

# The Record

SPRING 2024



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



**SLEEPERS IN  
THE HOUSE**



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

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

This logo represents the hand of Christ that blesses the cup, the hand of love that offers the cup, and the hand of suffering that receives the cup.

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

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



**Available online:**  
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## Society hosts two Vice-Regal visits

The Governor-General of Australia, Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC – pictured with St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Mark Gaetani - recently visited two of the Society's community support services.

Her Excellency's first visit was to Our Lady of the Way in Western Sydney, which offers crisis accommodation for women over the age of 45 seeking refuge from domestic and family violence. Her second visit was to Bethlehem House in Hobart, the largest provider of crisis and transitional accommodation for men experiencing homelessness in Tasmania.

'Her Excellency the Governor-General is known for her close interest in social welfare and the Society feels deeply honoured that she chose to visit two of our major services so early in her term of office,' Mark Gaetani said.

Stories on pages 4 & 11.

## On the cover...

On one of the shortest and coldest days of the year (except in the Northern Territory) hundreds of CEOs and community leaders gathered in capital cities and regional centres for the now-annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout. This year the event raised a total of around \$8.6M, funds that are being used to address the homelessness challenge that is being faced across the country.

Venues for the sleepouts included what one participant called the 'very hard cold concrete floor' of the basement carpark at Australian Parliament House, Canberra, which was where those pictured on our cover bedded down after presentations inside the grand building. Participating MPs included the House Speaker, Hon. Milton Dick, and Dr Andrew Leigh, Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury, and Employment.

More photos on page 20.



## Climb every mountain

Most of us would be familiar with this song from the 1965 musical *The Sound of Music* starring Julie Andrews.

*Climb every mountain, search high and low  
Follow every by way, every path you know...  
Follow every rainbow, till you find your dream  
A dream that will need, all the love you can give  
Everyday of your life, for as long as you live...*

Many would know of Julie Andrews but I'm guessing you may be less familiar with the name of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati who was born in Turin in 1901 and passed away in 1925, at the youthful age of 24. Blessed Pier was an inspiring young man who, at the age of 17, joined the St. Vincent de Paul Society and dedicated much of his spare time to taking care of the poor, homeless and sick, as well as demobilised servicemen returning from World War I.

An avid mountaineer, he wrote on a photo of what would be his final climb the phrase *Verso L' Alto* – "to the heights" – a motto which all of us Vincentians surely aspire to. Recent good news from the Vatican indicates that Blessed Pier could be declared a saint during the Catholic Church's 2025 Jubilee.

Youth service was on my mind when I participated in the National Youth Leadership Training weekend in Sydney during the first weekend of July. The 'Levelled Up Leadership' event was organised by the Spirit of Youth Standing Committee with support from our National Council. The objective of the training was to equip our Youth Representatives, young Conference Presidents and emerging leaders, to 'level up' their leadership skills within the Vincentian context.

Topics covered included effective advocacy, succession planning, community building, effective change management techniques, team building and communications skills, and what it means to be a Vincentian Leader.

I could not help but be inspired by such an intelligent, inspiring and energetic group of young people committed to their work in assisting our companions in all parts of Australia. The future of the Society is in good hands as these young people continue their journey walking alongside fellow Vincentians.

As winter draws to a close, I am reminded of the following verse from the Song of Solomon 2:11-12 - *For behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.*

I have quickly turned my attention to spring and what this time of growth and spirituality offers us as Vincentians. September is an especially important month in our calendar as we take time to reflect and participate in celebrations to remember two of our Founders – Saint Vincent de Paul – Patron of our Society and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

In accompaniment with the objectives of Congress 2023+ the National Council has chosen the month of September as a time when we can build on these existing celebrations in ways that have a unified promotion of renewal and revitalisation, sharing messages of hope, celebration, showcasing our Good Works and inviting new members to join us in working alongside those less fortunate in our communities. I encourage all our Conferences to use this opportunity to encourage conversations around inclusion, renewal and revitalisation, drawing on Catholic Social Teaching. **R**

In recent days I was informed of the passing of former Victorian State President, **Tony Tome** on the night of 18 August 2024. Tony joined the Donvale Conference when it was re-formed in 1999. He went on to serve as Ringwood Regional Council President, Eastern Central Council President, and Deputy State President before being elected to serve as Victorian State President 2010 – 2014. On behalf of the Society, I offer my condolences to Tony's wife Helen, his family and friends.

I wish to congratulate **Peter Houweling** on his election to the role of President of the NSW State Council for a four-year term, following the recent death of Paul Burton.

Peter has been an active member of St John the Evangelist parish conference in Dapto since being posted to Wollongong as a primary school teacher in the 1970s, where he raised his family, and later served as a principal. Over many years of service to the Society, Peter has served in various leadership positions, including NSW Vice President, Wollongong Central Council President, and Central Illawarra Regional Council President.

I also welcome **Geraldine Hawkes** as the President Elect for the Society in South Australia. Geraldine will commence in the role in early October.

Geraldine grew up in Glasgow, Scotland where her father was an active member of St Vincent de Paul Society. Since coming to Australia in 1988, she has led formation and leadership sessions across the Society in SA, meeting with many Conferences and visiting Companions in their homes. Geraldine became a member of Salisbury Conference in 2020, was elected as Regional President for Central District Region, and in 2023 was appointed as a Vice President by Brad Hocking, the current State President. **R**

## GOVERNOR-GENERAL VISITS



*(l-r) Eleri Morgan Thomas CEO Homes Tasmania, SVdP National President Mark Gaetani, Hon Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of Australia, SVdP Tasmania CEO Heather Kent and Stephen Shreeve, Executive Manager Bethlehem House.*

## Governor-General welcomed to Hobart service

In August, Her Excellency, the Hon Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of Australia, visited Bethlehem House in Hobart to tour the facilities and meet with those working and staying at the accommodation. A Special Work of the Society, Bethlehem House is the largest provider of crisis and transitional accommodation for men experiencing homelessness in Tasmania.

The Governor-General said she is using her time in the role to shine a light on services that offer kindness and care to people.

‘I want to thank you all on behalf of all Australians for the work that you do here and for how long you have been doing it. It is the job of the Governor-General to show up and express our gratitude,’ Her Excellency said to the Bethlehem House gathering.

‘My term as Governor-General will be all about care and kindness and people’s sense of belonging. ‘I am six weeks into my time as Governor-General and I have not yet been to many parts of the country, but we wanted to come to Tasmania early,’ she said.

Her Excellency was given a tour around the two campuses by Bethlehem House Executive Manager Stephen Shreeve, the Society’s National President Mark

Gaetani, Tasmanian CEO Heather Kent and Homes Tasmania CEO Eleri Morgan-Thomas.

During the tour she met with and talked to many residents about their experiences with homelessness and how Bethlehem House is supporting them.

Her Excellency also met Father Graham Howard who joined the celebrations on the day.

Father Graham was involved with the creation of Bethlehem House back in 1972 and has continued to provide pastoral support to the men of Bethlehem House for the past 14 years since concluding active ministry.

‘Special Works hold a very special place in our hearts because they are our organisation’s core service and are driven by what we see in the community. We are delighted to have seen the growth of Bethlehem House over the past 52 years,’ Ms Kent said.

‘There are about 75 men that are accommodated on this site, and they are supported by an absolutely incredible team of inspiring individuals that work so well as a team.’

The tour concluded with the Governor-General’s presenting an historic coin to the National President and State CEO as a symbol of appreciation and ongoing support. **R**



## In the Vincentian way

September 9 marked the feast day of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

When Frédéric established the first St Vincent de Paul Society Conference in 1833, his vision was based on marrying compassion with a deep commitment to social justice based on his Catholic faith.

Today the core of the Society, the Vincentian Way, remains solid and Society leaders continue to be resilient in strengthening the organisation's place in contemporary Australia. There have always been present and over-the-horizon challenges that our leaders and administrators have had to plan for in order to maintain the Society's capability to continue to deliver Frédéric's vision in local communities and to pursue a fairer Australia for all at the legislature level.

There is no doubt and much evidence to highlight the reality that charities are presently doing it tough. For a charity like St Vincent de Paul Society, the rise in the number of individuals and families struggling to survive in the cost-of-living crisis is a massive challenge.

Today's demand followed significantly increased demand that accompanied the drought, the Black Summer Bushfires and then the floods.

Accompanying the increase in demand, charities are having to adjust the level of support they can provide following the impact that the cost-of-living crisis is having on fundraising and the sale of reusable clothes and household items. As well, the number of Australians volunteering has been slowly declining over recent years, making it more difficult to continue to operate many charitable activities.

In this environment, charities are looking for a 'new deal' that will address outstanding issues beyond the control of the charitable sector and that will outline a new co-partnership with governments so that tight resources are allocated to those most in need in as effective way as possible.

Two outstanding matters to be grappled with are the benefits that accrue to the community when services are co-designed with those who receive them and the intergenerational poverty that takes 25-30 years to turn around.

Prior to the 2022 Federal Election, the Labor Party made a commitment to prepare a 10-year plan for the Not-for-Profit (NFP) Sector to ensure a strong future for Australian charities and to establish the conditions to double philanthropic giving by 2030.

Upon becoming the Federal Minister for Social Services,

Amanda Rishworth, along with Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities, Treasury and Employment, Dr Andrew Leigh, announced the development of a 'Blueprint' to provide a roadmap for government reforms and sector-led initiatives to boost the Sector's capacity to support and reconnect Australian communities.

This review is of great importance. While the Sector's contribution to the GDP is difficult to pinpoint, one-in-10 working Australians are employed by a charity, and volunteers contribute 320 million unpaid hours (valued at \$13.8 billion) per year. Government spending accounts for approximately 51 per cent of all charity income.

The Society operates in this environment – a far cry from the turbulent streets of Paris in the mid-1800s.

For over a year, a reference group drawn from the Sector with support from two academics specialising in the non-government sector undertook consultations with a myriad of NFP organisations and prepared a 10-year plan. The Synthesis Report has just been released and is available on the DSS Engage website. The Society expects the Government to outline a detailed response to the proposals to strengthen the Sector that are put forward in the Blueprint.

A second advisory group drawn from organisations holding funding agreements with the Department of Social Services continued its long-term work with the Department and the Department of Finance to bring about more realistic levels of funding for the delivery of services. This work included particular attention to the terms and conditions of funding agreements, including the mystery surrounding how annual indexation of Commonwealth grant programs is determined.

The Society awaits notification from these Departments about how future funding agreements will be more mindful of the actual costs of offering supports and services across the range of different community environments such that a 'one size fits all' template is tempered to realistically reflect the true costs associated with delivering government funded services.

In 2024, the life and mission of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam remains profoundly relevant, offering a guiding light for those seeking to make a difference, whether within our own Society or in the broader community, including in public policy spaces.

The Society's participation in these big picture planning conversations brings Frédéric's focus on compassion and social justice back to the here and now reality of community, hopefully for the betterment of all. **R**

## Embracing seasonal and Societal renewal

BY JAMES HODGE

Director of Mission, St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland

**“See, I make all things new.” (Rev 21:5)**

As the gentle warmth of spring envelops us, we are reminded of the beauty and power of renewal. The blossoming flowers and the fresh green leaves symbolize the promise of new beginnings, mirroring the divine assurance in the Book of Revelation.

