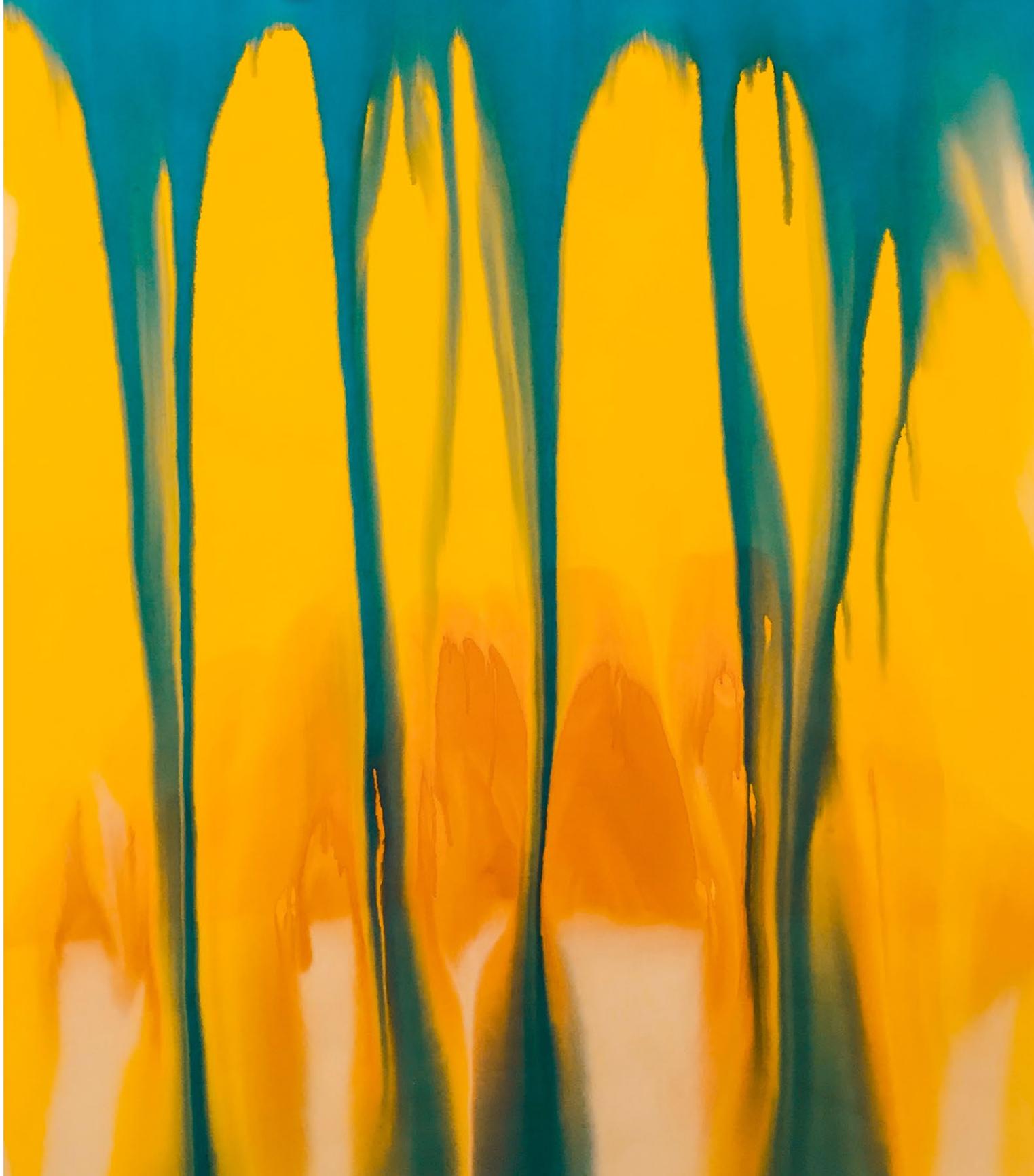


the Record

Spring 2020



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





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NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*

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

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

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

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

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

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

ISSN 2652-8894

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



Available online:
record.vinnies.org.au

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Welcoming the stranger: Pope Francis calls on each of us to care for the other

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

National President, Claire Victory joined an international webinar hosted by the University of Notre Dame on 14 October. Each of the six participants examined different elements of Pope Francis's most recent encyclical, Fratelli Tutti.

