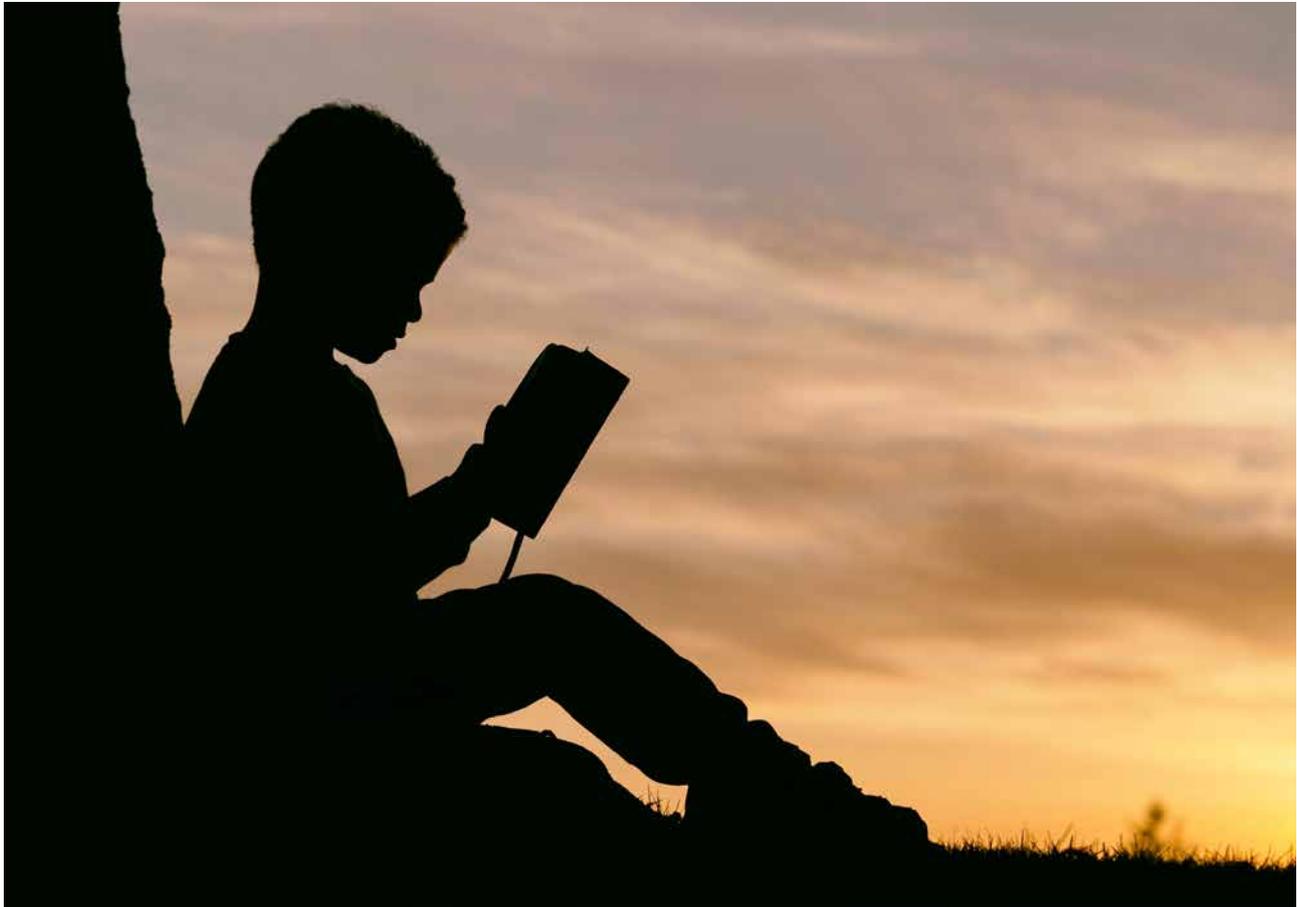
In just over two weeks, the organisation, promotion and execution of the car boot food appeal by Greenwood Conference members resulted in a replenished pantry which is vitally important for food relief for families during the pandemic. The community response to the appeal was also outstanding because many of the donors were they themselves affected by the economic effects from COVID-19.

“Vinnies has a very good reputation of helping so the trick is to get the message out to the community because the community really does want to help,” said Allan.

With the success from Greenwood Conference’s car boot food appeal, two other conferences, Woodvale and Wanneroo also adopted the idea and several weeks later ran equally successful collections. ♦

Deanna Watson is Communication and Content Developer St Vincent de Paul Society in WA.

Vinnies adopts National Catholic Safeguarding Standards



BY JUDITH TOKLEY

St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council has signed up to the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, ensuring a nationally consistent approach to the safety of children and vulnerable people across the Society.

National Council President, Claire Victory said the safety of companions, members, volunteers, staff and the general public has always been central to state, territory and national council governance practices with rigorous standards and practices in place.

The National Catholic Safeguarding Standards now provide a comprehensive set of principles, some of which are specific to

the Catholic Church, to ensure a nationally consistent approach to the protection of children and other vulnerable people. The National Catholic Safeguarding Standards set out 10 standards providing the framework for Catholic Church entities to build child-safe cultures and to advance the safety of children across the Catholic Church in Australia.

The Standards take into account the guidance of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the National Principles of Child Safe Organisations adopted by the Council of Australian Governments early last year. 'Serving some of the most vulnerable people in our communities through relationships of trust and respect is at the heart of the Vincentian mission,' Ms Victory said.

'We welcome this new resource and look forward to working with Catholic Professional Standards Ltd as they commence their auditing and reporting processes.

'We will be inviting the states and territories to establish a national working group in order for us to progress this initiative and to learn how to work towards a harmonised approach from practices presently in place. We now need to embark on some significant work together to ensure the Society is a safe organisation for vulnerable people,' Ms Victory said. ♦

Judith Tokley is National Communications Director, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

QUEENSLAND VINNIES

Leadership in Challenging and Changing Times: Modelling Vincentian Spirituality

BY SAMANTHA HILL

In these unusual times all of us, but particularly our Society's leaders are called to draw upon our spirituality and charisma for inspiration and motivation.

In times of challenge and change our leaders are guided by our mission of living the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor as they respond to the practicalities of meeting increasing and varied needs, at the coalface where people are seeking help often for the first time.

Our leaders, across all levels of the Society, are asked to be shepherds, pastors and living missionary disciples in all areas of their life in order to lead authentically. They are challenged to be living examples of our founders and patrons who modelled for us what it meant to be radical, visionary and socially responsible in the times in which they lived.

St Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam were both effective leaders of their times, encountering and ministering to the people of France and Paris. We read in their prolific letters and communications how they both lived extremely busy lives between ministry, study, accompanying companions, raising awareness and serving the poor.

They were both looked up to as leaders and used this platform to network, ask favours and educate wider society on social injustices. They identified and attracted people from all over who were committed to serving others and had a dedication to social transformation and making a difference in the world, especially in the lives of people living with poverty.