This season calls us to embrace renewal in our spiritual lives and in our commitment to the mission of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

We have access to the rich scriptural tradition of recognizing the patterns of life as a cyclic process of renewal. The faith experiences of the early Christians provided the reality that didn't see death as having the last word. It was an experience of witnessing the restoration of life from death through the Resurrection. Rather than holding onto the perspective that life goes in waves of linear inclines and declines, there is an invitation to us to see life as times of high activity, periods of rest and dormancy, and the return of fullness of life through renewal.

Spring is a time when nature awakens from the inertia of winter, bringing forth life in abundance. Similarly, we are invited to awaken our hearts and minds to the possibilities of renewal in our service to others.

Our National Congress last year provided us with the opportunity to act courageously and fully embrace a spirit of renewal through creative and innovative ways to engage with the world.

This renewal is particularly significant as we observe National Revitalization Month. It is a time to reflect on our past achievements, recognize areas that need growth, and chart a course for a vibrant future. Renewal calls us to not only maintain but enhance our commitment to the principles of Frédéric Ozanam, whose dedication to 'seeing Christ in the poor' remains a guiding light.

One of the key challenges we face today is attracting new and younger members to our Society. As *The Rule* reminds us, the energy and fresh perspectives of the youth are essential for the sustainability and growth of our mission. We need to communicate that our work in the Society is not just an act of charity but a transformative experience that aligns with their desire to make a meaningful impact in the world.

In doing so, we must also be prepared to adapt to the evolving needs of modern times. The world today presents complex social issues that require innovative and dynamic responses. Embracing new technologies, fostering inclusive communities, and advocating for systemic changes are ways we can stay relevant and effective. It is through this adaptation that we can continue to fulfill our mission in a way that honors our traditions while meeting contemporary needs.

Our journey of renewal is deeply rooted in trust in God. It is this trust that enables us to step out in faith, to embrace new approaches, and to inspire others to join us. As we trust in God's promise to make all things new, we are emboldened to pursue renewal in our own lives and in our collective efforts. This trust transforms our actions into powerful testimonies of God's love and providence.

Let us move forward with the spirit of spring, embracing the renewal that God offers us. Let us be revitalized in our mission, attracting new members, adapting to the challenges of our times, and steadfastly seeing Christ in the poor.

In doing so, we honor the legacy of Frédéric Ozanam and contribute to a world where love, justice, and compassion flourish. Trusting in God's promise, we are assured that our efforts will bring forth a new season of hope and transformation for all those we serve. **R**



## The Common Good

**BY DANNY CLOGHAN**

Western Australian President of  
St Vincent de Paul Society

On 27 July, I attended my first meeting of National Council as the Western Australian President of the Society.

To mark the occasion, National President, Mark Gaetani asked me to read out the following, as National Council's reflection that the Society is a lay Catholic organisation.

**The Common Good: We are more connected than separate**, which calls us to:

- Consider that the good of all is dependent on the good of each one
- Consider that we work with people in local communities through our conference structure, in order to build a stronger society.

After reading the statement to Council, we moved on to the agenda and meeting matters. However, I had this nagging feeling of, what did the statements mean?

I should start by saying that I don't have the answer to such a vexatious question, 'What is the common good?' In fact, I feel like an explorer with few navigational instruments. However, I push on.

As Vincentians, we commit to giving a 'hand up' to those in our community.

We assist those in need regardless of their creed, ethnicity, social background, gender, sexuality or state of health. We don't discriminate – we are truly Catholic' or universal.

We often share what others have given us by way of donations or what we receive by way of income. These donations, whether monetary or in kind, are contributions to the common good.

As Vincentians, we recognise that those we assist, despite their circumstances, belong to our common humanity.

When we assist those in need, we never know whether that 'hand up' saved them from spiralling towards 'rock bottom' but we do know that whatever assistance is given, it is within a framework of promoting and providing for the common good.

When we assist those in need, it is not some random disconnected act of assistance but to a person or family that is connected or related to us all, by way of being part of our common humanity.

I think I now better understand the statement that, 'the good of all is dependent on the good of each one'.

Conferences support or assist the individual in pursuit of building a stronger community. In sporting analogy, the better the individual player supports his or her teammates, the better the team.

As Vincentians, we realise and take action to contribute to the common good of our community (the team) – to make a better community, both for the present and the future.

However, this is not to say that we don't face challenges when we assist those in need... but life is like that.

This reflection which I have travelled and pondered on (with few navigational instruments) has helped me.

We don't pretend to fix everything for our companions, but we do know that what we do, is for the common good. **R**

## Congress Conversations

Two participants at the milestone Congress 2023+ in Sydney discuss meeting with fellow Vincentians to chart the Society's revitalisation and meeting future challenges.

**Maree Harmon** is a Member of St Mary of the Cross Lutwyche Conference and Chair of the Queensland Membership Advisory Committee. She worked as an accountant before retirement and still 'likes solving problems and making life easier for others'.



### When did you join the Society?

I remember attending a gathering of student members in southern Sydney in 1977, but I didn't have any more involvement for decades.

Although approached when my own church community conference was closing down, I thought I didn't have the time, being a mother and working and volunteering at school. In hindsight I do regret that decision. I was approached again by a member of one of our two Parish conferences and said I'd consider it when I retired in a couple of years.

When I did retire, I gave myself some time to myself, then when the remaining two conferences in my parish were amalgamating, it seemed like the time had come. So, I am a relative newcomer in that I only joined in 2016.

I joined eventually because I got the tap on the shoulder, but being Catholic and with a desire to be useful and being grateful that I had the time, I think it is a no brainer.

### What were you hoping to get out of being a Vincentian (on a personal level – we know the correct answer is to serve others)?

I'm not sure that I was expecting to get anything back, I just thought I could give my time and talents to people who needed help.

The reality of being a Vincentian in two busy inner capital city conferences, particularly in a housing crisis, is that you have fast tracked experience and end up a much better person than when you started. I've had two amazing female role models who have modelled absolute commitment, so I keep saying 'yes' to new roles and keep learning more about the Society and as a bonus, keep making new friends.

### How does being involved in a leadership position help you achieve what you want to get out of being in the Society?

I've now been a past Conference and Regional President and am currently on the Diocesan Council and sometimes that takes you on a different tangent to helping companions. However, the one thing all leaders in the Society have in common is the desire to not lose sight of their essential conference work, and to that end taking on a leadership position is all about helping conference members to best give a hand up to companions.

### What was the best thing about attending the Congress event in Sydney?

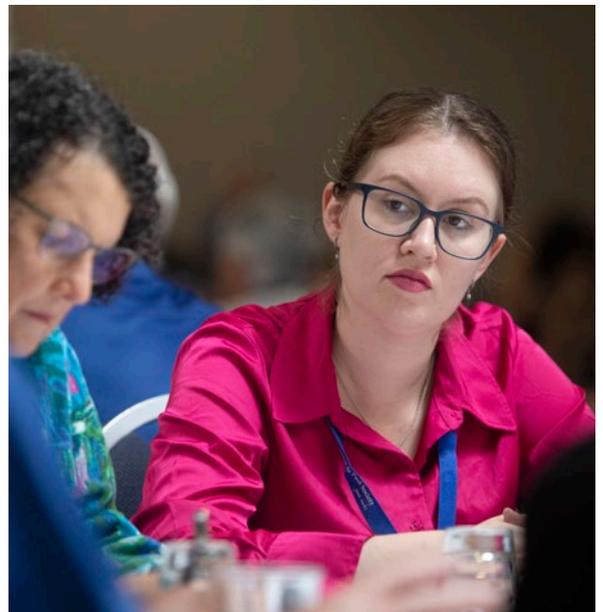
I'd been able to attend the Adelaide Congress representing our diocese, but I felt a sense of unfinished business, in that it was hard to see the results from that meeting. I didn't expect to get a second chance but was able to attend as chair of the Queensland Membership Advisory Committee.

### ***'I spent my working decades in public service with the ATO and I'm now considering Catholic Social Teaching rather than tax acts...'***

From Sydney we were determined to implement something that other Vincentians could assess as a result. Other than that, it was a great opportunity to meet with like-minded Vincentians and talk shop. I also felt very challenged in a couple of key areas, such as preserving our Catholic identity while being open to those who want to belong without yet believing, and the desire of youth to be conference members rather than just involved in youth programs.

### Why did you choose the Congress project on Leadership skills and training?

Conference presidents are the backbone of the Society yet I'm sure we've all experienced the presidential election where everyone else in the conference says no and one person reluctantly agrees.



Often, we take on leadership roles without understanding what servant leadership is, and without the experience in the Society to fully understand what responsibilities are involved. The position comes with a multipage list of roles and responsibilities that are hard to sustain for four years without support.

We need leaders who can thrive with extra responsibility, and delegate, so they have time to contemplate innovative ideas and the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of their members. With training, everyone with the right heart can be a great president.

**What do you hope to get out of being involved in the Congress projects?**

There's a real sense of purpose in getting the chance to pass on what I've learnt myself and to make the new leader experience a little easier for future leaders. It's a great opportunity to combine with other state's members to learn what other states have already implemented and to share resources so that no-one has to start from scratch and has a choice of programs to consider.

As usual I've met other like-minded members and get to share a member led experience while appreciating the support from all our dedicated staff. Hopefully we are proving the value of holding Congress and through making some course corrections, we ensure the Society's Legacy continues. **R**

## Now is the time to be a Vincentian

**Tom Everett** is the President of Perth Cathedral Conference and a Congress Champion who attended the 2023 gathering in Sydney and joined two project groups. He became a Vincentian in 2019, Conference Secretary in 2020 and Conference President in 2021. He is also a member of the Vincentian Refugee Network.



### Why did you join the Society?

I was new to Perth and I love service. It is part of who I am and part of how I live my faith.

### Along with the satisfaction of serving others, what were you hoping to get out of being a Vincentian?

I had hoped to get a few things... On a personal level – and I feel selfish saying this – I joined Vinnies primarily to meet like-minded people and hopefully make some friends since I had just moved to Perth.

On a professional level, I hoped it would expand my network in Perth and in the community services sector that I wanted to work in. On a spiritual level I had hoped it would allow me to live my faith.

Quite frankly, I suck at talking about my faith and much prefer my actions to speak for me, so Vinnies work sounded perfect for that. Alongside that I had hoped being a Vincentian would allow me to share my gifts and my privileges with those less fortunate.

### How does being involved in a leadership position help you achieve what you want to get out of being in the Society?

Through being a Congress Champion and as Conference President, I've been able to meet many like-minded people across Perth, the state, and now nationally. These roles have also helped me develop my leadership skills.

A leadership position gives not only more responsibility but also more ways to positively impact the lives of others, especially those in need, and that is the biggest thing that I get out of being in the Society.

### What was the best thing about attending the Congress event in Sydney?

I think everyone who attended would say the same thing – the food! No wait, I mean the people! I met so many inspiring people that weekend and listened and learnt so much from everyone I spoke to.

I realised that we share so many challenges with each other that we are not alone. Equally I learnt of amazing ways Vincentians are supporting those in need. I came away from it buzzing and wish every Vincentian could experience something like that.