For all the tragedy and disruption it has brought to our lives, COVID-19 has presented decision makers, and all of us, with the opportunity to closely examine the things that matter in a civil society. The Church has an opportunity and an obligation to be present in a real and meaningful way in reshaping the post-pandemic world.

Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis' third encyclical which was published in October, talks about welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, listening to and giving a hand up to the poor, defending the rights of all and ensuring that each person, at every stage of life, is valued and invited to contribute to the community.

As the church's largest lay organisation, the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia is central to the Church's practical response to need and challenge within our community. Vincentians welcome and give a hand up to people in need every day; those plunged into poverty, homelessness or despair through drought, or bushfire, or pandemic, or through historical and systemic disadvantage and discrimination. Walking with people is our core business.

We use this experience and understanding to advocate on behalf of our companions in the hope of influencing hearts and minds not just in governments where big decisions are made but in local communities where small actions can make a big difference.

In this edition of The Record, you will read about some of our advocacy

work, which is rooted firmly in the day-to-day experiences of our members.

Central to our advocacy is the capacity to listen to our companions. This is not always easy, and we could probably get better at this – especially at inviting and receiving feedback on how we are going in the work that we do. We need to hear about companions' experience of us, including things that might be challenging for us to hear.

The message running through Fratelli Tutti stands in stark contrast to the messaging that runs through much public policy and discourse which would have us consider people to be economic units and to treat them accordingly.

We hear members of parliament and the media talk in such a way that makes it clear they consider some people experiencing disadvantage to be deserving of help, while others are derided and made to feel guilty or morally deficient for requiring help.

As Catholics, we know – and Fratelli Tutti emphasises – that we are deserving of love, and the manifestations of that love, simply because we are human we are all endowed with human dignity; we do not have to prove ourselves worthy of God's love or the love and care of our neighbour.

One part of the encyclical which really struck me, perhaps partly because it involved one of the parables that really imprinted itself on me when I was a kid, was Pope Francis' discussion of the Good Samaritan. Pope Francis calls us not to overlook the detail that the passers-by were religious. He says:

“A believer may be untrue to everything that his faith demands of him, and yet think he is close to God and better than others. The guarantee of an authentic openness to God, on

the other hand, is a way of practising the faith that helps open our hearts to our brothers and sisters.”

“Paradoxically, those who claim to be unbelievers can sometimes put God's will into practice better than believers.”

I think that sometimes organisations like ours, and the Church more generally, can fall into the trap of not truly practising what we preach. And by that, I mean that we talk about how to treat people – that we should act with compassion and understanding and welcome to those in need – but then don't truly put that into practice.

A lot of us can probably think of people – good, Catholic, charitable people – who talk a lot about not judging people based on their gender, age, gender identity, sexuality, life situation, marital status and so on, and who do indeed act accordingly when it comes to their charitable work or what they do out there in the world; but who then shun, judge, or bully the person next to them at church, or across the table from them in a meeting.

This can of course have the effect of excluding gender diverse people, people who are divorced or in domestic partnerships, differently-abled people, people in non-heterosexual relationships or people who are not baptised Catholics from our ranks, and thus from our decision making; our decision making is the poorer for their absence, which ultimately makes us less effective in responding to those in our community who need our care.

Pope Francis says that “each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders”. To me, that is a call for us to be kind and compassionate not just to our companions, but also to our fellow Vinnies members, volunteers and employees. ♦

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

The Church in action

BY GLADYS DEMISSIE

Gladys Demissie is State President WA. From an early age, she has been involved with the Vincentian community; here is a snapshot of her story.

Growing up in Singapore, I remember that we had a French priest who was passionate about St Vincent de Paul and so our new parish was called St Vincent de Paul! From very humble beginnings – we met in the basement of a shophouse – a beautiful church was built and four Conferences were established, one each for women, men, girls and boys.

My mother was heavily involved in church life and encouraged both my 13-year-old self and my brother, to join the youth conferences and together with the older members of the girls' Conference (they were 17–18 and working) we visited people in their homes.

We also took children on excursions, to the beach or sight-seeing, all things that they wouldn't normally have had an opportunity to do. We'd organise a bus, pile them in and all the girls Conference, six or eight of us, would take them out; it was a fun outing for us too.