Our current leaders are demonstrating their commitment, creativity and agility. Just like our



founders, they are responding to the needs around them and taking a stand on behalf of the people who have been left behind.

We have seen a strong national response to the COVID pandemic and to the impact of drought and bushfires. The Society's leaders have taken calculated risks in the interests of the most vulnerable people, while balancing the organisations strategic and financial sustainability.

We continue our founders' tenacity as we put people first. When relationships are strong and people feel involved, morale is high and good things happen.

Relationships are key to our presence in local communities. Our leaders, whether engaged directly

or indirectly with those who come to us seeking assistance, first and foremost have answered a call to serve.

Our future directions are discerned with a clear vision and dedication towards best service to people experiencing disadvantage, concern for social justice, and work towards the eradication of poverty.

While our leaders are responsible for a diverse range of services for people from all walks of life in metropolitan, regional and remote communities, they are united by a commitment to make a difference in society. That is right now, tomorrow and for many years to come. ♦

Samantha Hill is Director of Mission St Vincent de Paul Society in Queensland.

National Council: Reflecting on our members' good works

BY TOBY O'CONNOR

No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. (Matthew, 5:15)

This reflection is directed to our members and our volunteers.

In so many obvious ways our world has changed. We are pushed to adapt our old routines to accommodate the devastating COVID-19 pandemic in our daily lives. Life has become a lot more challenging for many of our companions. And in the past months, we have seen the real-life impact of the virus on a new cohort of Australians who suddenly find themselves, some as the result of government decisions, facing the great uncertainties that follow the loss of employment.

Our local conferences and councils are adopting new approaches to allow members to continue to walk alongside their companions and to comfort the scores of new people who are turning to the Society as they face the anxiety that accompanies the effects of this virus.

Right now, I reach out to our members and volunteers on the front line.

As you walk with people in need in these uncertain times, I know that you have had to move to using electronic means to communicate with people. This cannot be easy. Many people are in distress as the safety of their previous world falls away due to the impact of the virus and governments' necessary and difficult decision to take drastic action to protect our nation.

I am writing to let you know that what you do **does** matter. **You** are bringing light to many people who see only darkness ahead. To borrow Matthew's words, you are shining light into every corner of



Toby O'Connor.

our companions' houses in so many ways.

Your optimism for a better world for the people in your community is what drives change. 'Hope' is that virtue which helps us look to a future that is not here yet.

As our website reflects, in our work with people in need we are often called upon to be holders of hope for them because they come to us at times in their lives when it can be hard to see the road ahead. Our gift to them is not only the resources that we can provide but, our care for them and the relationship we build with them.

Everyone involved at state, territory and national levels of the Society in Australia very much appreciates your eagerness to ensure the Society's lamp does not sit under a tub. In displaying passion and tenacity, members ensure light from the Society's lamp lights up the darkest corners.

During these times of change, one thing that has remained constant is our political leadership. In addition to guiding the nation through the uncertainty of the virus and

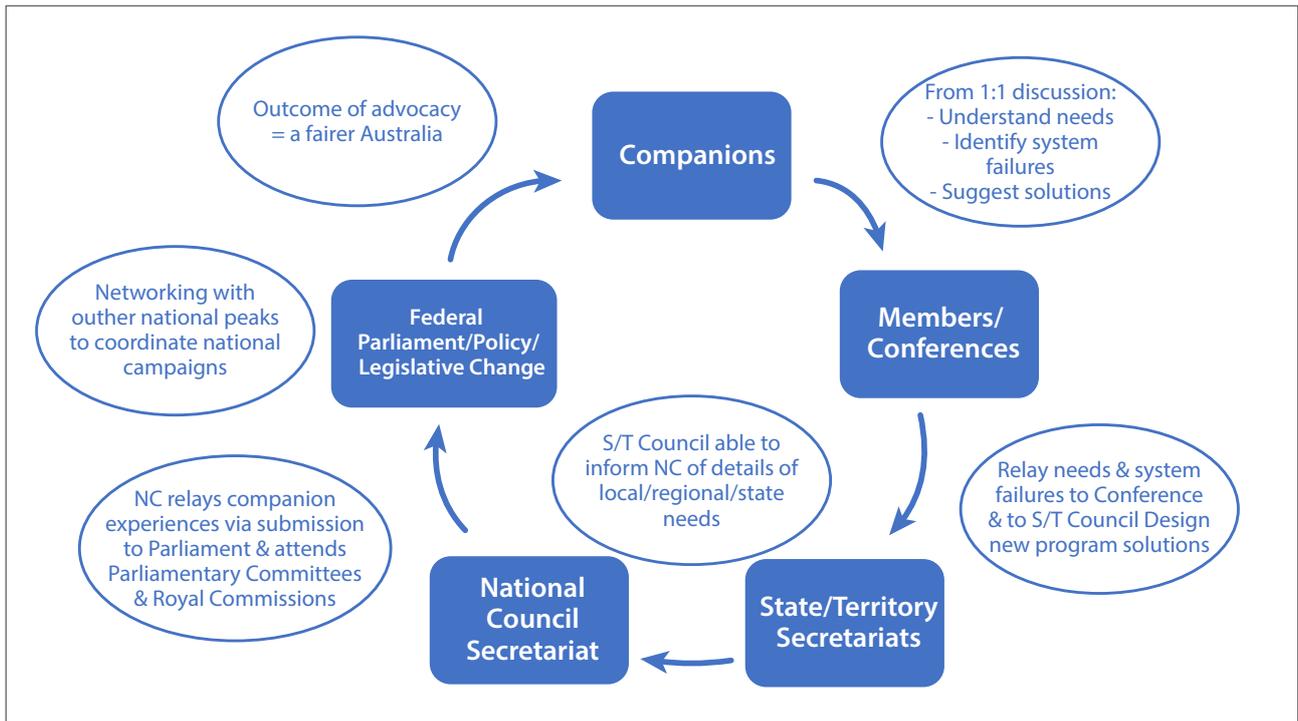
its health and economic impact, politicians continue to address the anxieties confronting so many Australians.

I want to let you know that the concerns you have expressed about your companions are being relayed directly to our Federal Parliament. We know that love motivates your conversations with all the people who approach the Society for assistance and comfort. This is an essential dynamic of our pastoral care. It is this unconditional love and your capacity to travel with people in need, for a long time or a little while, that ensures that when the Society addresses the Parliament we are not, what Corinthians refer to, 'a loud gong or a clashing cymbal'. What we say is truly reflective of what you are seeing first-hand in local communities right across Australia.

Since COVID-19 has emerged, your National Council has made submissions to the Bushfire Royal Commission, a number of Parliamentary Inquiries, including on homelessness, income support, issues affecting migrants and refugee and mental health issues, and worked with federal committees like the National Bushfire Recovery Agency and the COVID-19 Emergency Relief Ministerial Committee. Our advocacy through other channels is also heavily dependent on what you are telling us. Some of these are covered elsewhere in this edition. I am confident these contributions reflect the National Council's direction that the Society's *light must shine in people's lives* (Mt, 5:16).

I hope the accompanying diagram goes some way to highlight the process that ensures that your crucial lived experience feeds our advocacy on these crucial issues.