I also loved how the facilitators evolved the discussions over the weekend, taking it from sharing the messy, overwhelming, series of challenges we all face, to some tangible actionable items that drew from everyone's input – that was magic.

### *'The opportunities to serve those in need as a Vincentian are endless'*

### Why did you choose the Congress project on identifying and encouraging new leaders?

I've always been interested in the topic of leadership. I also get a kick out of encouraging people to try leading and supporting them to develop and grow into it. It was great to meet others at Congress who were equally as interested and motivated in this area as myself.

I'd love this project to share the opportunities that I have been afforded, to others in an accessible and inclusive way. I believe there is something for everyone in Vinnies no matter your age, skills, experience or background and that those opportunities don't just have to be in formal leadership roles as informal leadership is just as important.

That is what I want to help share with others through this project – the opportunities to serve those in need as a Vincentian are endless.

### What do you hope to get out of being involved in the Congress projects?

I want to play a part in creating and driving positive change in the Society so that it doesn't just last the next 100 years but thrives in the next 100 years. The Society still has a lot to give. I'd encourage anyone to be part of this exciting phase we are in – whether that is being a part of a Congress project to drive national change, or at a local level to serve those in need in a way that no other organisation can – now is the time to be a Vincentian!

### Can you share a little bit about your personal life?

I am a husband, a father of lots of indoor plants (that I struggle to keep alive) and I work for a humanitarian organisation that supports newly arrived refugees settle into their new home, Australia. I'm also a travel addict and always have an adventure up my sleeve. The next one, I hope, is Antarctica! **R**

## GOVERNOR-GENERAL VISITS

### Governor-General visits Our Lady of the Way

In late July, the Governor-General of Australia, the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, visited St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's recently opened facility, Our Lady of the Way, in Western Sydney. The service offers crisis accommodation for women over the age of 45 seeking refuge from domestic and family violence. Funding from the NSW Government enabled the redevelopment of the existing refuge, which provides trauma-informed, wrap-around services for women, coordinated by caseworkers. **R**



*Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of Australia poses for a selfie with (l-r) CEO Yolanda Saiz, Suzy Pace, Manager Macarthur H&H Service, Anna Scott, Acting Director H&H, Anupa Shrestha, Case Worker and Melissa Reil, Area Manager H&H Services Metro South.*

## RECYCLING

### Recycling centres are a bargain hunter's dream

Recently, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn took up management of the ACT's reuse facilities under a contract they were awarded by the Territory's government. Formerly called the Green Shed, the project, operating on two sites adjacent to the government-run waste management facilities, is now known as 'Goodies Junction'.

They opened for retail operations on 1 July and in short time had exceeded their projected foot traffic and sales. Besides contributing to Canberra's circular economy and sustainability objectives, the facilities have provided employment for over 60 new staff, including the majority of the previous staff, and will also create work experience and work opportunities for the Society's companions.

The donations received are being used to assist the local community and our conferences, including providing furnishings for two companions who had been sleeping rough and were assisted by our Street to Home team into new accommodation.

In the future, Goodies Junction will provide support to a range of community groups under its contract and



up-cycling workshops, and will be a hub of sustainability. Funds generated will also be used to enable the Society to offer a hand-up to more people in the Canberra region where significant disadvantage exists amongst a generally well-off population. **R**

# LEVELLED UP LEADERSHIP



## Levelling up together in Sydney

**BY CASSANDRA BULL**

on behalf of the Spirit of Youth Committee

From 5-7 July, the beautiful grounds of Mary Mackillop Place in North Sydney hosted our Spirit of Youth Committee's "Levelled Up Leadership" weekend, bringing together 47 enthusiastic youth leaders from across the country.

This dynamic event was designed to empower and inspire our current and emerging Society youth leaders and reinvigorate the national youth support network around the country... and it did not disappoint.

From the moment participants arrived, the energy was palpable. The weekend kicked off with an icebreaker session that quickly transformed strangers into friends, setting the stage for collaborative learning and spirited discussions. Each session was meticulously crafted to challenge and engage, covering a range of topics crucial for effective leadership.

Beginning with a dive into Vincentian Charism, and our Society Leaders, what quickly followed was a robust conversation on "Building Vibrant Youth Communities, within the Society" where participants discussed strategies

and tips to foster inclusive and active groups and greater connections to the Councils in which they sit.

The session on "Effective Advocacy" facilitated by Youth Action Network NSW, equipped attendees with practical tools to champion causes close to their hearts using a strengths-based advocacy model.

Meanwhile, "Succession Planning" provided insights into ensuring continuity and growth within the Society – many of the tips shared equally important for all conferences.

The presence of National Council President Mark Gaetani and CEO Toby oConnor, who joined for part of the weekend, was welcomed by our young delegates. They felt seen and supported by having national leadership join them and lead them in sessions of Effective Governance and Change Management, sharing honestly their own stories and experiences.

A particular conversation regarding burnout and taking care of yourself as volunteer leaders in the Society was a beautiful exchange of ideas and tips across the stakeholders.



Particularly impactful were the “Round Table” discussions where like-minded cohorts sat in their groups sharing stories and challenges they are facing, with a World Café to finish the event. Small groups rotated between tables, sharing ideas on how to take their newfound knowledge back to their communities. This format encouraged a rich exchange of perspectives and sparked creative solutions.

The weekend wasn’t all work and no play. Social activities, team building games, and small amounts of free time to network out of sessions allowed participants to unwind and build lasting connections. Celebrating in a packed church was also a special experience, especially participating in a beautiful Mass surrounded by so many other young people (not just the Society delegates).

By the end of the event, the sense of camaraderie was strong, with many expressing how the experience had not only enhanced their leadership skills but also reignited their passion for making a difference.

As the “Levelled Up Leadership” weekend concluded, it was clear that these youth leaders were leaving with more than just memories; they were equipped with the tools, confidence, and inspiration to lead their communities into a brighter future.

The organising committee is grateful to the strong support shown to our youth leaders from State and Territory Councils who assisted with flights and accommodation to allow such a richness of young people to attend. Special thanks also must go to the Spirit of Youth Committee, and National Council for facilitating such a great opportunity. Let’s hope this is the first of many such fruitful events, as we continue to journey together, revitalising our Mission based on the strong seeds planted at Congress 2023.

Special thanks to Lachie Dent, Steph Veitch, Ben Knight, Christina Gillio, Travis Ngatuere, Jordan Thuma who were key members of the organising committee for this event, supported by the National Council Secretariate (Cleo and Cass). **R**

## What I liked . . . participants share their views

- Pretty much everything!
- Meeting so many other young and passionate people from across the country..
- Hearing what they have implemented and their aspirations
- The opportunity to share experiences and a fantastic leadership team paving the way forwards.
- Being able to connect with Vincentians from around Australia, share ideas, and set up networks for ongoing support and collaboration
- Be reinvigorated for the role of youth within the Society.
- Tangible teachings, such as succession planning and how to run effective meetings.
- The chance to talk with other states about what programs they are implementing and finding out about mutual struggles that we have functioning as youth conferences.
- The governance sessions and the information about the bigger picture Society. **R**

## A fantastic experience

**BY LACHLAN DEBEL**

Deputy Youth Rep, Toowoomba Diocese

***Lachlan Debel attended the Society's 'Levelled Up' Leadership weekend in Sydney in July. Here, he discusses what he describes as 'a fantastic weekend and experience'.***

My preparations for the weekend started a few weeks before with my appointment as Deputy Youth Rep for the Toowoomba Diocese. The Youth Rep for the Toowoomba Diocese, Alexis, had a wisdom tooth removal and I was privileged to have been chosen to represent Toowoomba.

A few weeks later, the big weekend arrived, and I was filled with nervous excitement. The nerves soon cleared after arriving at Sydney late on the Friday afternoon where I was welcomed with open arms by the Vincentians that I attended the event with.

Throughout the event, they gave me support and heard me as an equal, despite relative inexperience in my own leadership role - a massive thank you to all of you I attended the event with.

The grounds where we stayed at for the weekend, Mary Mackillop Place, were beautiful. Located in North Sydney, it was complete with wonderful accommodation, great food and hallowed grounds which even entombed the body of Mary Mackillop - giving us Vincentians that intangible spiritual presence and motivation.

The weekend was packed to the brim with noteworthy and wonderful speakers who did an excellent job of educating and teaching us, the Society's youth, into levelling-up our leadership skills. This has now given us the tools to truly inspire and bring effective change within the communities we represent.

I can speak on behalf of myself and those who attended the event that this incredible experience gave me a plethora of fresh, invigorating ideas which I'll be bringing back to my Diocese.

I will be excited to see the changes that not only I can bring, but my fellow youth and see how it changes Vinnies for the better in the next few years. **R**



## Thumbs-up for emergency relief program

### ***New study shows clients feel positively about the Society NSW's emergency relief program.***

Responses from 900 people with experience of the emergency relief program administered by St Vincent de Paul Society NSW have shown that it is seen to provide 'crucial assistance during crises', is effective in preventing specific crises, including eviction and severe hunger, and significantly enhances the well-being of clients.

These, and a range of other encouraging findings, have emerged from a [study](#) conducted for the Society NSW by the Mckell Institute, an independent, not-for-profit research organisation dedicated to advancing practical policy solutions to contemporary issues.

Emergency relief services help those experiencing hardships with tailored support, including short-term accommodation, food aid, essential items, healthcare assistance, transport aid, and utility bill payments. The Society NSW's emergency relief services provide immediate crisis assistance and act as gateways to additional support like legal aid, mental health services, and domestic violence assistance

### ***“Emergency relief services offer a crucial ‘hand up’ rather than a ‘hand out’, reaching people at their most vulnerable points and providing immediate support to prevent deeper crises.***

The report, Immediate Aid, Measurable Impact: Examining the effectiveness of Emergency Relief, is Part 1 of a two-part series examining the changing nature of poverty in NSW that the Mckell Institute is undertaking in partnership with the NSW Society.

Launched by the federal Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth, it notes that the twin projects 'work to offer an understanding of the evolving nature of poverty in Australia, while articulating the levers governments have at their disposal to address its immediate impacts.

'Emergency relief services, such as those provided by various charities and community organisations like the Society NSW, play an essential role in the early intervention space and alleviating poverty, especially during cost of living crises such as that being felt by millions of Australians today'.

The report is informed by quantitative survey data of the 900 individuals and qualitative insights gathered from interviews conducted between June and July 2024. Its findings are further informed by analysis of the Society NSW's Client Assistance Management System (CAMS) metadata regarding emergency relief over previous years.

Other key findings include a significant majority of



respondents (78.1 per cent) feeling that support from the Society NSW has been instrumental in their progress towards stability and self-sufficiency: 'This indicates that the program effectively addresses needs before they escalate into more severe crises.'

While all respondent cohorts reported overall satisfaction, regional Australians showed greater agreement that the Society NSW's support helps with food security, living expenses, and housing stability: 'This indicates that local links and community integration enhance the effectiveness of support services, particularly in addressing regional challenges where other services may be sparse and the importance of fostering a more tailored and responsive approach.'

The survey also revealed high demand and satisfaction among recipients with disability, with 25.8 per cent of the Society NSW's clientele relying on the Disability Support Pension (DSP), compared to 3.7 per cent of the general population. Some 70.1 per cent of DSP recipients agreed that the Society NSW's support helped cover living expenses, compared to 65 per cent of the general sample.