However, I also learnt some hard lessons. I remember one home we visited, the father couldn't cope with what was happening, so he very sadly committed suicide and left his wife with six kids to look after. At that time, in Singapore, there was no such thing as welfare, so the family was living hand to mouth and charities like Vinnies were their only lifeline. We'd visit and help out with food but I don't recall providing help, like we do now, with paying bills or providing vouchers.

My mother wanted us to get



Gladys Demissie.

involved because our own upbringing had had its challenges. She instilled in us an appreciation for what we had and even if we didn't have much, there were always people who were worse off than us and we could give back to the community. We grew up respecting hard work, family, compassion, fairness and equity and those values have stuck with me all my life.

In 1975, I left the Conference and my comparatively sheltered upbringing in Singapore and moved to Australia to study. I went on to get married, have children and my parents later joined me in Australia. To my mum the church was always important so when she settled in the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians in Perth, she resurrected the local Vinnies Conference and got me to help with the finances by becoming the treasurer and I've been involved ever since.

For most of my career I worked for the ATO; while most people are loath to pay their taxes, my attitude was and still is, more about how the taxes we pay allow us, as a society, to look after the disadvantaged through our welfare system.

When I visit the WA Conferences, I like to talk about the work of the Society more generally. As Vincentians, visitation is close to our heart but the Society throughout Australia does so much more. Very recently, we undertook a facilitated workshop that built on last year's address by Robert Fitzgerald to the WA State Council and the wider membership which focussed on servant leadership. Via my fortnightly newsletter, *The Vincentian*, I have been sharing, with the wider WA membership, the outcomes of the workshop and how servant leadership helps us to focus on what we do and our desire to make the society we live in a better place.

Things happen in life that help to build empathy. My own life has had some significant challenges and so when I go into someone's home or hear their stories, there is a level of solidarity about what it means to make ends meet, what life is like when you're struggling. Going to church is part of the conversation but at the end of the day it's about community; that's where we see the Church in action. To me it's very much about how you live your life that demonstrates the things that matter and the person that you are. ♦

Gladys Demissie is State President WA. She has been a member of her local conference in WA since 2009 and a member of the WA Finance Committee since 2013. In 2014 she was appointed to the WA State Treasurer role and took on the role of Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee in that year. She became State President WA in July 2018.

A passion to preserve the spirit of youth

BY JACOB MILLER

Jacob Miller is Vice President and National Youth Representative on the National Council. The story of a 20-year-old man responding to what he witnessed in his local community, was the genesis of Jacob's connection to the Society some 15 years ago.

As a conference member at Sacred Heart College (New Town, Tasmania) I ventured out on home visits with the Saturday ARVOS program meeting isolated elderly community members, and on Street Retreats interacting with men and women experiencing homelessness.

I could see the need for an Australia transformed by compassion, and Vinnies was the vehicle I witnessed not only making that change but including young people in the work. Founded by young people, Vinnies continues to be motivated to include young people in its membership.

In 2010 I joined Southern Regional Council in Hobart, and my journey began as a leader within the Society. As an 18-year-old, I felt my opinions were equally valued and my enthusiasm was harnessed.

I have always approached my faith and the Society as almost a means to an end. I certainly believe in God (in all her glory) but like Louise and Vincent, God for me is with people, whether offering them assistance on a visit, running a buddy day, or accepting a donation from them in our stores, it is then I feel most connected to greater purpose of life.

I bring to National Council experience in working as a member and employee across Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania, being particularly involved with youth development and shops. I have a Bachelor of Theology and have also



Jacob Miller.

studied education and volunteer management which have been the perfect combination in my work with National Youth Team since 2013.

Last year, I participated in National Council's Emerging Young Leaders Program. This was a fantastic opportunity to bring my passion and experience to the next level. Studying with Australian Institute of Management and Australian Institute of Company Directors has lit a new passion in me to continue our journey of developing best practice governance and structures that support members to continue doing 'good works'.

I am passionate about striving 'to preserve the spirit of youth, characterised by enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination' (The Rule, Part 1 | 3.5). There are many thousands of young people – educated, passionate, skilled, spiritual young people – working for the Society across the country. I hope my time with National Council can

bring their stories to the fore. That we can find new and diverse conference models to respond to a diverse Australia, that we can find pathways to membership for the thousands of young people engaged through stores, soup vans, education programs and school communities; but most importantly that we stop talking about sustainable membership models, and create action to start breaking down the roadblocks that some people face in their efforts to support our mission. Continuing to grow diversity in our membership, will be our strength.

