

# Mini Vinnies



## STARTER KIT



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

## OUR MISSION

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

## OUR VISION

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

# Mini Vinnies



*The St Vincent de Paul Society acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land upon which we work, and pays respect to Elders past and present.*

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## WHAT IS MINI VINNIES?

**Mini Vinnies empowers primary school students to become advocates within their school and local community by putting their values into action. Students meet regularly to learn about social justice issues, develop leadership skills and engage with the wider St Vincent de Paul Society.**

## WHAT DO THEY DO?

Mini Vinnies members, with the guidance of teachers meet to discuss and raise awareness of social justice issues and organise ways to help others in need within their own school community and beyond.

Mini Vinnies is also a great opportunity for students to reflect on the needs of those they want to help in their community, help shape compassion and understanding with their fellow students, and share their passion to raise awareness about social justice issues.

## WHY START A MINI VINNIES GROUP?

Your school would be joining hundreds of primary schools across Australia working alongside Vinnies to build up the next generation of social justice advocates, and caring, compassionate members of society. It also gives your school the opportunity to recognise and respond to the needs in your local community.

We offer engaging resources and on-going support to help you empower your students to create a more just and compassionate society today, and to build the foundation for a more equitable future.

By getting your school involved, you will be able to help the St Vincent de Paul Society, a leading provider of specialist homelessness services across Australia including transitional and crisis accommodation as well as case management, health services and educational and vocational programs.

By encouraging your students to get involved, you will be supporting young people to raise awareness about these important issues and to be proactive within their school and community.

# HISTORY OF THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a community of people who work towards the alleviation of poverty and suffering throughout the world.

Frederic was a 20 year old university student who, with no firsthand experience of poverty himself, felt the desire to alleviate the suffering around him in war torn France in 1833. Responding to the great poverty in the Paris of his day, he and a group of friends began visiting the homes of those in need, bringing practical assistance of food and firewood, as well as something less tangible - empathy and love. Frederic and his friends began meeting regularly and formed the first conference. They decided to adopt the name of the St Vincent de Paul Society after the patron saint of charities.

CONFERENCE IS A FRENCH WORD MEANING "COMING TOGETHER". A CONFERENCE IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO GET TOGETHER ON A REGULAR BASIS TO MEET AND DISCUSS WAYS TO ADDRESS PARTICULAR NEEDS IN THEIR COMMUNITY.

FREDERIC OZANAM, THE SOCIETY'S FOUNDER, ONCE SAID, "YOURS MUST BE A WORK OF LOVE AND UNLIMITED KINDNESS... YOU MUST NOT BE CONTENT WITH TIDING THE POOR OVER THE POVERTY CRISIS; YOU MUST STUDY THEIR CONDITION AND OFTEN THE INJUSTICES WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT SUCH POVERTY WITH THE AIM OF LONG TERM IMPROVEMENT".



## HOME VISITATION AND SPECIAL WORKS

Home visitation is a core work of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Home visits are carried out in pairs, with conference members providing support to people experiencing hardships by offering them food vouchers, clothing or furniture.

Most importantly, our members offer emotional guidance to allow people to take control of their lives and continue the tradition established by Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Special Works are a professional facility, program or service run by the Society. They service a need which cannot be met within the normal scope of a conference.

Examples of Special Works in your Vinnies community may include:

- Clothing and Furniture Depot
- Household Formation and Support
- Migrant and Refugee Support
- Overseas Partnership and Development
- School Support Program
- Social Justice Advocacy
- Vinnies Retail Centres
- Vinnies Youth Programs
- Mental Health Support Services
- Homelessness Support Services
- Drug and alcohol rehabilitation



For more info visit the 'Get Involved' page at [vinnies.org.au](http://vinnies.org.au)



## SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY

St Vincent de Paul Society members cannot see injustice and let it go unchallenged. We feel compelled to Raise Our Voice; to advocate on behalf of the people we assist and speak out on the barriers that keep people in a cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

We call for solutions to injustice by engaging government, working with other agencies and raising awareness across the community.