The essential take away from my reflections are these: the Society's



‘bottom-up’ model is our strength. All of us can recognise the role we play in relaying the hopes and aspirations of people in need.

Without our conferences and our members reflecting the challenges being faced by those they provide pastoral care to we would not have the strength of practical experience to deliver our advocacy messages

or our proposals to make existing systems fairer to our national decision-making House.

Before concluding, I want to acknowledge the very hard work all our social policy staff put in to crafting our social justice positions. There are many occasions when they have to work to pressing deadlines and on many fronts.

They serve our members and our Society well in bringing about a fairer Australia.

Finally, thank you to all our members for what you do to. May you continue to be a beacon of Christ’s love on the hill. ♦

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

Our key values

The Society is aligned to seven key values:

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

Compassion – Welcoming and serving all with understanding and without Judgement.

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

Integrity – promoting, maintaining and adhering to our mission, vision and values.

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

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

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

Membership

There are three categories of membership of the Society. *Conference members* are those who belong to the grassroots groups within the Society known as conferences. They live their Catholic faith in action through the spirit of Christian charity. *Associate members* are those who are committed to the ethos, mission, aims and objects of the Society and who assist the work of the Society, but do not attend conference meetings. *Volunteer members* are those who respect the ethos, mission, aims and objects of the Society and who volunteer in any of the Society’s works. Associate and Volunteer members are registered by procedures established by the relevant State or Territory Council.

Please visit [Become a Member](#) for more information. ♦

National Council: Emergency Relief



BY PATRICK MCKENNA

National Council Secretariat

On 29 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced an additional \$200 million would be made available for Emergency Relief to meet the expected increase in the need for these services resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Emergency Relief National Coordination Group (NCG) was subsequently established to advise the Minister for Families and Communities, Senator Anne Ruston, on the distribution of Emergency Relief funds.

The NCG consists of leaders in the Emergency Relief sector, including the St Vincent de Paul Society, as well as the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

In addition to being represented on the committee by our CEO

Toby oConnor, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council is contracted to provide secretariat services to the NCG.

Pat McKenna was seconded to fill this role in April, from his ordinary duties at St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn as Director of Strategy and Transition.

The NCG has already produced a report to Minister Ruston advising on the areas of greatest need for Emergency Relief services.

We are seeing Temporary Visa holders as the main group who require Emergency Relief at present.

Many Temporary Visa holders have lost their jobs and are not eligible for income support—they have no income and many have no savings.

Another group in need are those living in areas that were already impacted by bushfire

or drought, which is now further compounded by the economic downturn from COVID-19—gaining employment in these areas is particularly difficult.

The item most requested by people in need of Emergency Relief is food. Emergency Relief Providers are instrumental in the distribution of goods from Foodbank, which has experienced a significant spike in demand since the beginning of this year, beginning with the bushfires, then COVID-19, and now the second wave.

The graph below shows the quantity of Foodbank goods distributed to people in need this year (blue line) compared to the average of last year (orange line). Foodbank ordinarily sources its food through donations from supermarkets and farms,

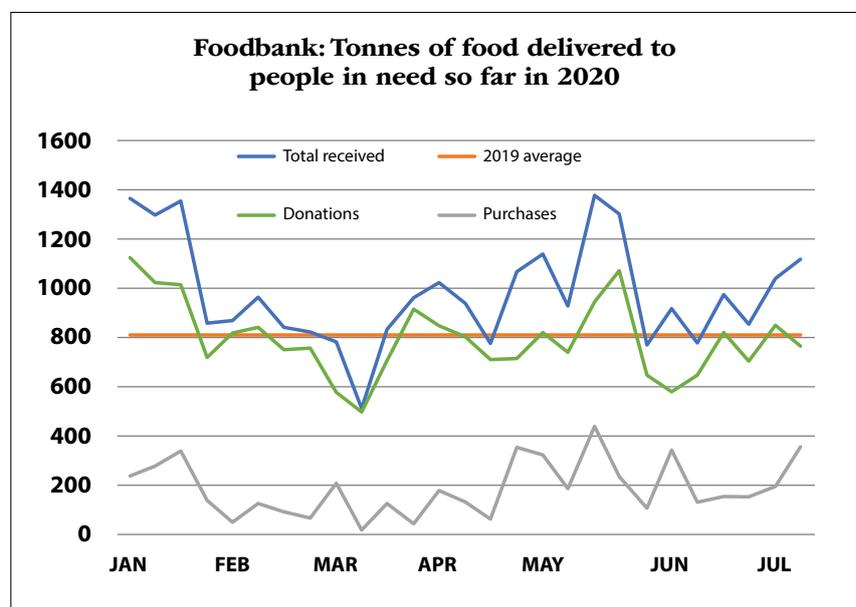


but the high demand this year requires staples such as rice and pasta to be procured with the Government's additional Emergency Relief funds (grey line).

Foodbank: Tonnes of food delivered to people in need so far in 2020

As I write this article, I am breathing a sigh of relief that JobKeeper and the JobSeeker Supplement have been extended, albeit at a reduced rate. The NCG was particularly concerned about the conclusion of these supports which was set to occur as rent moratoriums ended also.

The reduction of subsidised wages in a struggling economy could lead to further job losses. Those who have accumulated rental debts will be asked to commence repayments soon. For those who receive income support, we hope the rate will not be tapered back to its starting



point of \$40 per day—well below the poverty line. We will continue to advocate to ‘raise the rate’.

While the future remains uncertain, we can certainly expect to see further hardship moving forward for people who are unable to find employment or are working

significantly reduced hours. Our members, volunteers and employees are working hard to provide them with a hand-up. ♦

Patrick McKenna is National Coordinator, COVID-19 Emergency Relief Program: Emergency Relief Support National Coordination Group – Coronavirus and beyond.

Our members walking alongside bushfire affected communities

BY ROSE BEYNON

As at 23 July 2020.

The Vinnies Bushfire Appeal was first opened in response to catastrophic bushfires in northern NSW in late September 2019, and later expanded to support the many communities affected by the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20 across Queensland, NSW, the ACT, Victoria and South Australia.

Thanks to generous donations from members of the public, businesses and philanthropists, \$22.9 million was raised to support people who suffered devastating damage to their homes and livelihoods from the fires.

Funds raised in NSW via the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal have been incredibly important in supporting people and communities impacted by the Black Summer bushfires. So far we have distributed \$5.4 million of the \$8.6 million allocated to NSW from the bushfire funds (this does not include parts of the far NSW South Coast which fall under our Canberra-Goulburn team's management). In addition, \$1.2 million has been committed for distribution under the upcoming Community Grants program which will help communities rebuild, focusing on projects with community-wide benefit. This



brings the total funds spent and committed to \$6.6 million.

Our volunteer members are embedded in communities right across the state and were often the first to render assistance to their neighbours in the immediate aftermath of the bushfires.