As a young, professional, gay, catholic, long-term member of the Society I look forward to continuing to respond innovatively to needs of Australia – just like those young people who gathered around Rosalie Rendu to create the Society we have today. ♦

Jacob Miller is Vice President and National Youth Representative on National Council. Professionally Jacob works as Retail Coordinator for Hobart City Mission.

Vincentian Spirituality

BY SR THERESE
HAYWOOD DC

Spirituality can be described as an energising vision or a way of seeing the world. Vincentian Spirituality is the particular expression of spirituality that builds on the tradition of St Vincent de Paul, St Louise de Marillac, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and Blessed Rosalie Rendu.

These people incarnated a way of following Jesus and we are called to walk in their footsteps.

Some people sum up what motivated these people and what motivates those who walk in their footsteps as the Vincentian Question, namely, 'What must be done?'. This was a question that was put to Vincent in the face of the need which confronted him and it is a question that echoes down through the years 'What must I/we do?' in the face of the need that is in front of us.

The key aspects of St Vincent's spirituality are:

- To love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms – that is to put our love into action by providing practical help to people who are suffering.
- see the face of God in the people we serve and to pray for them.
- To share the compassionate love of God with all those we serve.

That is to say that Vincentian spirituality is a spirituality that unites action with contemplation, prayer with direct service.

St Vincent said:

I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or their apparent intelligence, ... But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of



God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people.¹

When Frederic and his companions came along, they took the foundation of Vincentian spirituality that had been built by Vincent and Louise and their followers up to this point and developed it.

Frederic said of the people he served:

We should fall down at their feet and say with the apostle: You are our masters, and we will be your servants. You are the visible images of this God whom we do not see, but whom we believe we love in loving you.²

Frederic and his companions lived out their Vincentian spirituality as lay people who married and had

careers but also had Vincentian spirituality at the centre of their lives through their membership of the Society.

The Rule tells us that:

The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. (1.2)

The centre of Vincentian spirituality is the conference because Society members reflect together on their experiences of serving people in need and finding God there. Their shared experiences and reflections are a source of strength and growth for them in their journey.

Membership and Conferences

James Cormack CM wrote:

In every person called to serve, the gift of compassion is a live and growing trait. Compassion is not born full-grown in any of us, and it must be nurtured in order that it might grow. It must be encouraged and called forth.³

Members in conference support each other in putting this compassion into practice and growing in love.

The essential Vincentian virtues of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal, are the tools that Vincentians use to help them put their spirituality into action.

Simplicity can be described as being honest and authentic. Zeal is the passion and the energy that we put into our mission. Meekness means being gentle and approachable especially to the people that we serve. Humility involves being reasonable and down to earth. Mortification is the selflessness that is required to be of service to others.

Together Society members grow in these virtues as we serve and prayer together.

Vincentian spirituality supports us Vincentians to live out our mission:

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. ♦

Sr Therese Haywood DC is the National Council's Spiritual Adviser.

Membership

There are three categories of membership of the Society. **Conference members** are those who belong to the grassroots groups within the Society known as conferences. They live their Catholic faith in action through the spirit of Christian charity. **Associate members** are those who are committed to the ethos, mission, aims and objects of the Society and who assist the work of the Society, but do not attend conference meetings. **Volunteer members** are those who respect the ethos, mission, aims and objects of the Society and who volunteer in any of the Society's works. Associate and Volunteer members are registered by procedures established by the relevant State or Territory Council. Please visit the [Become a Member](#) section of this website for more information.

Conferences

A conference can be established within any community such as a parish, town, suburb, school, university, workplace, ethnic or social group providing they are endorsed by an appropriate Council within the Society. Conference members meet regularly, usually weekly but at least fortnightly and no work of charity is foreign to them. Together they visit people in their homes, in hospitals, institutions or wherever else they may be found needing aid or comfort. Conference work is not limited to home visitation; members also meet and pray together at other times. To read more about the role of prayer in conferences please visit [Spirituality of the Society](#). ♦

1. St Vincent de Paul Correspondence, Conferences, Documents Vol 1, 26.
2. Frederic Ozanam A Life in Letters, 96.
3. Cormack, James C.M. (1992) "Reflections on Service to the Poor," Vincentian Heritage Journal: Vol. 13: Iss. 2, Article 5. Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol13/iss2/5>

Advent is a time of longing and hope: A Pastoral Approach

BY LEO TUCKER

A brief reading from Luke's gospel...

Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. Martha's sister, Mary, sat down at Jesus's feet and listened to him speaking. Martha, who was distracted with all the serving said: 'Do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do all the serving? Please tell her to help me.' But he said to her: 'Martha, Martha you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed. Mary has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her.'

A few years ago, Robert Fitzgerald AM spoke to members, staff and volunteers of the Society on the importance of good governance for faith-based charitable organisations. He mentioned that governance objectives for the Society are; (i) safeguarding the identity; (ii) promoting the mission; (iii) embedding core values; (iv) developing 'right relationships' based on trust and respect, and (v) delivering best interest outcomes. These perspectives were good to hear as they encapsulate our purpose and life, especially that purpose and life in a secular world.

This form of governance expresses a Society, which is more than a

compassionate NGO. What is crucially significant is that our people attend to those we meet and serve through a pastoral approach. This pastoral position is shared in our prayerfulness, reflections and conversations.

Pastoral care is an essential aspect to our work. In its simplest form it is an approach of being present to another. In broad terms, I believe, it is the telling and reflection of life stories, understanding them as presented and discerning them in the light of a spiritual journey believed, proclaimed, celebrated and lived to its full. It offers little instruction or advice but hears someone's story with empathic active listening. It is a taxing role especially when we are time poor living very busy lives.

Similar tensions are expressed in the gospel story of Mary and Martha. Martha's 'way' of presence is by fulfilling the need to do something. In fact, the gospel tells us that she 'was distracted with all the serving'. Mary's 'way' is very different as it is much about nothing apart from being with Jesus sitting at his feet. There is a tension between the 'ways'. The nature of a pastoral approach is reflection on this tension, for to grow as Christians we need to find that place which is open to the good works of Martha and the contemplative attitude of Mary.

A pastoral approach is marked in the expression of Blessed Rosalie, 'Be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor. If you have nothing to give, give yourself'. In this we continue to show a spirituality which is being present to those we meet offering a spirit that is practical, engaging, relational, and always responding in love.

Advent, in the Christian tradition, is a time of longing and hope. Our pastoral presence to another is so needed in these Covid to post-Covid times as we head toward the Christmas season, through Advent. Sharing our presence rather than presents can seem like a difficult task when we are being busy. Advent provides a wonderful reminder to instead share our presence every day through a letter, a visit, a phone call, or a conversation – something that helps warm and transform someone else's life. This 'being with others' is similar to our Vincentian spirit of 'being for others'.

Lord, may we continue to be one for another; present in our conversations, reflective in our thoughts and prayerful in our lives.

May the Peace and Spirit of the Christ child continue to bless us. ♦

Leo Tucker is Executive Director Mission and Spirituality St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.



Presidents as Servant Leaders

Rule 3.11 Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavour to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charisms of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and of the St Vincent de Paul Society. The president of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian Spirituality.

The following information was collated by the National Council in 2014. It covers some of the key responsibilities, expectations and qualities of a Conference President. This information is not inclusive of everything, as each President will be required to respond to the individual needs of their Conference and the people with whom they serve.

Conference Presidents play an important role in encouraging an atmosphere in which the talents and capacities of members are supported, and everyone is encouraged to contribute in meaningful ways.

In addition, the President will continually promote the responsibility of managing the Society resources with care and prudence within the spirit of generosity to help those in need. The President will also identify and respond to any issues that can cause harm, discomfort or risk to members and those we serve.

Skills and attributes

For the well-being and effectiveness of the conference it is important the Conference President has the ability to:

- Positively and effectively communicate

- Create a welcoming and friendly environment
- Motivate and encourage others
- Delegate to other members
- Encourage reflection and faith development of the members
- Engage and work with a diverse group of people
- Respond to changing needs
- Ensure ethical and accountable decisions are made on behalf of the Society
- Ensure compliance regarding any legal or Society policies and procedures
- Encourage communication with other internal networks and external agencies where required
- Seek assistance and support from Society staff and members on human resources, financial, and administrative matters where required. ♦