Our Social Justice Statement offers practical solutions to effect change in three priority areas and invites our members, volunteers, and the general public to speak up for justice on:

- 1 Affordable Housing and Homelessness;
- 2 Energy Affordability and Cost of Living Pressures; and
- 3 Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Schools can play a key role in this advocacy work by running awareness-raising campaigns, participating in Society initiatives such as, the Vinnies School Sleepout, Winter and Christmas Appeal, and raising funds for our work engaging government and other agencies to enact change.

Together we can work towards addressing entrenched injustice and create a fairer society.



Check [www.vinniesyouthqld.org.au](http://www.vinniesyouthqld.org.au) for ways you can get involved.





## GETTING YOUR SCHOOL INVOLVED

### 1 Let your schools know

Let your school's executive staff know you'd like to start a group in the school. Let the children in your school know what Mini Vinnies is all about and find out if they are interested in forming a group. Generally students in Years 4, 5, 6 are best suited, though each school is different. If you already have a social justice group of some sort, feel free to include Mini Vinnies activities as part of that group.

### 2 Find a coordinating teacher

Find a coordinating teacher (if not yourself) to help the group and offer supervision. This could be any teacher or staff member within the school who is willing to support these students to learn about social justice issues, think of ideas to make a positive change, and help them run awareness raising and fundraising activities. Their role is to guide group discussions, help the students put their passion and ideas into action, and support the children in their individual and collective growth.



Generally, we ask that this coordinator:

- Organises regular group meetings
- Helps their group learn and think in new ways – there's some great resources online to help!
- Keeps in touch with their local Vinnies team so we can support you and share your successes with others
- Makes sure activities are safe, and that students have permission slips, etc, if/when needed.

### **3 Connect with your local Vinnies team**

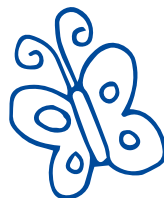
Form a connection with your local Vinnies team – we've got dedicated Society representatives in various regions that are able to present to the students about the Society and the work they do to assist the local community. To start this relationship, you can organise for them to speak with students about Mini Vinnies and drum up interest in forming a group.

### **4 Recruit Mini Vinnies Members**

Recruit your Mini Vinnies members and hold your first meeting. Put posters around school, make daily notices, and assembly announcements to invite students to join. Make your first meeting fun and exciting, share a bit about Vinnies and what the group is all about, and include a nice reflection about positive change. Start a brainstorming session about some of the issues the students care about and what they could do to help. There's also an example activity at this end of this book to get you started. Your group can choose how structured or relaxed it would like its meetings to be, and you may also choose to allocate roles such as: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer or Spiritual Advisor.

### **5 Recognise their commitment**

[Optional] Hold a Commissioning Ceremony to recognise your student's commitment to helping others and identify them as leaders in the school. This can be part of an assembly or special event, and usually the students are thanked and presented with a certificate and a special badge by the school principal or a representative from Vinnies. Visit [www.vinniesyouthqld.org.au](http://www.vinniesyouthqld.org.au) for more information and get in touch with your local Vinnies team to arrange the badges and to request a representative to attend on the day.



## TAKING ACTION MINI VINNIES STYLE

**An easy mantra we like to teach our Mini Vinnies students that can help to guide meetings is to See, Think and Do.**

This is a model adapted from the Young Christian Workers movement.



SEE

An opportunity for students to be exposed to some of the social justice issues affecting people in their community and beyond. This stage helps students develop empathy for those in need.

Mini Vinnies should offer a safe and structured environment for children to learn about disadvantage and social justice issues, in a caring and empathetic way. Images, videos and stories are helpful tools to make it easier for students to relate and engage with these topics in a practical sense.

Students learn to:

- Look out for and identify injustices they see in the world around them such as unfair treatment of those experiencing homelessness, unequal access to water, etc.
- Consider how other people may not have been as fortunate as them.
- Learn about what's happening in their local community and the world around them in a fun and exciting way that will complement curriculum learning.



THINK

Develop the students' understanding of social justice issues in a personal way through reflection, research, discussion and expression.