We have also worked in partnership with the Commonwealth Government

to support people in designated bushfire-affected postcodes, with just over \$3 million in government Emergency Relief Fund payments distributed by Vinnies in NSW. Payments are still available for eligible households. If you are in NSW, visit www.vinnies.org.au/erf for more information. For other states, please call us on 13 18 12.

As we move from immediate disaster relief into the recovery and

- **\$22.9 million raised through donations**
- **\$17.0 million spent and committed; and**
- **\$5.9 million committed to recovery projects over the next 18 months.**

Your generous donations have provided:

- emergency financial assistance including rent and mortgage payments, car repairs and registration, medical expenses
- food, clothing and household items
- crisis accommodation when homes were destroyed or damaged or when people were evacuated, and
- other financial and emotional support to help get people back on their feet. ♦

rebuilding phase, your donations will be used to help individuals deal with the long-term impact of the fires. The remaining funds in NSW will be used to help communities rebuild, focusing on projects with community-wide benefit such as restoring community halls and other shared facilities. You will also be helping farms and local businesses get back on their feet. Two key announcements targeting long-term community development will be made on 27 July.

Canberra-Goulburn

In Canberra/Goulburn (lower South Coast NSW, Snowy-Monaro and Queanbeyan-Palerang) the Society is reaching out to those impacted by the fires who have not yet sought our assistance. Emergency relief funds from the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal are continuing to be distributed to those who have lost homes (up to \$3000) as is Commonwealth Emergency Relief funding (of up to \$1,000). There is an additional focus on community recovery and a first round of grants directed to community recovery is launching in August 2020.

Victoria

In Victoria, there has been a strong focus on engaging with local communities to understand their recovery needs. This included a team of members travelling to Mallacoota and Corryong on a weekly basis, as soon as the roads opened up, which was some 6 weeks after the bushfires ended. To date, we have assisted over 600 individual and families. During Covid-19 travel to the bush fire effects areas is not possible so we have transferred back to a phone and online system to continue to assist supporting local people.

A focus has also been made to

support students from kindergarten through to tertiary with their ongoing education. A generous donation from the Victorian Jewish Community is assisting with these grants. One early example of the important assistance that has been provided came as a result of close community discussions where the Society was able to support the engagement of counselling support for students by funding a Trauma Recovery Practitioner at the local school for 12 months to work with students who have been impacted by the trauma of the bushfires. Two additional significant education projects are also in the planning and about to be launched.

In northern Victoria and across Gippsland our volunteers continue to be active across their community, responding to calls for assistance and providing food hampers, bills, education costs and more.

South Australia

In South Australia, all of our donated bushfire funds have been distributed. Only Commonwealth Emergency Relief funding (of up to \$1,000 cash) is available and a further amount of up to \$1,000 is available for bill payment.

The types of bills covered include:

- Electricity/gas/water bills
- Council rates
- Clean up property (cutting of trees, movement of trees)
- Replacement of fire prevention for property (sprinklers etc.)
- Fencing replacement costs
- Revegetation costs
- Generators
- Solar panels
- Replacement of household items lost (where this no insurance/ insurance doesn't cover all items/ or applicant is underinsured)

- Irrigation systems
- Water tanks
- Cleaning water connections to the house (no mains water)
- Beehives
- Stock feed
- Wood for fires
- Food – credit at supermarkets, butchers
- Food vouchers – Drake, IGA, Foodland
- Rent payments
- Mortgage payments
- Car repairs/servicing/new tyres – goods vehicles required in all fire-affected areas due to distances travelled – Yorketown, Adelaide Hills and KI
- Car registration or driver's licence
- Medical expenses (essential only)
- School Fees for SA government schools.

Queensland

In Queensland, the impact of the fires has been primarily to grazing land and agricultural infrastructure, such as fences and sheds. Few claims have been received for assistance to repair dwellings. Vinnies volunteers have revisited many families that were fire affected in October and November 2019, and who did not seek help at that time. This increased the number of claims processed in May and June 2020. The recent fire assistance has been mainly from the Yeppoon area (Livingstone LGA), with some claims from the Scenic Rim local government area. ♦

Rose Beynon is National Director Policy and Research, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council and Bushfire Liaison Officer.

Falling between the cracks

Vinnies continues to distribute funds generously donated to the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal, supporting people as they enter the long recovery phase after the Black Summer bushfires. As of Monday 2 March, \$9.8 million has been spent to directly support bushfire victims nationwide. Here we share the story of Anne Hewitt, one of the many people your donations have helped.

Anne Hewitt has spent much of her life giving care and shelter to others; she fosters elderly and abandoned animals, and was her late mother's carer until she passed away in 2018.

It seems a cruel twist of fate that someone so giving can lose everything, but that's exactly what happened when a bushfire tore through Anne's property in November last year.

Anne had moved to Upper Fine Flower, a rural area north-west of Grafton, just a few months prior. After her mum passed away she wanted a new start, so she sold her farm, bought a block of land, and moved her animals and two large containers onto the property.

"I had my little shipping container set up on my new block and I had everything that I'd bought to build a container house," Anne said. "All the materials, like special cladding, walls and flooring, insulation and all the rest of it."

It was to be the perfect little home for Anne, surrounded by fields where her horses could graze and her dogs could run. But it never came to be – the fire burst through before the container could be built into a fully-fledged house, and devastatingly, that meant none of it was insured.

"When I tried to get insurance, they said it's not quite a house and it's not quite in contents and it's not quite this, so I just fell through the cracks," Anne said. "So I said alright, leave it because in a couple of months I'm hoping to get it made into a house, and we'll go from there. That never happened."

Anne is unspeakably grateful that she was able to get most of her rescue animals out in time, moving them to an evacuation centre in Grafton over the course of three days. With the fire hot on her heels, she was left trying to coax the last two ponies into a horse float. They wouldn't budge, and Anne had to make the difficult decision to leave them behind.

"The fire was billowing over the hill and I said, 'we have to go'. We got going at about 2 o'clock or something, and the fire hit at about 2:30, 3 o'clock," she said.

She spent the afternoon at the evacuation centre, worried sick about the ponies and her property. As soon as she could, she headed back to Upper Fine Flower to assess the damage.

"I drove out along the road, and I was dodging fire bombs and trees falling and all the rest of it, and got out to where I live – or lived – which is about a 50-minute drive, and got to the front gate and looked out and said OK, my container is on fire," she said.

"That was at 9 o'clock that night. No sign of my ponies, so obviously I didn't sleep that night."

Anne spent the night at the evacuation centre, but made the return journey to her property at first light the following day. Everything was scorched – but miraculously, her two

Anne has received an emergency cash payment from Vinnies, which she's using to purchase tarps and a water tank for her caravan, and hay bales for the horses. She's incredibly thankful to Vinnies as well as The Salvation Army, who have also provided her with support.

ponies stood in the midst of the destruction, alive and well.

That day, Wednesday 13 November, is the last time Anne has been home.

"I haven't been back to my block because I just can't get that round my head. When I went back out to help collect the ponies the next day, the blackness and the burn and the smell and everything, I just said, 'I can't do this, I can't come back yet'."