Meet the National Council

NATIONAL PRESIDENT
Claire Victory

NATIONAL DEPUTY PRESIDENT
Warwick Fulton

SPIRITUAL ADVISER
Sr Therese Haywood DC

VICE PRESIDENT
Maurie Ryan

VICE PRESIDENT
Patrick Wallis

VICE PRESIDENT
Jacob Miller

NATIONAL TREASURER
Paul Trezise

NATIONAL SECRETARY
Ryan Erlandsen

CANBERRA GOULBURN PRESIDENT
John Feint

NSW STATE PRESIDENT
Peter McNamara

NT PRESIDENT
Jocelyn Cull

QLD STATE PRESIDENT
Dennis Innes

SA STATE PRESIDENT
Brad Hocking

TAS STATE PRESIDENT
Mark Gaetani

VIC STATE PRESIDENT
Kevin McMahon

WA STATE PRESIDENT
Gladys Demissie

Read more [here](#). ♦

Recent Refugee Challenges and the Vinnies Response



BY TIM MCKENNA

Refugees in Australian detention and in our community still face serious challenges due to Federal Government policies.¹ This article updates the situation, outlining Vinnies' response.

People in Australian Detention

In October Senator Jacqui Lambie decided to oppose the Federal Government's proposed legislation to give Border Force more power to remove mobile phones from people in immigration detention. She sought advice from Australians through a web-based survey and

then published her reasons for that decision in an article on her website.²

Of 75,500 respondents, 96 per cent advised her to vote against the bill. Senator Lambie opposed the bill principally because the Government already has the power to stop people in detention using their phones illegally. She also noted 'it's just cruel to punish a class of people for the actions of a few individuals' and that 'we don't have to be cruel unnecessarily'.

The National Council issued a media release calling on the Senate to oppose the bill³ and sent a copy to Senator Lambie. The Council also issued a second release welcoming her decision to reject it.⁴

Unfortunately, this win still retains the status quo. The cruelty of unnecessary, indefinite detention of innocent people continues to take its toll. The Council's second media release noted that 'the rate of self-harm in immigration detention is 200 times higher than in the Australian community'.

The situation for people held in Australia, and in PNG and Nauru, will only be resolved when they are safely and permanently resettled. The Federal Government still has no plan to do this for the hundreds of refugees not accepted by the US. The quickest, safe solution would be to take up New Zealand offer to take these people.⁵

People in Our Community

Recently there has also been a serious deterioration in the situation for the thousands of refugees in our community made destitute by the Federal Government's continued lack of support during the pandemic. As part of the Refugee Council of Australia's *Nobody Left Behind* campaign,⁶ National Council President, Claire Victory wrote to the Federal Social Services Minister Anne Ruston before the Federal Budget seeking justice for these people.

Sadly, the Budget not only failed to institute proper support for these vulnerable people, but instead halved the existing funding. The Refugee Council of Australia, in condemning this decision, stated 'Service providers across the country have reported at least a 300 per cent increase in the need for emergency food and rental relief for people seeking asylum since the pandemic began'.⁷

The Society also issued a statement after the budget noting that people on temporary visas (including refugees) continue to have limited access to financial, housing, and medical assistance. 'They have lost their jobs and are unlikely to find suitable employment at this time. They

have very few options and yet this Government continues to ignore their plight'.⁸

In addition, the Refugee Council recently brought to public attention another unfortunate Federal Government decision, the stripping of financial assistance from up to 500 refugees and people seeking asylum transferred to Australia from PNG and Nauru for medical attention several years ago.⁹

Last month, several hundred people (including families with children) were moved out of community detention after only three weeks' notice. Rebecca Lim, a member of the Vincentian Refugee Network (VRN), is working with these people in Queensland. Ms Lim says: 'Now they have to fend for themselves in the middle of a coronavirus pandemic. People over 18 cannot study or do any training, they have no housing, they have no case-work support, and they have no income support'.¹⁰

Finding work is extremely difficult for these people, many with medical problems and all having endured seven years of detention.

In the four states immediately affected (QLD, NSW, SA and WA) Vincentians are working with specialist refugee agencies to help these people, but the task

is overwhelming. In Queensland, Nathan Middlebrook (also a VRN member) says 'the Society is providing emergency relief to assist these people. After contacting the free call number, they are connected to a specialist, virtual assessment team to determine their needs and deliver the support. Social visits are also being co-ordinated for local Vincentians to further assist individuals and families where needed'.¹¹

Several hundred additional people are expected to be transferred to the community soon, including over a hundred people in Victoria once COVID restrictions are lifted.