Reflect on what can be done about this issue – what can they do about this issue, individually and as a group?

This can be done during meetings or at home, however it's important to not rush this step.



DO

The students' enthusiasm will be needed at this stage! It's really up to them (provided it's safe and appropriate) to come up with ideas of how to help and make decisions about what actions to take.

It may be as simple as sharing a positive thought for those suffering or creating a poster to put up around the school about the importance of keeping the playground tidy or looking out for one another.



Of course, your group might choose to take some bigger actions, such as:

### **Awareness raising & advocacy**

Educate others in your school community about these injustices:

- Present at an assembly
- Hold a stall or event that draws attention to that issue
- Make posters to display around the schools

Then start advocating for change:

- Write letters to a government representative or local council telling them how you feel about the injustice and why it needs to be changed.
- Write a letter of compassion/solidarity to those experiencing hardship.
- Collect signatures for a petition.

### **Appeals**

Our two national appeals at winter and Christmas time help raise much needed funds to assist people experiencing hardship at these difficult times of year. The Winter Appeal also seeks donations of winter clothes and blankets, and the Christmas Appeal calls for donations of food, toys and gift cards to create Christmas Hampers for local families.

### **Sleepout**

A national initiative to give people a small glimpse into the realities of homelessness by ‘sleeping rough’ for a night in the middle of winter, whilst raising awareness and funds to provide crucial assistance to people experiencing homelessness. Schools and unis across Australia host Sleepouts, as well as the hundreds of community groups and CEOs.

### **Other fundraising opportunities**

Be as creative as you want – coin lines, rice days, pyjama days, etc.

### **Supporting people**

Reach out to those in your community who are disadvantaged or isolated. How about visiting the local nursing home or setting up a buddy system to support isolated students in your school?



## An example to get you started:

SEE

- As a group discuss some of the opportunities you have in your day-to-day lives (write them on a mind map if this helps).
- List some of the opportunities that other young people might be missing out on if they are experiencing disadvantage.
- How would you feel if you were to go without these opportunities? What other problems can arise from missing out on these opportunities?
- Reflect on how one missed opportunity often leads to missing out on opportunities in other areas which in turn leads to greater disadvantage.
- Why do these disadvantages exist? Try researching what are some cost of living pressures, starting at [vinnies.org.au](http://vinnies.org.au).

THINK

- Share the information you found about the above issues and what support is available to help these people.
- Draw a big mind map of how we could support families struggling with these cost of living pressures – don't be afraid to dream big!
- Who can you talk to about these concerns to try to create some change – your principal, your mayor, your local member of parliament?

DO

- As a group make a shortlist of some of the achievable actions from your mind map that you could do as a group.
- Note which items you can do anytime like “ask someone if they're sad” or “donate some clothes to Vinnies that don't fit me but are still good quality”, and note which ones need a bit more planning and support to get started.
- Now it's time to put those plans into action!





## MINI VINNIES PLEDGE

**As a member of Mini-Vinnies I promise to  
make a difference in my world by:**

Caring for, respecting and loving myself.

Strengthening my friendship with Jesus by praying each day and  
understanding his compassion for those in need

Caring for others in my school and social community by  
befriending those who are alone, needy or in trouble.

Contributing to the happiness of my family by my willing help,  
respect, consideration, joy and kindness.

Caring for, appreciating, enjoying and nurturing God's creation –  
the environment.

Treating others the way I would  
like them to treat me.



## MINI VINNIES PRAYER

*Lord, open our eyes that we may see the  
deepest needs of your people.*

*Move our hands that we may feed the hungry.*

*Touch our hearts that they may bring warmth  
to those who are sad.*

*Let us share our time and possessions  
with those in need.*

*Give us the care that strengthens the sick.*

*May we all be a source of support and  
encouragement for each other as we strive  
to build a more loving society.*

AMEN.



*While this pledge and prayer has been widely adopted  
by Mini Vinnies groups, please feel free to adapt them to  
suit your school's needs.*

# CONTACT US

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