The loss of the expensive shipping containers, solar panels and building materials is a huge blow, but Anne is tough – she can take that in her stride. What is truly difficult to deal with is the loss of her mum's possessions – clothes, photos and other mementoes.

Anne said she and her mother were "best of friends" before she passed away, a year before the fire.

"I sort of hadn't had the chance to get over it and sort things out,



so I had all her belongings in the container. So there's a lot of emotional stuff going on there. It's more difficult to get over than the fire thing."

For now, Anne and her family of horses and dogs are living on a camping site in Grafton. Thankfully Anne's caravan was stored away from her property when the fire hit, so it was spared and now serves as a temporary home.

Anne has received an emergency cash payment from Vinnies, which she's using to purchase tarps and

a water tank for her caravan, and hay bales for the horses. She's incredibly thankful to Vinnies as well as The Salvation Army, who have also provided her with support.

Anne isn't sure what happens next, and she doubts whether she'll ever be able to return to her property. For now she's just surviving.

"I'm a bit of an emotional wreck but I'm also happy that I got my animals out in time," she said.

After everything Anne has been

through, new troubles continue to surface: her car just broke down, and mere weeks after the fires, floods have hit Upper Fine Flower and caused further damage to her property.

We still need donations to the Vinnies Bushfire Appeal so we can continue to help people like Anne, who are in the early days of recovery and facing an uncertain future. Every single cent donated is being used to support people affected by the bushfires – many who are now facing floods as well. ♦

The advocacy voice of our members

BY ROSE BEYNON



The Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements

In its submission to the Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements the National Council called for a more streamlined approach to assessing and responding to need for people affected by natural disasters in the short- and medium-term.

Speaking to the Society's experience with the bushfires, flood and drought, CEO, Toby oConnor said responses to natural disasters work well when all levels of government, charities and businesses work together in the interests of local communities.

But he said processes can sometimes be unnecessarily complex, which can bring about unhelpful situations for traumatised communities and exhausted volunteers. The Society delivers services with minimal overheads due to its large volunteer base and is able to mobilise resources quickly in the aftermath of disasters. The Society's submission provides information on the responsibilities of and coordination between all levels of governments relating to natural disasters. ♦

Read the SVDP submission [here](#).

Read the SVDP media release [here](#).

Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee: Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20

This submission outlines the Society's experiences in responding to the 2019-20 bushfires and includes recommendations on what should be done by governments and agencies to improve service responses.

The Society has consulted with its state and territory entities in preparing this submission. The information contained reflects the views of members and staff who provided direct relief to those affected by the 2019-20 bushfires through Vinnies' centres/shops, helplines, visits and attendance at community events and Recovery Centres.

The submission outlines the Society's three-tiered response to the crisis: emergency, recovery and rebuilding. It also includes aspects of the Society's response which worked well, including mobilising local conference members and volunteers, spending time with people, being respectful and building trust, calling on members and volunteers from surrounding areas, reinvesting in the local community by supporting local businesses and a willingness to work with other agencies.

Actions which could improve responses include the need for more agility across all governments and agencies. ♦

Read the SVDP submission [here](#).

Rose Beynon is Director Policy and Research, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council and National Bushfire Liaison Officer.

Vinnies joins call for bipartisan anti-racism strategy

The St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council President, Claire Victory, has supported calls for a bipartisan National Anti-Racism Strategy to address increasing incidents of racism in Australia.

As co-signatory to an open letter to the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison and the Leader of the Opposition, Anthony Albanese the Society has joined with 23 other organisations urging our political leaders to create this urgently needed blueprint for change.

'The letter calls for actions which strengthen social cohesion in our multicultural society in the face of an increase in hostile, discriminatory and abusive behaviour towards Asian-Australians since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic,' Ms Victory said.

'Specifically, the letter calls for a bipartisan National Anti-Racism Strategy to draw on existing experience and expertise to promote social cohesion at all levels of Australian society.

'We are mindful of the national leadership the Prime Minister has shown in the face of the bushfire, drought and COVID-19 emergencies.

'We encourage him to continue his



vision for uniting all Australians by leading the development of a national strategy to address discrimination directed at all peoples including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, African-Australians, Islamic and Jewish Australians and people of other religions and cultural minorities.

'We acknowledge the Opposition Leader's commitment to the strategy and to a new national

anti-racism campaign which would send a message of zero tolerance of racism in Australia.

'We welcome this evidence of bipartisan support.

'We urge our parliaments to address this issue as a matter of urgency and we reiterate our commitment to help build this essential strategy,' Ms Victory said. ♦

A copy of the letter is available [here](#).

Tragic Death in Custody

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council strongly supports the recent recommendations of the NSW Deputy State Coroner, following an inquest into the death in custody of an ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident who was incarcerated in a NSW prison.

National President Claire Victory said this is a tragic case which could have been avoided if the recommendations of the 2017 ALRC Report had been implemented.

'But the Society notes with dismay that the Report

was delivered to the Federal Government in December 2017 and that the Government has failed to respond,' Ms Victory said.

'The St Vincent de Paul Society strongly agrees with the view of the Deputy Coroner that the tragedy of Aboriginal deaths in custody must be addressed in the context of the over representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system,' Ms Victory said. ♦

Read the SVDP media release [here](#).

Overseas Project



BY JUDE BLACKLOCK

Supporting the Society’s work in overseas countries is broadly known as ‘Twinning’ which comes from the word used for the direct relationship between a conference or council in a donor country, and a conference or council in a beneficiary country. Vinnies conferences and councils in Australia currently support almost 2,000 conferences and councils via twinning relationships in partner countries.

Development projects can also be requested by a partner country. National Councils of our partner countries work with their conferences to develop and send project applications for approval and funding by Australia. Most projects funded by Australia are around \$2,000 in value.

In a three-year period, July 2017 to June 2020, Australia received 54 project completion reports from projects it had funded, of which 49 included details of direct beneficiaries. An example of a direct beneficiary of a project that

Country	Projects - Direct beneficiaries reported	Total Direct Beneficiaries
India	38	1624
Indonesia	1	640
Myanmar	3	43
Philippines	1	35
Sri Lanka	5	591
Thailand	1	54
		2987

Table 1 Direct Beneficiaries by Country Jun 2017-Jul 2020

provides a milking cow is the person who receives the animal, and their household. Indirect beneficiaries may include other community members where any excess milk or milk products are more readily available locally.

Table 1 shows the number of direct beneficiaries, by country, for projects that were reported on over the three-year period. Twenty-four projects also reported their direct beneficiaries by gender, and of these, 87% of direct beneficiaries were female.

The majority of projects in India are Milk Cows, Sewing Machines or Small Business projects, which benefit a smaller number of people per project but aim to provide beneficiaries with a direct means of improving their income. This is in comparison to projects in Sri Lanka which tend to benefit more people by design. For example, an electricity project or water purification project providing a source of electricity or water filter to 20+ families, which aim to provide a service to beneficiaries

which will then allow them to pursue better health and education outcomes. The project reported on in Indonesia is a coffee growing and training program and is into its 3rd year of operation, which is why the number of direct beneficiaries is relatively high. You can read more about this project on our website¹.