'Emergency relief programs are growing in importance and form an essential component of the Australian safety net, playing a critical role in the early intervention space and alleviating poverty,' said Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO. **R**

## Faith will keep the fire of hope burning

Faith, optimism and determination are key to achieving justice for Australia's First Nations Peoples, and in keeping with the NAIDOC Week theme, these qualities can ensure the fires burn for a brighter future.

Speaking in advance of NAIDOC Week, which ran from 7-14 July 2024, National President Mark Gaetani promised St Vincent de Paul Society continues a strong commitment to its First Nations policies and remains optimistic these goals will in time be implemented by governments.

'Within this [policy framework](#) we continue to call for the funding of, and commitment to, Closing the Gap targets by all governments, the age of criminal responsibility being raised to 14 years, and for community-led policies on justice reinvestment and keeping children safe, with ongoing funding,' Mr Gaetani said.

'We are keeping the fire burning in our hearts to achieve these fundamental human rights and will continue to advocate strongly with government to ensure they remain on the agenda.'

Mr Gaetani noted the Society's long history of working with and assisting First Nations communities, families and individuals, saying a disproportionate number of people assisted by member conferences are from First Nations backgrounds.

'Indeed, for certain services in the Northern Territory, over 90 per cent of people we assist identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, while in many places, especially

regionally, the figure exceeds 50 per cent. This reflects the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our country and highlights why more must be done.'

On Sunday 7 July, at the start of NAIDOC Week, Catholics around Australia honoured and celebrated the rich cultural heritage and contributions of First Nations Peoples to the Australian Catholic Church.

'Under the banner of Keep the Fire Burning - Strong in Faith, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council marked National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday,' Mr Gaetani said.

'We joined with them in the spirit of the Gospel Reading for the day, from Mark 6:1-6, which tells the story of Jesus returning to his hometown, only to be met with scepticism and disbelief.'

'As the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council says, "This passage resonates deeply with our own experiences as First Australians, as we can often find that our voices go unheard and our contributions not embraced".'

'These words should resonate with all Australians,' Mr Gaetani said.

'We must listen to the voices of First Nations Peoples and work hard to achieve a fairer Australia for everyone. NAIDOC Week is an ideal time to contemplate these issues and resolve how best to take meaningful action in our personal and working lives.' **R**

The theme for Aboriginal and Islander Sunday this year was *Keep the Fire Burning - Strong in Faith*. We are incredibly proud to recognise the last of our award winners – our Elders. The three recipients of this award have indeed kept the fire of Faith and Culture burning for future generations.

**2024 NATSICC Service to Community Awards**

Eileen and Shirley conduct many Ceremonies for many significant Church events (eg Pentecost), displaying the way in which Aboriginal Culture and Catholic faith work together.

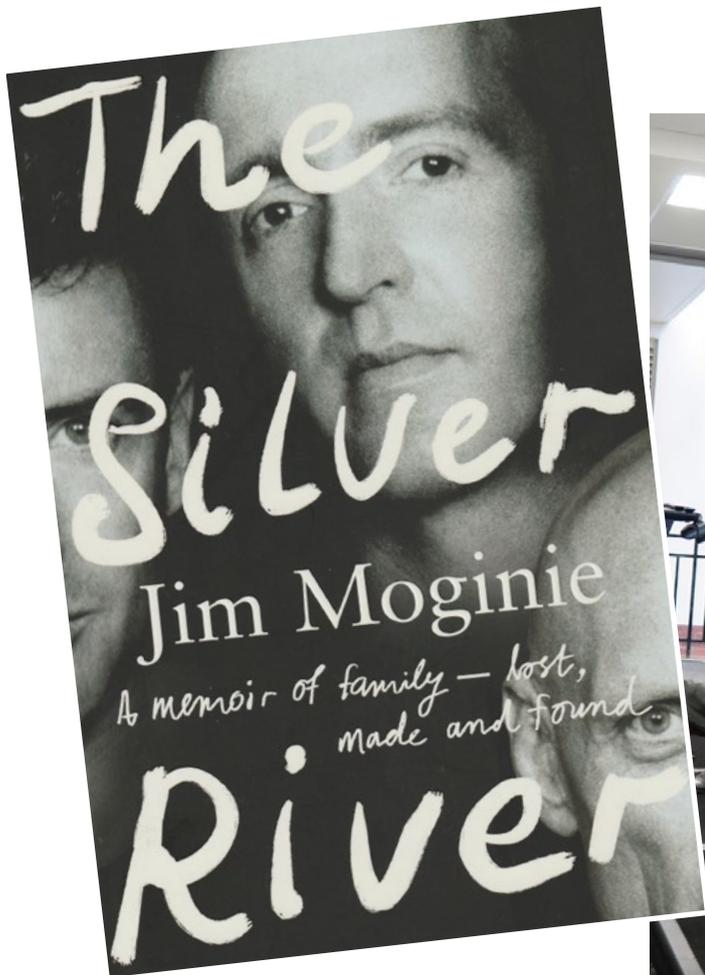
They are an incredible witness to the Gospel - combining Faith and Spirituality. They are role models for the younger generation.

*Eileen Bray and Shirley Purdie*  
Elder Award Winners

**2024 NATSICC Service to Community Awards**

"Maureen's dedication and service have made a lasting impact on her community. Her strength, compassion, and unwavering commitment have earned her the NATSICC Elder Service to Community Award, recognizing her significant contributions and the love and care she has shown to those around her."

*Maureen Moore (VIC)*  
Elder Award Winner



## The pluck of an Irish

Jim Moginie, a key driver of the creative output of Midnight Oil, discussed his diverse career with one of the national capital's most interesting figures, author, commentator, cricket writer and gender transition activist, Lieutenant-Colonel Cate McGregor AM (also pictured). To list the creative achievements of Jim Moginie (the 'g' is pronounced as 'j') would take up this entire review.

Suffice it to say that he was the guitarist and a major inspiration for the hugely popular output of one of Australia's best-known bands, Midnight Oil, fronted by the towering singer-turned MP-turned singer again, Peter Garrett, but powered by the musical genius of Moginie and drummer Rob Hirst.

The Canberra leg of his book launch was held at the start of NAIDOC Week, appropriately, as the band had a deep commitment to the rights of First Nations people.

As Moginie explained to the charismatic interlocutor McGregor and an audience of enthusiastic, and it must be said, ageing, Oils' fans (this writer included), his own connection to place was recognised when he visited Ireland, wherein runs the Silver River of the book's title. As he showed, Moginie has retained his voice, guitar skills and a love for Irish music. Explaining that the 'Irish mob' are most likely to gather in a pub for a 'session' on a Monday

***Paul House, a Ngambri-Ngunnawal custodian of the Canberra region with Walgalu, Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri ancestry, delivered the Welcome to Country, in language and English, and with the help of the yidaki (didjeridoo) at the launch of Midnight Oil band member Jim Moginie's book, The Silver River, at the National Archives in Canberra.***

***Over the past twenty years, Mr House has performed in the role of Chairperson of both the Ngunnawal and Ngambri Local Aboriginal Land Councils and is currently a board member of the latter.***

or Tuesday night, when bar trade is low and needs a kick along, he concluded his author event by playing a lively jig. If the Guinness had been flowing, we could have been there all night.

'Irish traditional music is the source for me,' he writes, 'the pure form. It can wake up the muse.'

*The Silver River* is not the work of a writer trading on his success in another creative field, but a heartwarming and at times challenging memoir by a man who found later in life that he had been adopted.

On Australia Day 2012, then-Lieutenant Colonel McGregor was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for "exceptional service to the Australian Army". She has also provided volunteer service to St Vincent de Paul Society. **R**

# Preparing the Society for election fever

*'The order of society is based on two virtues: justice and charity... Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is justice's role to prevent the attacks.'*

- Frédéric Ozanam

Nothing says winter more for Canberrans than the early morning ritual of scraping ice off the windscreen before hitting the road. While you wait for your fingers to defrost, thoughts turn to the 'big house on the hill' which saw our representatives returning home to attend to duties in electorates which, for the most part, are in warmer climes.

Our three-year parliamentary term is shorter than comparable democracies, meaning the electoral cycle, fuelled by the media, has become almost endless. The impacts of this 'short-termism' include policy timidity and reduced government service delivery. Changing the parliamentary term, widely seen as desirable, would require a referendum and there is no foreseeable appetite for that, given the fate of the negative vote for the First Nations Voice.

With the hand of the RBA on the interest rate tiller, it is hard to imagine a federal election being called during the footy finals season, and then it's the turn of the 'silly season', or what we would prefer to call the Holy Season, not a time for political adventurism.

Nevertheless, there's a rising whiff of election fever in the air, starting with the Cabinet reshuffle in late July and progressing to pollies on all sides turning up at shopping centres, MPs' newsletters arriving in mailboxes and a spate of 'politics in the pub' events.

History shows that late spring (Oct-Nov) and early autumn (April-May) bookmark the federal election season, which for National Council's Social Justice Advisory Committee and the Vincentian Refugee Network means a need to update our key advocacy positions, as well-known as these may be in the broad sense. The key focus topics are First Nations peoples, housing and homelessness, poverty and inequity, people seeking asylum, welfare and taxation reform, secure work and gambling reform.

These updates are being developed for release in September 2024. National Council has also commissioned the Australian National University to update its welfare and taxation reform paper, and to develop new papers on poverty and what it would take to eliminate it, and the Goods and Services Tax.

Recently, submissions have been prepared on the [Financial Services Regulatory Framework in Relation to Financial Abuse](#), the [People's Commission into the Housing Crisis](#) and the [Productivity Commission's inquiry into Philanthropy](#).

We have corresponded with Independent, Greens and Coalition Senators, calling on them *not* to pass the Migration Amendment (Removal and Other Measures) Bill 2024. Currently, it seems this proposed legislation is on the back-burner, with parliamentary support unlikely.

We conducted social media campaigns during NAIDOC week, National Refugee Week, Reconciliation Week, and National Volunteering Week, and supported the launch of a Charities Amendment Bill [see separate article in this issue] to protect the right of charities to advocate.

We have called for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan to be legislated.

We recently signed on to the [Alliance for Gambling Reform](#) and continue to call for a Government response to the important parliamentary committee report, [You Win Some, You Lose More](#), notable in regard to ending the advertising of online gambling.

Finally, we have signed on to the [Ending Child Poverty](#) campaign, fully supporting the halving of child poverty by 2030. New Zealand, Canada, and the USA have successfully implemented legislation to reduce child poverty, resulting in improved child wellbeing. We believe this can be achieved. We also believe you can't change what you can't measure, which is why setting a benchmark is critical to driving change.

Our federal advocacy materials are accessible at [Let's Build a Fairer Australia!](#) and on National Council's [Advocacy homepage](#).

We look forward to continuing our work with Members and the broader Society family to promote our federal advocacy positions and, with your help, to drive important changes in social justice policy. **R**

## Day One Minister visits the capital's Vinnies Roadhouse

On her first day as the Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Clare O'Neil MP visited the [Vinnies Roadhouse](#) food engagement service in central Canberra to see the work the team is doing to provide meals and material aid to people doing it tough in the nation's capital.