Claire Victory recently wrote to the Prime Minister raising concerns about the negative impact of this policy on these people and the difficulty the Society and other organisations are having in supporting them.

While government support for these refugees is an essential first step, their situation will only be justly resolved when they are given a permanent home in Australia or another safe country. Until then the Society continues to advocate for them and help them in their need. ♦

Tim McKenna is Chair of the Vincentian Refugee Network.

1. https://record.vinnies.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/TheRecord_Winter2020-FA-web2.pdf pp 8-10.

2. https://www.lambienetwork.com.au/surveyresults?utm_campaign=phone_ban_nondonors_oppose_2&utm_medium=email&utm_source=lambienetwork

3. https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/321359_Stop_the_blanket_ban_on_mobile_phones.pdf

4. https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/321473_Vinnies_welcomes_Senator_Lambie%E2%80%99s_proposed_rejection_of_Asymylum_Seeker_phone_ban.pdf

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/05/jacinda-ardern-tells-scott-morrison-new-zealand-remains-open-to-resettling-nauru-refugees>

6. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/nobody-left-behind/>

7. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/governments-decision-to-slash-support-for-people-seeking-asylum-will-deepen-worsening-crisis-say-refugee-organisations/>

8. https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/321482_Federal_Budget_relies_on_optimistic_assumptions.pdf

9. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/state-premiers-warned/>

10. <https://catholicleader.com.au/news/catholic-groups-struggle-to-help-refugees-released-into-brisbane-community>

11. Ibid.

Charities must be funded for the work they do on family and domestic violence

BY ROSE BEYNON

Many of our services work either directly or indirectly with women, men and children impacted by family and domestic violence but not all those services attract government funding.

In July 2020, the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council prepared a submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs' Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.

The Society's response to those experiencing or at risk of family and domestic violence varies

across the states and territories. This is due to the principles of subsidiarity which underpin our federated model and mean that the assistance provided reflects and is informed by local needs. However, the extent to which assistance is provided is also defined by the resources available.

One of the outcomes of the parliamentary inquiry is to inform what will follow the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, which has been in place from 2010 to 2022. While one of the purposes of the National Plan was to align the approach taken by governments

to addressing family and domestic violence, much variation in policy and funding approaches remains across the states and territories.

The Commonwealth Government has largely focussed its efforts on funding agencies such as OurWatch to develop primary prevention tools and resources; [1800Respect](#) to provide telephone counselling assistance, the [e-safety Commissioner](#) to address online abuse and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety ([ANROWS](#)) to produce and disseminate research and evidence on addressing violence against women and their children.



Responsibility for funding direct service delivery has remained with state and territory governments.

There has also been a tendency for Commonwealth and state and territory governments to fund only specialised family violence agencies and support services. While these agencies and services are much needed, this approach fails to recognise and acknowledge the role and assistance provided by many mainstream services and charities, working either directly or indirectly with women, men and children impacted by family and domestic violence.

Consequently, much of the work done by the Society has been funded largely through its own resources or with state/territory government funding and bequests. In some instances, the Society has also partnered with other non-government organisations to increase the assistance provided.

Even so, the Society assisted almost 4,800 people in 2019-20 through 23 refuges available to women and children experiencing or at risk of violence. Through these safe places, women are encouraged to develop individual support and safety plans. They have access to workshops on life skills, are provided with referrals to other services (such as counselling, health, legal and immigration services) and helped to find permanent housing and

access to schools and other child-related services. Examples include Amelie House and Elsie Women's Refuge (NSW), Manna House and Louise Lodge (Qld) Marian Community and Olive's Place (VincentCare Vic), the Vinnies Women's Crisis Centre (SA) and the Young Parent's Program (ACT).

The Society's overall framework is to support people experiencing or at risk of family violence in the choices they make - whether that is to stay in a relationship or leave. Where possible, short and long-term accommodation, with long-term support, is provided.

The Society is conscious of the fact that these statistics are an underestimate of the extent of family and domestic violence experienced by those we assist. For instance, they do not include other housing options accessed by those in need, including through Amelie Housing, Vinnies Housing Qld and the Rapid Housing Family Violence program (VincentCare Vic). Further, family and domestic violence are often not disclosed as the reason for seeking assistance, even though this may be evident.