Many of the Small Business projects are 'Revolving Loan' projects, which means that the beneficiary is loaned the money and allowed to pay back in small instalments. This means that the money can be re-loaned when it has been repaid and also removes the need for businesspeople to have to rely on local money lenders who often charge high interest rates.

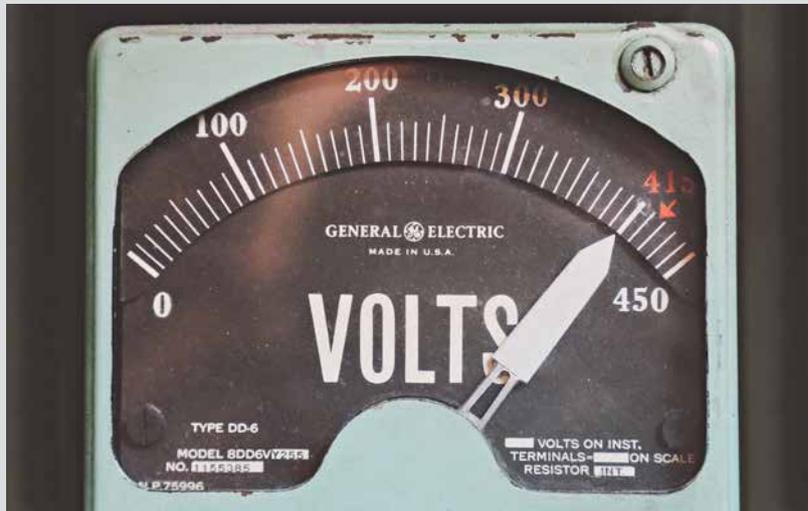
While there has already been an increase in rate of completion reports received during the last three years, due to the recommendation of a Review to actively request completion reports being implemented, the Overseas Partnership Advisory Committee is working on encouraging partners to report on all completed projects.

If you'd like to find out more about overseas work including projects go to our website², or you can contact the National Projects Coordinator, Bec Bromhead, or the ODP Facilitator, Jude Blacklock – both via overseasadmin@svdp.org.au. You can also contact Jude if you would like to sign up for a two-monthly email update on the overseas program. ♦

1. www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/318518_Agricultural_Project_-_Indonesia.pdf

2. www.vinnies.org.au/page/Our_Impact/International_Impact/

Jude Blacklock is Overseas Development Program Facilitator, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.



Case Study 1: Electricity Project

The Sri Lankan National Council identified a group of families that the Trincomalee Diocesan Council was supporting who were living in homes without an electrical connection. The families were displaced due to conflict and had relocated some years before – some children had never lived in a home with electricity. The project connected electricity to 24 homes and beneficiary families reported feeling that they could now “live as equal citizens”, and young people “felt happy as they were now more able to pursue their studies and also watch and listen to what is happening around them.” ♦



Case Study 2: Bicycle and Tool Project

In India the National Council worked with St Joseph's conference in the Guntur Central Council Region to develop a project to benefit 15 construction workers in their community. They provided each worker with a bicycle to allow them to get to construction sites more easily from their homes. Ten tradesmen also received some tools and five painters were given some painting equipment to assist them in their work. ♦

Anti-Poverty Week

11-17 October 2020

BY TONI WREN

This Anti-Poverty Week we're starting early, focusing on keeping payments above the poverty line and supporting the Everybody's Home campaign.

2020 has been like no other including for those of us involved with Anti-Poverty Week. Just like the distillery in Sydney which switched from making gin to hand sanitiser, we've needed to rethink how we can best achieve our purpose to support Australians understand poverty and take action collectively to end it.

Before the bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic struck there were already 3.2 million Australians living in poverty. Many were relying on shockingly low income support payments that were effectively trapping them in poverty. The campaign to increase these payments had the support of a diverse number of Australians from business groups to the Country Women's Association and in 2019 Anti-Poverty Week joined in as the evidence showed us an increase was the most effective solution to poverty in Australia. Despite this overwhelming evidence and strong support from across the community, we weren't making any progress in convincing the Federal Government.

Fortunately, one of the first measures it took in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was to introduce a \$550 per fortnight Coronavirus Supplement, effectively doubling the JobSeeker unemployment payment and extending the Supplement to nine other payments. This was a huge relief as we knew there would be untold hardship and poverty if people were forced to live on \$40 a day given the inevitable recession ensuing from the COVID-19 shutdown of the economy.

But there was a catch – the increase was time-limited and due to end in late September. It became obvious we could not wait until Anti-Poverty Week in October but needed to start work immediately to help convince the Federal Government to either extend it or permanently increase payments. That's why we've been supporting the [Raise the Rate for Good](#) campaign. As part of that we've highlighted the importance of the payment in protecting children from poverty especially now we estimate there are more than one million with a parent receiving the Supplement.

I don't think supporting the poorest people in our society should ever be seen as a bad thing. And to use it as some kind of punishment - it will somehow incentivise you to go get work if you're not being paid enough to live? How does that ever work? I think it's frankly cruel to expect people to survive well below the poverty line.

This was Science and Tech Editor at NITV Rae Johnston answering my question on [ABC's Q and A in late May](#) which asked the panel if they agreed that the smart and right decision would be to permanently increase unemployment payments and payments for students so they were above the poverty line. Rae brought up her son while living on sole parent payments. She spoke about how hard it was trying to get by: *"By the time I paid for my rent, my bills, my electricity, food in the fridge and enough petrol left in the car to get back to the shops next fortnight, I had \$5 left over for my son and I. And that was all I if anything happened, if there were any emergencies, like if I needed baby Panadol, \$5!"*