The new Minister chatted with volunteers, staff and visiting companions, and helped plate up and serve meals at the busy service that operates six days of the week, providing hot evening meals and access to support and referral.

The CEO of SVdP Canberra/Goulburn, Lucy Hohnen, describes the Roadhouse as 'a safe and welcoming environment for people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, and people experiencing social isolation'.

Reflecting on her visit, Minister O'Neil said [on LinkedIn] 'Day one as Minister for Housing and Minister for Homelessness and I was able to grab some time to visit St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn to serve some meals to people who would otherwise have gone hungry.

'Having a secure roof over your head is pretty fundamental. Without it, holding down a job, caring for your mental and physical health or looking after loved ones is incredibly tough.

'It's the most massive privilege to have the chance to do something about this growing problem in our community. And great to meet the team who are here, week in, week out, lending a hand to their fellow Aussies in a time of need.'

Lucy Hohnen added, 'It was an absolute honour to welcome the new Minister to one of our services,

'During her visit, the Minister engaged with our staff and volunteers, heard the stories of those we support, and discussed the challenges and issues we face in addressing the homelessness crisis. We are grateful for the Minister's support and look forward to lasting, positive change for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness in this country.' **R**



# CEO SLEEPOUTS



## Vinnies CEO Sleepout raises over \$8.6 million nationally

Thanks to another tremendous organisational effort around the country, a total of more than \$8.6 million was raised through 'sleeper sponsorship' and donations to the 2024 Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

Held in all capitals, major regional centres and a number of smaller locations, the now-annual event is the key fundraiser for supporting the vital work of St Vincent de Paul Society in assisting people experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout began in 2006 to raise both community awareness and much-needed funds in support of homelessness, with nearly \$100 million being raised nationally over the lifetime of the event.

'I would like to thank all our participants, donors and supporters who have played a role in allowing us to achieve an outstanding result with our 19th Vinnies CEO Sleepout,' said Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

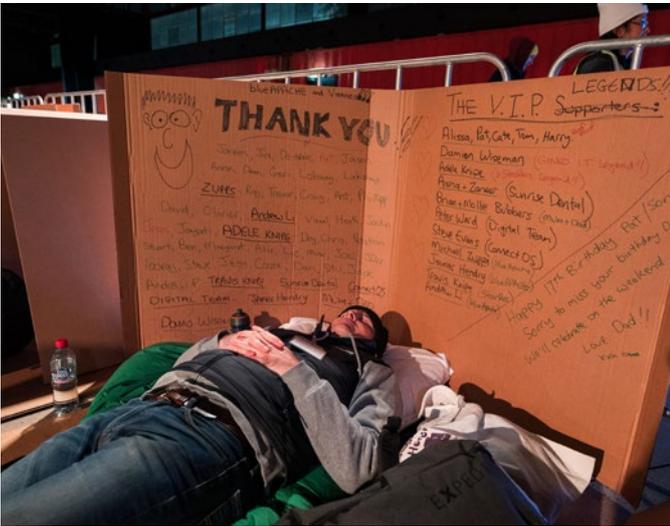
Vinnies Queensland CEO Kevin Mercer said the single night raised \$1.93m, with all funds going to help Queenslanders facing or at high-risk of homelessness

On June 20, more than 500 participants had traded their warm beds to sleep out at the Brisbane Riverstage, CBUS Stadium on the Gold Coast and Maroochy Surf Club on the Sunshine Coast.

Those sleeping out in Melbourne included Michele Hartz, a first-time participant with lived experience of homelessness.

She shared her thoughts: 'When I was experiencing homelessness as a teenager, no one wanted to hear my voice. Today, I lend it to this cause because I have seen first-hand the transformative impact of the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's work in their unique Ozanam House, a crisis accommodation and homelessness resource centre in Melbourne.'

Another first-timer was Dr Jennifer Fitzgerald AM, Group CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria: 'Homelessness and insecure housing must not become normalised in our society. It is a fundamental human right to have a safe place to call home. Seeing people living on the streets, in cars, or unsafe accommodations is unacceptable. We are committed to changing this reality.' **R**



## Campus campers raised over \$15,000

On 14 August over 130 students and staff from the Australian National University brought home the realities of homelessness by participating in the 2024 Vinnies on Campus ANU Sleepout. Together they raised over \$15,000 for their local community.

In addition to raising funds, the Sleepout focused on raising awareness about homelessness related issues affecting young people, starting with a panel discussion on homelessness in the ACT.

The panelists included Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Vinnies Social Justice & Policy Coordinator Kwadwo Owusu, Vinnies Street to Home Team Leader Ben Fitzgerald, Matthew Wilson from Ruby House and Marija Rathouski who shared her personal experience of living through homelessness. **R**



**ANU sleepout**



*St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn CEO Lucy Hohnen with Charities Minister Dr. Andrew Leigh.*

## Cold night for a great cause

***Charities Minister Andrew Leigh saw life through the eyes of the nation's homeless when he slept rough as part of this year's Vinnies CEO Sleepout. He recalls a long, cold and inspiring night...***

Damien Tarrant was just 11 years old when he left home.

Over the years, he has slept on the street and in an old car. To keep the car warm in the Canberra winter, he connected a fan heater up to a cable that he found dangling off a power pole.

He was addicted to heroin and spent time in jail. This year, Damien finally got a home of his own.

After Damien told his story at the CEO Sleepout, they opened the discussion up to questions. I asked him what he does when he sees someone sleeping rough today. Damien replied that he stops to chat, and often buys them a pie or a coffee.

It's a far cry from the way many people treat homeless people – walking by as though they don't exist.

Government has a massive responsibility to address homelessness, and over the past few years, the Australian Government has done as much as any previous government in Australian history.

Our new investments – including the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund and the \$2 billion Social Housing Accelerator – will deliver more homes for Australians who need them.

We've implemented the biggest boost to Commonwealth Rent Assistance in more than 30 years. Working with states and territories, we've set a target to build 1.2 million homes. And like the Prime Minister, (the then) Housing and Homelessness Minister Julie Collins lived in public housing as a child, so she knows firsthand its importance.

But alongside the work of government, charities play a valuable role.

One of these is the St Vincent de Paul Society, which has been helping disadvantaged Australians since 1854. It was a Vinnies staff member, Ben Fitzgerald, who connected with Damien, and helped him find stable accommodation and deal with the other challenges in his life.

Established in 2006, the Vinnies CEO Sleepout is a simple idea: sleep rough for a night to raise money for homelessness programs. The money raised doesn't displace government funding - it adds to the resources available to assist the most vulnerable.

This year was my second Vinnies CEO Sleepout, so I had a bit of an idea of what to expect.

First, be prepared to be cold. The rules of the sleepout are that you can bring as many warm clothes as you like, but foam and air mattresses are verboten. Everyone sleeps on a few sheets of cardboard.

Second, prepare to be woken up by lights and noise. Just as rough sleepers in the real world have to contend with streetlights and car horns, the CEO Sleepout isn't done in the dark, quiet environment your parents told you to create for good sleep hygiene.

Third, don't expect much sleep. The sleeping part of the Sleepout runs from 11pm to 5am. So, the best you'll do is six hours of shut eye.

This year's CEO Sleepout was held at Parliament House. Our host was Milton Dick, who became Speaker in 2022 and has set about bringing a gentle touch of egalitarianism to the role.

Over the past two years, Milton has held a morning tea to honour the parliamentary cleaners, gotten to know those who work in the underground tunnels of the parliament, and opened up his suite for events run by charities helping the vulnerable.

So, it was only natural that Milton would join the sleepout, raising more than \$23,000 for Vinnies in the process (making him the fourth-highest fundraiser in the ACT).

On the night of the sleepout, after hearing from Vinnies staff and clients about the lived experience of homelessness, all the participants gathered for a group photo in parliament's marble foyer, before heading down to the carpark.

Most of the participants were corporate CEOs, with a sprinkling of politicians.

As well as Milton and myself, the team of temporary rough sleepers also included my Labor Federal colleague David Smith (who received an award for his decade-long dedication to the fundraising event) and ACT Liberal MLA Mark Parton (who was doing his eighth sleepout).

With people dressed in trackie daks, oodies, beanies and old jumpers, no-one takes themselves too seriously. This makes the conversation flow easily.

We discussed how impressed we were at the raw honesty of the speakers.

Lucy Hohnen, the CEO of Vinnies Canberra/Goulburn, seemed to have a perpetual smile on her face as she watched her team manage the logistics of the night.

Then it was off to our cardboard beds for the night. After



a run of sub-zero temperatures, the weather was relatively mild for Canberra, going down just to a low of 3 degrees Celsius. I tossed and turned for what only seemed like a few hours, and then it was 5am.

Together, this year's Vinnies CEO Sleepout raised more than \$8 million nationally, including more than \$800,000 from the ACT event alone.

So, if you're a CEO or senior leader within your organisation, consider taking part in the 2025 CEO Sleepout. You can find more information [here](#). **R**

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Andrew Leigh is the Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities, Treasury and Employment.

This article appeared previously in Community Advocate [Institute of Community Directors Australia \(ICDA\) | Cold night for a great cause.](#)

## Homelessness services get the facts on who needs help

'We worked together and agreed to share data, because we were desperate to understand the changes and challenges.' With these opening words, VincentCare's Paul Turton addressed a roomful of frontline service providers and peak body representatives to help launch *Inside the Front Door*, a longitudinal report on the issues faced at the initial assessment and planning stage by six high-volume homelessness services in Melbourne.

As the report notes, 'Over the past two decades, homelessness has become an entrenched feature on Australia's social landscape and pressure on homelessness services has continued to rise.'

In 2021/2022, just over 1 per cent of the population sought assistance from specialist homelessness services and just over 1-in-10 Australians have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.

'While a great deal is known about who presents to homelessness services, much less is known about service utilisation patterns among households 'at risk' of homelessness and experiencing homelessness.'

Findings include that one-in-three households (33 per cent) presenting for the first time in 2020 reported having mental issues, a rise from 23.4 per cent in 2014. The proportion of households reporting domestic or family violence nearly doubled in this period to 15.8 per cent. Regular users of the services were twice as likely as light users to have been homeless, and three times more likely to have been in a correctional facility and to have had medical issues.

The report said the services 'know better than anyone that the problems they face are largely driven by factors outside of their direct control – the combined effects of a lack of affordable housing, rising living costs, and inadequate income support are driving ever more people into housing related problems across Melbourne'.

The seven-year study was conducted by RMIT University, commissioned by Unison Housing Research Lab, and led by VincentCare in collaboration with The Salvation Army, Launch Housing, WAYYS and Haven. It is based on patterns of use at homelessness service system entry points at six organisations that cover most of Metropolitan Melbourne.

The 'changes' referred to include an increase in presentations by employed people from 1 in 20 in 2014, to nearly 1 in 10 in 2020. As 'Simon', a team leader at VincentCare's northern access point told the audience,



**Top: (l-r) Paul Turton (VincentCare Victoria), Peter McGrath (Salvation Army), Guy Johnson (RMIT), Harry Smith (Haven Home Safe), Molly O'Shaughnessy (VincentCare Victoria), Shari McPhail (WAYSS), Laura Mahoney (Launch Housing), Dahna Bond (Unison Housing), Godwin Kavaarpuo (Unison Housing Research Lab) and Kate Colvin (Homelessness Australia).**

'There is a complexity in the cases we are seeing daily, and we simply don't have the resources to support this complexity...it's heartbreaking having to consistently say no clients.'