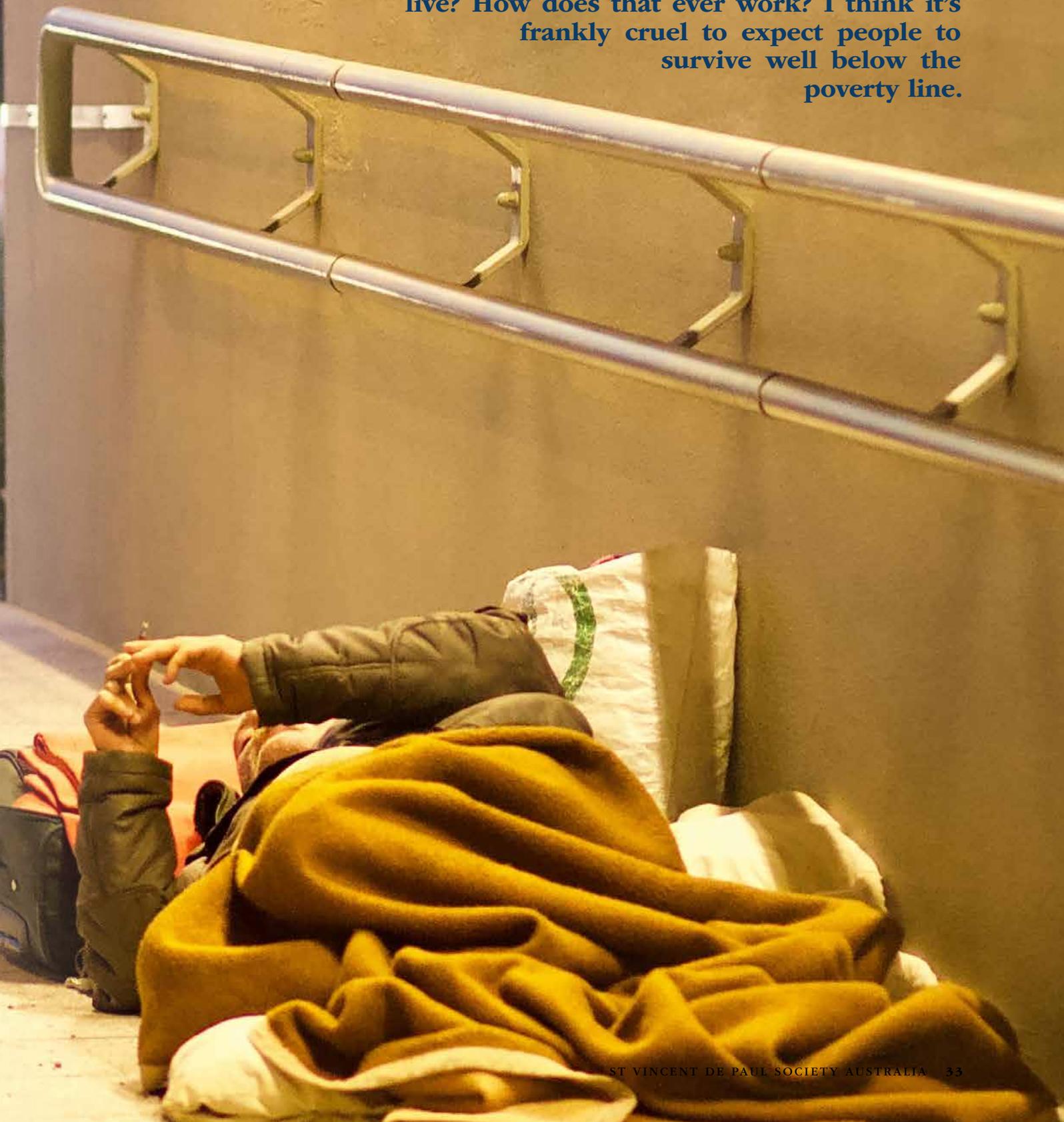
I'm hoping we've made some progress on this by the time you're reading this article.

In 2020 we also want to focus on that other great driver of poverty – unaffordable housing. To this end we are partnering with the [Everybody's Home](#) campaign, starting from Homelessness Week (3-8 August) and running through to the end of Anti-Poverty Week which is 11-17 October this year. We've also decided that we won't be holding or encouraging physical face-to-face events during the week, given the risks associated with COVID-19. We believe there will be many creative ways we can achieve our purpose especially with such great partners as the St Vincent de Paul Society. We very much appreciate the long-standing commitment and involvement of many from the Society including the 2020 sponsorship from your national office as well as Barrie Van Wyk and Louise Miller-Frost stepping up to be honorary Co-Chairs in the ACT and South Australia respectively.

This pandemic shows us that the health of Australians is our number one priority. Yet we know that too often, being sick can make you poor and being poor makes you sick. The pandemic also shows us we can solve tough problems if we listen to the evidence and work together for the common good. The PM has proudly stated that the National Cabinet has been guided by "evidence and outstanding expert advice" to attain the welcome low rates of infection and fatalities in Australia to date. We need to keep doing this as we design and implement policies to help people during the crisis and when we come out the other side if we want to build a healthy and prosperous future for all. ♦

Toni Wren is the Executive Director of Anti-Poverty Week. You can sign up to their regular eNews and find out more about Anti-Poverty Week [here](#).

I don't think supporting the poorest people in our society should ever be seen as a bad thing. And to use it as some kind of punishment - it will somehow incentivise you to go get work if you're not being paid enough to live? How does that ever work? I think it's frankly cruel to expect people to survive well below the poverty line.



I get knocked down, but I get up again...



BY CASSANDRA BULL

The National Council's Drought Relief Team is receiving between 200 and 300 applications a week from people in remote and regional Australia who are feeling the ongoing impact of one of the worst droughts in Australia's history.

Paddocks might be green in some places, but it takes a while for income from crops and depleted stock numbers to make its way to peoples' bank accounts.

Every day, people in our call centre hear heartbreaking stories about folk who are living with the triple whammy of the drought, the bushfires and now COVID-19.

Vinnies and The Salvation

Army are distributing the Federal Government's Drought Community Support Initiative, a grant which pays up to \$3,000, to farm households, farm workers and business operating in drought-declared areas. Round 1 was available from mid-2019 and round 2 has been available since December last year.

As of 24 July 2020, the Drought Relief Team had assisted over 10,000 applicants and distributed over \$31 million dollars in DCSI 2 funds.

We are receiving applications from across Australia.

There's a consistent story from many regional communities: cash flow is depleted, and while some areas have had rain, it has been patchy in most areas, with some parts still desperately waiting in hope.

The St Vincent de Paul Society has welcomed news today that the Australian Government extended its Drought Community Support Initiative Round 2 until 31 December 2020. The Society urges farming communities still impacted by the drought to apply for the payment of up to \$3,000 per household.

We received money from both rounds of the Drought Community Support Initiative through Vinnies. We run a small beef herd. We will not have any farm income for another year at least, so the support helped us buy food and pay for electricity. We had a small casual off-farm income, but COVID-19 has made that difficult too. We can't crop because of the nature of our land... but at least we have grass now. After four years of drought, the bushfires and now COVID-19 we are just worn out. Vinnies has been great, no judgement, just thoughtful help. ♦

We used the payment to help buy groceries and pay bills. I was really grateful for that. Overwhelmed, actually, because I was in a pretty bad spot. ♦

- Sonja, Broken Hill farmer.

And typical of country folk, the people most in need of the funding are shy to come forward, often telling us that their neighbour or friend needs the assistance more than they do.

For that reason, we are acutely aware of the Vincentian ethos of seeking out the 'poor' as we continue the drought relief work. Inspired by The Rule, Vincentians are encouraged to strive to seek out people in need.

The experience of these communities requires us to think differently about what emergency assistance and support means. A \$3,000 cash payment might represent an insignificant dent in the cash deficits our pastoralist and agricultural communities are facing.

continued on page 36 ►

Money spent in each State – DCSI/Additional



5073 applicants supported – DCSI 2; Additional 1.5 million plus additional EAPA and Telstra Voucher support.



6 applicants supported – DCSI 2; beginning to build partnerships with other agencies.



1820 applicants supported – DCSI 2; Additional \$1 Million in drought relief spent.



570 applicants supported – DCSI 2; Additional \$36,500 drought relief spent.



1994 applicants supported – DCSI 2; No additional funds at this stage, lots of referrals to other agencies.



906 applicants supported – DCSI; beginning to build partnerships with other agencies.

◀ continued from page 35

But we are hearing that the \$3,000 helps with household expenses and is having a significant impact on morale, not just for individual farming households, but in the community where these funds are spent.

The early indication from applicants surveyed shows that the DCSI funds are enough to tackle some of the essential household bills, providing reprieve even for a short while.

In line with The Rule which calls us to adapt to a changing world, the Drought Relief Team has been agile in its approach to engaging, assessing, and supporting farming communities, within the limits of COVID-19.

Our ability to move within communities and drawing on personal relationships to help

Just letting you know that we have received the \$3000 Relief Payment to our bank account and it is very much appreciated. If it were not for one of your members talking about this payment on Macca's Australia All Over, we would not have been aware that we might have been eligible. The application was very easy to do, not like some Government forms. ♦

spread the word to people who need a hand has been severely hampered. Instead, we are thinking outside the box, listening to the advice of key community stakeholders, and reaching out in new, and sometimes unorthodox ways to ensure people living with the impact of the drought and in some cases, bushfires and COVID, know that we are there and that help is available.

Our heart-felt thanks to each of the local conferences around Australia who have spread the news about this initiative. Your

valuable efforts are very much appreciated, especially in light of the extraordinary demands on your resources in such unprecedented times.

We are now halfway through delivering this project, and we look forward to working with you to help people in your local communities who need a bit of a hand because of the drought right now. ♦

Cassandra Bull is National Manager, Drought Relief Program, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

**UP TO \$3000
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
DROUGHT SUPPORT**

APPLY TODAY ▶

 Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Communications

 St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Vinnies Victoria certified carbon neutral

BY DEE RUDEBECK

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria is proud to announce that it has been certified carbon neutral under the Climate Active initiative, underpinned by the Australian government.

This is a significant achievement that sets Vinnies Victoria apart as the first social welfare charity in Australia to achieve the certification. Vinnies Victoria was supported by Telstra and Deloitte in the process and we are thankful to both organisations for their invaluable guidance and support.

The impact of climate change is on our minds more than ever as the coronavirus pandemic has made us all too aware of our collective vulnerability. Climate change has also been linked to the drought and bushfires that devastated communities around Australia this year.

It is our experience of assisting people affected by each of these crises, as well as our daily work with people on the frontline of poverty and disadvantage that underpins our commitment to achieving a sustainable, equitable future for all – #greenworks.

Our organisation is already working hard in the sustainability space through its contribution to the circular economy – last year Vinnies Shops sold almost 11.5 million items and garments to

nearly 4 million customers, and through partnerships, diverted more than 3.5 million kilos of apparel and 10,000 mattresses away from landfill into reuse.

We are now taking accountability for the greenhouse gas emissions associated with these shop operations and our other charitable works. While the purchase of 10,000 tonnes of high-quality offsets is necessary this year, Vinnies Victoria commits to reducing our carbon footprint through a series of ongoing activities and supporting decarbonisation of the Australian economy.

Vinnies Victoria is acutely aware that society needs to decarbonise and leadership in this space is paramount. As Vinnies Victoria looks to provide practical assistance to people in need, we are motivated by the disproportionate impact climate change has on people living in poverty.

The support we have received from Telstra and Deloitte, brokered by our Policy and Research Manager Gavin Dufty, shows what can be achieved when business and the community sector work together.

Vinnies' Victorian CEO Sue Cattermole sits on the advisory panel of Melbourne University's Sustainable Society Institute and is passionate about the achievement.

'The impact of climate change will be significant on social, economic and health system infrastructures and we know that the most vulnerable members of society will be worst affected,' she said.

'It is incumbent on all of us who can, to reduce our contribution to climate change.

'We hope to be a driving force for positive change for other not-for-profits and businesses,' Ms Cattermole said.

Through the purchase of offsets in hydro, solar and wind power, Vinnies Victoria is also investing in the renewable energy market so that other industries benefit.

There has been much media commentary on a green recovery when the coronavirus crisis eases and achieving carbon neutral certification means Vinnies Victoria is firmly part of the solution. ♦

Dee Rudebeck is PR and Communications Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Victoria



Vinnies CEO Sleepout succeeds against the odds, raising \$5.7m for homelessness

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout has overcome the challenges of COVID-19 to raise \$5.7 million nationally, beating its target of \$5.0 million to support homelessness services.

Across Australia over 1,550 business and community leaders braved the cold on Thursday 18 June as part of the first virtual Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

Originally set to take place in major cities with a focus on rough sleeping, the impact of COVID-19 saw the event revised for its 15th anniversary with participants nominating to sleep in cars, couches and backyards while tuning in for a live-stream hosted by television personality Dr Andrew Rochford.

Initial fundraising targets which started out at \$2.5M in April 2020 as Australia grappled with the first wave of COVID were revised upwards as fundraisers saw greater participation and interest in the event.

The funds raised allow Vinnies to assist people experiencing or at risk of falling into homelessness with accommodation, food, healthcare and individualised support designed with the ultimate goal of providing a safe and permanent home.

National Council CEO Toby oConnor who spent the night in his veggie patch at his home in regional NSW said 'It is humbling to experience what a night out in the cold feels like for too many people. It is also great to be able as individuals to come together as one large community around such an important cause and doing something that I know will make a difference for people Vinnies supports'.

Following a Welcome to Country by Wiradjuri woman Yvonne Weldon, the two-hour live stream saw host Dr Rochford speak with a number of participants and people with lived experience of homelessness.

Closing the night with a live cross to Adelaide, Nick Reade from Bank SA, was named the highest national fundraiser with over \$225,000 – earning the highly coveted pillow sponsored by *The Australian*. 'It's great to support such an amazing organisation like Vinnies,' said Nick. 'I'd love to be able to solve homelessness and with my team, we've been able to raise money, awareness and make a direct contribution.'

Despite a once in a lifetime health and economic crisis, the Vinnies CEO Sleepout was able to go ahead in 2020 thanks to the work of staff, volunteers, sponsors and participants. ♦

COVID-19 Winter Appeal

As the impact of COVID-19 deepens, the St Vincent de Paul Society is calling on Australians to dig deep and donate generously to the COVID-19 Winter Appeal.

National Council CEO, Toby oConnor said falling donations because of the COVID pandemic, coupled with a spike in demand for services, make tough times even tougher for many people.

'Our ability to raise money through shops, Catholic schools and parishes has been affected by the restrictions. Australians have been very generous over the summer months, donating money and goods for people affected by drought and by the catastrophic fires that ravaged many communities.

'Donations now are vital to ensure our good works can continue to make an impact on the lives of the increasing number of vulnerable people right across the country,' Mr oConnor said. ♦

Read the SVDP media release [here](#).

Register to take part in the 2021 Vinnies CEO Sleepout at www.ceosleepout.org.au.



Vinnies
good works

Help us support those
IMPACTED BY COVID-19

TO DONATE

GO TO [VINNIES.ORG.AU/COVID19WINTERAPPEAL](https://www.vinnies.org.au/covid19winterappeal)
OR CALL **13 18 12**



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