*Inside the Front Door* is the first study to analyse the long-term changing patterns of homelessness service use across Melbourne's homelessness support agencies. The team analysed records from six Initial Assessment and Planning services and covered 70,000 households across Melbourne.

On a discouraging note, it concludes by saying there has long been a view that homelessness or a housing crisis is typically a once-off experience over a relatively short period of time, after which people successfully live in the community. 'While this remains true for many, it is untrue for an increasing number of households for whom housing insecurity appears to be a persistent issue'.

It said this raises the question of the effectiveness of the entry point, or triage, programs and whether they should be re-designed to account for the fact that many people's housing problems are more enduring. 'The heavy service use cohort is more homogeneous and is strongly associated with more complex needs – very high rates of mental health concerns, substance misuse, experiences in the custodial and State out-of-home care systems, and a very high rate of family and domestic violence.'

Data on this cohort is reliable and could be used to develop a prioritisation framework, the report added. **R**

## Child poverty report sounds alarm bells



Australia faces a mountain of future challenges, judging by The Australia Institute's [report](#), *Ending Child Poverty in Australia*, which finds one-in-six children already living in poverty but no official acceptance of a poverty line or any monitoring of poverty being conducted by government.

'As this report notes, poverty has long-lasting and insidious impacts on a child's health and well-being and can affect their schooling and employment opportunities throughout their entire lifetime,' said St Vincent de Paul Society's National President, Mark Gaetani.

'But it goes broader than that because child poverty is a social minefield that affects families, the many support services provided by governments and not-for-profits, and the nation's budgetary bottom line because the knock-on costs are stupendous.'

The report gauged community attitudes towards child poverty, finding people were overwhelmingly supportive of government measures to reduce child poverty, with 81 per cent agreeing that household income support payments should be set at a rate that did not cause any child in Australia to live in poverty.

'This commonly held view aligns with the position of St Vincent de Paul Society,' Mr Gaetani said, 'which is that the JobSeeker rate should be raised to 90 per cent of pension payments, and this could be afforded by various fiscal reforms, including a reduction of the 50 per cent capital gains tax concession on the sale of investment property.'

'This is clearly spelt out in the [research](#) on tax and welfare

done for the Society by the Australian National University. The recommendations discuss how best to help people most likely to be in poverty – those receiving JobSeeker, working age pension recipients (including DSP and carers), sole-person households, single parents and renters.

'Poverty, and in particular, child poverty must be a priority for this Government. For years now, we have called for a benchmark to measure and reduce child poverty. For a country as wealthy as Australia, we should be aiming to halve child poverty by 2030.'

'Let's remember that every child living in poverty equates to a household, often a single-parent family, that is struggling to get by amidst the cost-of-living crisis.'

'The alarming statistic of one-in-six children living in poverty gives an indication of the huge number of households doing it tough. Our Members see at first-hand how difficult things have become, with demands for assistance continuing to rise, including a spike in calls for emergency relief.'

'As one of this report's authors has rightly said, poverty is a policy choice, which means the onus for taking remedial action lies with the government. The Society calls on the Albanese Government to take immediate steps to resolve child poverty in a country that can well afford to prevent anyone falling through the safety net.'

'[End Child Poverty](#) says that every day in Australia more than 761,000 children live below the poverty line. We fully support their campaign to legislate for change.' **R**

## Children's welfare is the 'elephant' in Australia's room

Passionate about children's welfare since she worked as a child protection officer in western Sydney decades ago, Anne Hollonds, now the National Children's Commissioner, is clearly frustrated that a major new report by her office is yet to receive a proper response from Australia's leaders.

Or indeed, any significant response at all (at the time of meeting with *The Record* in early September), whether from the Government or Opposition, for as Ms Hollonds stresses, the issue is not party-political but lies at the very core of what Australia is, and should be, as a society.

'It's a whole-of-Federation issue,' she tells us, 'and the major parties have completely failed. This should be a key priority for government but we've completely misunderstood the problem, expecting the justice system to solve it.'

'Children must be a key priority but at present they're the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about beyond the crime issue. It's so much more than that. This is a national shame.'

The Commissioner's report, *Help way earlier!: How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing*, calls for transformational change to Australia's child justice system in ways that would put child wellbeing first and address the root causes of offending.

***"I just simply can't understand why child safety and child wellbeing are not a key priority... in the way that other critical issues are."***

- National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds on [ABC RN Breakfast](#)

It lays out a suite of recommendations aimed at helping vulnerable children thrive while keeping the broader community safe.

Commissioner Hollonds notes that the treatment of children in the criminal justice system, some as young as 10 years old, is one of the most urgent human rights issues facing Australia.



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

'Of course we all want to live in communities where we feel safe,' she wrote in *Guardian Australia*, 'but decades of research have emphatically found that being "tough on crime" with kids is not the answer.'

'For too long governments have ignored the evidence that prevention, not punishment, is key to keeping our children and the community safe,' her report adds.

'We won't be able to make our communities safer places for everyone if we just keep punishing and locking up kids without addressing the root causes of child offending...'

'There are common threads for kids who get into trouble: poverty, homelessness, violence and abuse, health and mental health issues, disabilities and learning problems, dropping out early from school and – for many First Nations and migrant families – systemic racism and intergenerational trauma. For most, these are disadvantages from birth.'

Along with the human rights dimension, she quotes the astounding cost of incarcerating children: \$1.0 million per child per annum.

The report urges reform based on both evidence and human rights, highlighting that this requires child safety and wellbeing to be made a national priority. It calls for collaborative action across federal, state and territory governments, with a range of urgent measures. These include establishing a National Taskforce for Child Justice Reform, a federal Cabinet Minister for Children, a national Ministerial Council for Child Wellbeing and better protection of children's rights by enactment of a National Children's Act and a federal Human Rights Act

It also urges the Australian Government to increase the level of income support payments for children, young people and families, and for it to urgently prioritise access to safe and affordable housing for children and families, including those in the child protection and justice systems.

These are also key policies in St Vincent de Paul Society's [A Fairer Australia](#) platform.

Before the report's release, in a 'law and order' election climate, the Northern Territory's LNP promised to legislate to lower the age of criminal responsibility from 12 years to 10. It won in a landslide and has shown no sign of resiling from its promise, despite this being at odds with most Australian Attorneys-General.

Similarly, the Queensland LNP opposition has pledged to sentence certain child offenders as adults if it wins the forthcoming election. The Commissioner believes recent weeks have marked 'a major step backwards for the rights of Australia's children'.

St Vincent de Paul Society has long advocated for the age of criminal responsibility across all Australian jurisdictions to be raised to 14 years, a position supported by one of the report's 24 recommendations and argued forcefully by Ms Hollonds who believes that early incarceration does little more than hardwire young people into an ongoing life of crime.

Signs of this are evident in the Sydney suburb of Mt Druitt where Ms Hollonds did her early work with children at risk. Returning there recently, she saw children as young as 10 in local parks, affected by hard drugs - 'This was much worse than it was back in the day,' she says.

Commissioner Hollonds has realised the need to 'politicise' the issue after being told by politicians off the record that there are 'no votes in children', a comment that has her shaking her head in wonder.

Rising to the challenge, she has been amplifying her messages to the media, addressing the National Press Club and, in the lead-up to the next federal election, is urging anyone interested – which should be everyone – to ask their MPs and electoral candidates to list children's welfare as a key policy priority.

'It is my urgent plea to the prime minister and leaders



of all governments to look closely at the evidence, agree to make child wellbeing a key priority and work together across the federation.' **R**

The National Children's Commissioner's report is at <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/publications/help-way-earlier>

Commissioner Hollonds spoke to 150 children and young people, their families and stakeholders, and recorded a video to report on what she heard - [youtube.com/watch?v=w2N1K2ycll4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=w2N1K2ycll4)

#### Senate inquiry announced

On 11 September 2024, the Senate referred the matter of Australia's youth justice and incarceration system to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for an inquiry due to report by 26 November 2024. The closing date for submissions is 10 October 2024. Details at [Australia's youth justice and incarceration system – Parliament of Australia](#)



## Shaping our social justice agenda

The Society NSW's biennial Social Justice Forum brought together members from around the state for an enlightening day of advocacy and discussion.

Held at Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney, the forum focused heavily on housing with the main plenary session discussing the role of increased density in addressing the current crisis.

John Engler (Shelter NSW), Sue Weatherley (Planning Institute Australia) and Graham West (Amelie Housing) presented as part of a discussion facilitated by Solange Frost (Manager, Policy and Advocacy).

Participants also heard from Maeve, a Mini Vinnies member, who spoke in support of housing: 'I am not blind to what is unjust... Many people my age think that they can go on with life and homelessness will just magically evaporate – but unless we take action, it will eventually fall down on us.'

A series of workshops was held throughout the day on subjects including First Nations Justice, fair treatment for people who use alcohol and other drugs, and making private rental housing work for renters on low-incomes.

Attendees learned a range of skills from the Government Relations and Policy team about engaging with MPs and councillors to advocate for change, the role of drawing upon the stories of people we assist in our advocacy



work, along with engaging with communities and other organisations in pursuit of common causes.

An afternoon plenary session saw members identify issues present in their regions and draw upon their newly developed skills to develop social justice priorities to be actioned in the lead up to local government and Federal elections.

If you would like to receive the latest information on the Society's campaigns for a more equitable NSW, sign up to our monthly Social Justice e-Newsletter at [socialjustice.vinnies.org.au/join](mailto:socialjustice.vinnies.org.au/join) or contact [social.justice@vinnies.org.au](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au)

The Forum presentations and recordings of the sessions are on the [NSW social justice website](https://www.vinnies.org.au/social-justice), and the following sessions are available to view:

- [Spiritual reflection](#) (Mary Ryan, State Council Vice President, Mission & Spirituality)
- [Opening address](#) (Yolanda Saiz, CEO)
- [Closing address](#) (John Adams, A/NSW President) **R**



## ACT Cost-of-Living Report launched

In late August, the CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, Lucy Hohnen joined ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) CEO Dr Devin Bowles and other leaders from ACT Community Sector organisations to launch the 2024 ACT Cost-of-Living Report.

The report highlights the harsh realities faced by many Canberrans on low-income. It reveals persistently high inflation and high interest rates are causing great stress on low-income households and adding to demand for community sector services across the ACT.

The report can be accessed at [actcoss.org.au/publication/2024-act-cost-of-living-report/](https://actcoss.org.au/publication/2024-act-cost-of-living-report/) **R**

*(l-r) Rebecca Zappelli (Families ACT), Lucy Hohnen (St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn), Miranda Phillips (Roundabout Canberra), Brooke McKail (Domestic Violence Crisis Service ACT), Hannah Watts (Youth Coalition of the ACT), Carmel Franklin (Care inc), Jean Giese (VolunteeringACT), Travis Gilbert (ACT Shelter), Aoife Berenger (Care) and Dr Devin Bowles (ACTCOSS)*

## Town Hall meeting in Canberra

In mid-August, the Society Canberra/Goulburn organised a Town Hall for Members, Volunteers and Employees from ACT and surrounds. Around 130 people attended in-person and a further 70 people participated online.

CEO Lucy Hohnen *(pictured)* introduced the [2024-28 Strategic Plan](#), followed by presentations from business units on the priorities for the coming year, capped off with an activity that focused on how the Society can continue building a collaborative 'One Vinnies' culture. **R**





## Message to Queensland leaders: Home, Hope, Dignity

The Society in Queensland has just released its first State Election Statement, *Home, Hope, Dignity*.

Queensland's State General Election is on Saturday, 26 October 2024.

The statement comes in the context of significant growth in the Society's works across the state and so an increasing need to ensure our advocacy efforts engage with the election process, working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

'*Home, Hope, Dignity* is our message to political leaders in Queensland ahead of the 2024 State Election,' said the Society's Queensland CEO, Kevin Mercer.

'The statement outlines concrete recommendations for policy action to shape a more just and compassionate response to the current housing, homelessness, and cost of living crises.'

Key recommendations include:

- Establishing a 4-year social housing build target of 5,000 per year.

- Funding a health care integration plan to embed physical and mental health and Alcohol & Other Drugs services in Specialist Homelessness Services contracts, and
- Increasing support to families with school aged children to meet the rising costs of out-of-pocket school costs – including uniforms and education technology hardware and software.

These recommendations emerge from the perspectives of our expert and experienced members and staff who work on the front lines of these crises. The Society sees in these recommendations a message of hope for those who have lost confidence in their chances to keep ahead of rising costs.

'We urge the next government of Queensland to commit to the promise of a safe, secure and affordable home for all Queenslanders. For those struggling to escape or avoid homelessness, these recommendations offer a vision of dignity as the guiding principle for Queensland's support for its most vulnerable residents, said Queensland State President, Patricia McMahon. **R**



**At the launch of the Society Canberra/Goulburn's ACT election policy were (l-r) Paul Williamson, Conference Member, Kym Duggan, Chair of Social Justice Committee and Advisor to C/G Council, Lucy Hohnen, CEO and Len Hatch, Volunteer.**

## Canberra/Goulburn launches ACT Election Statement

The St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, through its Social Justice Committee, has developed a pre-election statement that reflects the social injustices facing companions in the lead up to this year's elections in the Australian Capital Territory. Polling day for the 2024 ACT Legislative Assembly election is 19 October.

The 2024 ACT Election Statement was launched by the Chair of the Social Justice Committee, Kym Duggan, at an internal event in Canberra on 4 September, 2024. The event was attended by a section of Members, Volunteers and Employees of the Society, including the CEO, Lucy Hohnen.

The launch event enabled the Social Justice Committee to contextualise the role of the Election Statement in the advocacy campaign of the Society, encouraging all present to familiarise themselves with the complementary conference briefing notes.

The Statement makes 17 policy recommendations. Key among them are the calls on all parties to:

- Support an early amendment to the ACT Human Rights Act to include a right to adequate housing
- Increase the existing stock of affordable social housing by building, at a minimum, an additional 3000 social housing properties over the next five years

- Commit to long-term and expanded funding for all homelessness support programs.
- Commit to an inclusive energy transition process that supports low-income earners as part of the actions to implement the Integrated Energy Plan.
- Commit to maintaining the ACT's status as a Refugee Welcome Zone.
- Fund a Community Co-ordinator position in all ACT Schools to support parents and families to connect with the school and wider community.
- Commit to prioritising the implementation of all 28 recommendations from Our Booris, Our Way Report [Booris is a Wiradjuri word meaning children].
- Commit to explore a Cross Border Justice Scheme with the NSW Government

As part of the outlined activities, the Society is on schedule to host a Community Forum in October 2024 with ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) under the auspices of Anti-Poverty Week. The Community Forum will have representatives from key political parties speaking to how their respective party policies aim to address the changing dynamic of poverty in the ACT.

Read more about the 2024 ACT Election here [2024 ACT Election Statement](#) **R**

## No happy birthday for Australia's \$12bn refugee detention program



*Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre.*

PHOTO: DIAC IMAGES

July 19 marked the eleventh anniversary of a dark day in Australia's history when the then-Rudd government announced that "unauthorised maritime arrivals" would not be allowed to settle in Australia and were to be detained in offshore locations.

This was a reversal of Labor policy, as the newly elected Rudd Government in 2007 closed down the detention centre in Nauru, with the then-Minister calling it a 'shameful and wasteful chapter in Australia's immigration history'.

Since 19 July 2013, the astronomical cost of the policy has reached \$12.118 billion.

Today, around 48 refugees remain in Port Moresby, PNG after transfer from Manus Island in a 2021 deal that neither the Morrison nor Albanese governments, has adequately explained, nor has PNG's.

'Like so much of this detention program, the PNG deal is clouded in secrecy,' the St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Mark Gaetani said in a statement marking the anniversary.

'Before Parliament rose for the winter break the Government provided information about the Independent Management Arrangement that conceals more than it reveals. It said funding for PNG to manage this cohort had been "confidentially negotiated" and that disclosing the dollar value of Australia's support could compromise PNG's ability to manage the residual caseload.

'It said openness about the funding would have the potential to "cause significant damage to the Australia/Papua New Guinea bilateral relationship". The Government stressed that no merits-based review of the funding

arrangement will be considered because it relates to policy decisions of a "high political content" that affect Australia's relations with other countries and forms "part of Australia's border protection response".

'As a result of this secrecy and the poor way the whole process has been handled, a number of these asylum seekers are seriously ill, without access to proper medical care, and are struggling to get by in an environment that is neither safe nor welcoming.

'At present, Australia is paying PNG an undisclosed amount to handle an issue that could be more humanely resolved here. The reality is that vulnerable individuals are being sacrificed on the altar of diplomacy.'

Mr Gaetani said a further 100 asylum seekers, more recent arrivals, are being held offshore on Nauru, the independent Pacific nation, most of them in a facility run by the US for-profit prison company, Management and Training Corporation.

'This costly and poorly run program is also lacking in transparency, with journalistic and human rights access denied. The Society believes all those held in offshore detention should be brought to Australia immediately for proper assessment, medical treatment where necessary, and then for consideration of resettlement, whether here or in a third country.'

Mr Gaetani echoed the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's view that 'the whole history of offshore processing has been a complete financial and moral policy failure', adding, 'This is bound to continue if we detain people in poor conditions, hidden from scrutiny and with limited access to proper medical care and legal assistance'. **R**

## Charities seek to advocate for justice and advise on policy

The Stronger Charities Alliance (SCA), a coalition of nearly 140 charities, has launched a new Bill aimed at amending current laws that impede charities from advocating on laws and policy without fear of political reprisal or risk to their charitable status. They also seek greater probity surrounding the appointment of the Commissioner of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).



The draft legislation saw the light of day on 26 June at a media event in Parliament House attended by charity representatives and two parliamentarians, the Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury, Dr Andrew Leigh, and the independent Member for Curtin (SA), Kate Chaney.

The *Charity legislation amendment: Promoting certainty, trust and independence Bill 2024* can be read [here](#).

‘This suite of reforms would resolve the most urgent issues facing the charity sector regarding its rights to advocate,’ said Saffron Zomer, CEO of Australian Democracy Network, the SCA’s parent body.

The reforms in the so-called ‘omnibus Bill’ are: legal clarity around the benefit to our democracy and society from charitable advocacy; the right to publicly engage in government policy discussions without fear of losing funding or favour with the government of the day; and a merit-based appointment process for choosing the ACNC Commissioner.

The SCA has called on the Parliament to pass the reforms as soon as possible. Deciding whether to accept the Bill and choosing when it might be introduced to Parliament are matters for the Government.

**‘I will always listen closely to the views of charitable organisations...’**

- Dr Andrew Leigh, Assistant Minister for Charities

Ms Zomer said, ‘The sector is clear about the solutions that are important to us. We have engaged with the government’s review processes, but it’s time to address long-standing issues. We urgently want action that respects and protects our crucial role as advocates.’

‘In a fair democracy, a multitude of voices is able to contribute to public debate. The ability of the charity sector to advocate on the issues we are experts on, to speak

up for our communities and to play an appropriate role in policy debates should be guaranteed regardless of the politics of the day.’

National President Mark Gaetani said, ‘St Vincent de Paul Society’s advocacy role is as important to our work as providing a meal and shelter to those in need. Our focus on addressing the causes of poverty and injustice is central to our mission and this important right of charities should be protected.’

Choosing the ACNC Commissioner, a process currently under ministerial direction, is of great interest to the charities sector, as the Commission is the national regulator and plays an important role in the operation of the sector.

The SCA is seeking a ‘transparent, merit-based appointment process... consistent with other recent amendments to federal appointment processes, such as... the reformed Administrative Review Tribunal and Commissioners to the Human Rights Commission’.

This would include at least one charity sector representative on an assessment panel and the public advertising of the position.

Responding to a follow-up inquiry from the Society’s National Council CEO, Dr Leigh said that in accepting a copy of the proposed bill he had promised to consider what part it could play in the government’s work to double the giving to charities and boosting capacity in the charity sector.

‘I will always listen closely to the views of charitable organisations in informing any reforms to the Charities Act 2013...’, he added.

‘The government’s response to the Productivity Commission’s Future Foundations of Giving report and to the Not-For-Profit Sector Led Blueprint will provide an opportunity to consider how best to support the vital role of charitable advocacy.’ **R**

# Housing should be a mandated human right

## ***St Vincent de Paul Society supports MPs' push for National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill.***

Prominent independent MPs Kylea Tink (Member for North Sydney) and David Pocock (Senator, ACT) have introduced a [Bill](#) into the House of Representatives and the Senate, respectively, that would require adequate housing to be treated as a human right for every Australian.

Under the proposed legislation, the Australian Government would make a long-term commitment to transforming what the MPs call “Australia’s dysfunctional housing system” into a fairer market for both renters and home buyers. The Bill, seconded in the House of Representatives by independent MP for Indi, Dr Helen Haines, would require current and future governments to develop, implement and maintain a 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan in line with [legislated objectives](#), including improving housing supply, affordability and ending homelessness. These include improving housing supply, affordability and ending homelessness.

‘At its heart is the goal of ensuring everyone in Australia has an adequate home,’ Sen. Pocock said.

St Vincent de Paul Society is one of the 117 individuals and organisations to have [signed an open letter](#) calling on the Housing Minister to legislate such a Plan. Supporters include peak advocacy groups such as ACOSS, Mission Australia and National Shelter, leading academics, industry experts, economists, and former politicians from both sides of politics.

‘The bill proposes establishing a National Housing Consumer Council to represent both tenants and homebuyers and an Office of the National Housing and Homelessness Advocate, to independently monitor the progress of the Plan, assess its outcomes and investigate systemic housing issues,’ Sen. Pocock added.

‘The complexity of this crisis requires a long-term strategy and commitment that endures beyond short-term political cycles. Legislating the ongoing requirement for a National Housing and Homelessness Plan can help deliver that.

***The absence of a meaningful and well-informed national housing plan or strategy has contributed significantly to the mounting housing and homelessness problems Australia now faces***

– Society’s letter to Hon. Julie Collins, Minister for Housing

‘Having a transparent framework, with agreed national objectives embedded in legislation and greater accountability can help transform how we treat housing from being a vehicle of wealth creation to a fundamental human right.

‘This bill seeks to build on and future proof the work currently underway and responds to the calls from a huge cross section of stakeholders to enshrine a beefed up National Housing and Homelessness Plan in legislation.’

Kylea Tink said the legislation would help bring clarity and urgency to tackling one of the country’s most pressing issues.

‘Every Australian deserves the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to adequate housing. Access to safe and secure housing is one of our most basic human rights and is fundamental to individuals, families, communities and our nation thriving.’

Ms Tink said the Bill also seeks to streamline and better coordinate Commonwealth housing policy development and delivery which is currently fragmented across Treasury, the Department of Social Services, the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council and Housing Australia.

The Society has contacted the Minister for Housing, Julie Collins, to record our support for the proposal to legislate for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

‘From our work in housing, homelessness and human rights we know that Australia’s housing system is badly in need of fundamental long-term reform as well as short term relief,’ we said.

‘We acknowledge and welcome the successive expenditure announcements and reform initiatives pledged by the Albanese Government and its re-assertion of Commonwealth housing policy leadership.

‘However, moves to date have been modest in scale and disparate in nature. We see a need for a strong and ambitious overarching framework that gives coherence to [the initiatives delivered since the 2022 election](#). And, more importantly, one that provides a roadmap for the much wider and more ambitious long-term housing reforms required.

‘We also acknowledge that the Government has been developing a National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP), shortly due for release. But the [inadequacy of the Issues Paper](#) released in July 2023, and the [Consultation Summary](#) released January 2024, raise serious doubts about the likely outcome of the process.’ **R**



## Nice, bright and Lucinda Light

### **Victoria opens two new Vinnies Shops, more to come.**

The second week of August saw the opening of two Vinnies shops in Melbourne aimed at smart, fashion conscious and environmentally aware shoppers. Located in Fitzroy and Ascot Vale, the latter as a 'PopUP by Vinnies', the new shops will generate much-needed funds by catering to what Neil Harvey, St Vincent de Paul Victoria's General Manager Retail, calls the 'modern shopper who values quality, sustainability and fashion'.

Neil said the Vinnies Fitzroy Shop is likely to become the 'spiritual home' of op shopping for decades to come: 'Underneath the most beautiful rustic wooden ceiling beams, customers will experience special offers and charm, inviting the community to value shopping with purpose'.

After the enormous success of the first PopUP by Vinnies in the Docklands over Easter, Vinnies Victoria was excited to open its second PopUP Ascot Vale.

'PopUP by Vinnies is a one-of-a-kind Vinnies shopping experience. It's not Vinnies as you know it,' explains Liz Randle, Vinnies Victoria's Head of Merchandise and Retail Innovation.

'PopUP by Vinnies proposes a temporary, yet motivating shopping experience which challenges the concept of traditional op shops. We have collected standout, unique and exciting donations, bringing sustainability and incredible value to shoppers in Melbourne Metro and surrounding regions,' Liz said.

'We want to provide something new for our customers and engage everyone who values authenticity, is fashion-conscious and cares about environmental sustainability, showcasing the diversity and value of their items.'

On 24 August the PopUP shop welcomed Lucinda Light, star of *Married at First Sight*, adding a touch of celebrity glamour to the shopping experience.

'Supporting Vinnies Victoria, spending time in the new and unique 'PopUP by Vinnies' shop and talking to others who love thrifting as much as myself, is something I really looked forward to,' Lucinda said.

'I am also inspired by the mission of St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria, the charity behind the Vinnies Shops in Victoria, and the positive impact it has on so many lives.'

Vinnies Victoria plans to open five more shops this year as they grow their number of shops to raise funds for the growing need in Victoria. **R**

## SOCIAL HOUSING



At the announcement of a \$5.2m revamp for St Vincent de Paul Society's community support centre in Mackay, complete with social housing, were (l-r) SVdP Queensland Housing Coordinator Raeleen \*\*\*\*, Assistant Minister for State Development/Member for Mackay Julieanne Gilbert, SVdP Mackay Regional President Richard Calligan, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations Grace Grace MP, SVdP Queensland General Manager Property & Construction Joe Duskovic, and SVdP Queensland Housing Coordinator Vick \*\*\*\* (\*\*\*) names withheld on request).

## Mackay Family Support Centre gets \$5.2M upgrade

The St Vincent de Paul Society's Family Support Centre on Juliet Street, Mackay is set to be redeveloped with the help of a \$5.2 million funding package from the Queensland Government and the state's mining companies.

The redeveloped centre will enable the Society to better help local families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and facing hardship, poverty and family breakdown.

It will include six new self-contained housing units, along with offices, meeting rooms and work areas, kitchen, laundry and carpark. A larger food pantry with cold room will help increase the amount and types of food provided to those seeking support, along with a laundry with washers and dryers, and a fully resourced kitchen and eating areas.

Queensland's Minister for State Development and Infrastructure, Grace Grace joined the State MP for Mackay, Julieanne Gillbert to meet those who use the vital service and release new concept drawings of the redevelopment.

'The project will provide essential support for members of

**'The project will provide essential support for members of the Mackay community'**

the Mackay community who are either experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness,' Ms Grace said.

'Queensland communities should be the first to benefit when the resources sector they support succeeds and that's why our partnership with the resources sector through the RCIF [Resources Community Infrastructure Fund] is such a great initiative.'

The project is funded by the RCIF, a partnership between the Queensland Government, participating Mineral Resources Industry parties, the Queensland Resources Council and its members. **R**



## Partnership to deliver crisis accommodation at Rothwell

Moreton Bay, Queensland residents escaping homelessness will soon be better supported thanks to a new partnership between the Society and the State Government to convert a disused aged care centre in Rothwell into crisis accommodation.

The site has been converted into a 17-unit facility for people with urgent housing needs, including First Nations people and women experiencing domestic and family violence.

Residents will have 24/7 access to Society support staff, providing trauma-informed case management and tenancy support and help with essential and emergency needs.

The Society's Queensland CEO Kevin Mercer said this combination of Dept of Housing-provided accommodation with on-site wrap-around help from SVdP had proved to be an effective support model at other locations, such as The Park in Spring Hill.



**Main photo:** The refurbished site will provide urgent housing for locals, including First Nations people and women experiencing domestic violence.

**Inset:** Housing Minister Meaghan Scanlon (left) with two Rothwell residents, Queensland Premier Steven Miles and SVdP Queensland CEO Kevin Mercer.

‘Providing a safe place to live is just the first step in helping Queenslanders escape homelessness,’ Mr Mercer said.

‘This valued partnership with the State Government will provide vulnerable Queenslanders with not just a bed to sleep in, but a place where they will be supported to help reach their goals and overcome mental and financial barriers to secure safe and secure housing for the long-term.’ **R**

## Overseas Partnerships training bridges cultures

Twinning is the pairing of a Vincentian Conference or Council in one country with a reciprocal Conference or Council in another, with the support of their respective National Council. Twinning enables Society Members in Conferences and Councils to support one another spiritually, financially and through mutual encouragement. As a Twin, our friendship provides unique understanding and insight into the culture, struggles, achievements and lives of our fellow brothers and sisters, as captured in *The Rule*.

Twinning financial support provided by Australian Conferences/Councils to their overseas twins is used to supplement efforts to support their communities, with the intention for the receiving Conference/Council to become self-sufficient. Australian Conferences/Councils may also receive project funding applications from their overseas Twin. These projects are developed by the overseas partner, based on priorities they have identified, and support the self-sufficiency of the National Council or the community.

Twinning operates in line with Catholic Social Teaching principles that include Solidarity, which calls us to accompany people living with poverty across national, racial, religious and ideological boundaries, to work together to restore the dignity of people living with poverty and empower them to participate in society through cultural, economic and political processes.

Enacting this principle, the Society's Overseas Partnerships Program (OPP), which includes Twinning, follows a strengths-based approach which includes supporting capacity building alongside our overseas Partner countries.

Identifying and developing the skills necessary to work respectfully and effectively with the Society's partners in other countries has been the focus of recent Overseas Partnerships training sessions, held across both Australia and overseas and supported by National Council and State Councils.

Facilitated by Deborah Rhodes (Consultant) and Tricia Wilden (National Council's OPP Director), components of the training included building partnerships, communication across cultures, understanding strengths-based approaches and

increasing cross cultural understanding and how these can help strengthen our overseas partnerships and Twinning relationships.

The Overseas Partnerships training sessions provided participants the opportunity to learn more about the strengths-based approach, and to discuss their experiences in other cultures. Many agreed that important qualities included enabling others and listening to them, open-mindedness, flexibility, prior research about countries before visiting, imagining partnerships, putting preconceptions aside and, if possible, developing language skills.

Members of National Council's Overseas Partnerships Program Steering Committee (OPP SC) attended NSW, Qld and Canberra OPP trainings. They will incorporate these learnings into their relationships and work with all our overseas partners countries. Members of Council General International's International Territorial Vice President-Oceania (ITVP-Oceania) team attended Fiji and Canberra trainings, and they will use these approaches in their work strengthening the Societies and National Councils across the Pacific. **R**

### Strengths-based approach to capacity development

A strengths-based approach starts by revealing what is working within an individual, group, community or organisation, then uses these strengths as a way to achieve positive change. It is a philosophy and a set of methods that contributes to positive change.

Why is this relevant for international collaboration?

- It is culturally respectful
- Generates motivation to bring about change by those whose lives are expected to change
- Is evidence based, with roots in multiple sectors
- Develops a set of priorities determined by those in each context and relevant to each other (not imposed from the outside)
- Motivates people to take action towards positive change.

## Twinning between Fiji National Council and NSW State Council

### NSW training held in Sydney on 6-7 November 2023

Attended by NSW members of NSW/Fiji Twinning Committee (comprising members and staff from NSW State Council) and a representative from National Council's OPP SC.

### Fiji training held in Nadi on 23-24 January 2024

Attended by National Council of Fiji including President, Office Bearers and Regional Council Presidents and ITVP-Oceania representative.

The trainings were followed by a partnership building visit undertaken by NSW State Council, National Council and ITVP-Oceania representatives on 8-14 February 2024.



## Twinning between Solomon Islands National Council and Qld State Council

### Qld training held in Brisbane on 13-14 November 2023

Attended by Qld members of Qld/Solomon Islands Twinning Committee (comprising members of Qld State Council and staff from Qld State Office) and a representative from National Council's OPP SC.

### Solomon Islands training held in Honiara 26-28 April 2024

Attended by National Council President and Office Bearers with special guest from the disability sectors talking about strengths-based approaches and partnerships.

A partnership building visit is being planned by representatives from Qld State Council, National Council and ITVP-Oceania over 20-23 September 2024.



## Working Groups for Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea

### OPP Training held in Canberra 20-21 July 2024

Members of each of National Council's Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea Working Groups attended the training so as to strengthen their work supporting the formation of the National Councils in each of these countries at the request of the ITVP-Oceania.





## St Vincent de Paul Society

NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc.

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

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