In New South Wales, much work has also occurred in developing and maintaining partnerships with other non-government organisations and state agencies to improve service coordination and referrals. Much work has also occurred in training staff and building their capacity to

take a child-centred approach when responding to the needs of children in families experiencing family and domestic violence.

The Society's submission notes that family violence cannot be addressed without addressing the significant gaps that currently exist at all stages of the housing continuum – from shelter/crisis accommodation, through to transition accommodation, supported accommodation and longer-term community, social and affordable housing.

Service responses must also be adequately resourced so that they can be trauma-informed and child-centred in their approach.

Finally, a general, broad-brush community approach to addressing family violence means that those who are at greater risk of violence continue to fall through the cracks. A more targeted approach is needed to assist young women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living in regional and remote communities, women living with disability, women experiencing financial hardship, pregnant women, women separating from their partners, women on temporary visas and older women.

The Society's full submission is accessible [here](#) and on the website. ♦

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

Escapee from racism was Australia's gain

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Daniele Velcich OAM (1931-2019)

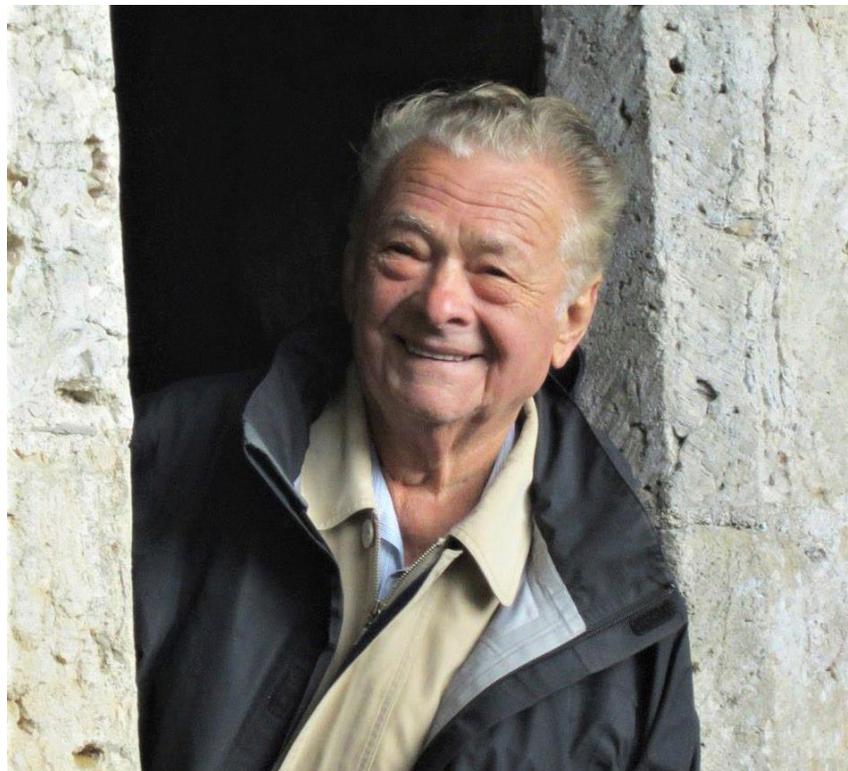
The real estate listing said the 'sprawling property' in Riverstone, western Sydney, built in 1985, had never been on the market before, and was run as a community centre by the Saint Mary of Cherso (SMOC) Association. This non-profit, the ads explained, was dedicated to giving European immigrants, mostly from Italy and Croatia, a place to socialise, adding that the proceeds of the sale would be donated to a mix of charities and other organisations, including St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

Fortuitously, the property was sold in mid-2019 to a local businessman who plans to convert it into a women's refuge centre, providing counselling services and crisis accommodation. Daniele's friends and family know he would have been incredibly proud for this land will be used to serve and support some of the most vulnerable people in the community.

When the legalities were concluded the Society learnt that the SMOC Association had pledged to donate \$100,000 in the memory of Daniele Velcich, their president from 1966-2018, who had recently passed away. Many years earlier he had ensured that no member would profit from the Association, and that all funds would be donated to charity when it closed.

Half of this generous gift was earmarked for the Vinnies Van, the balance would be allocated to other good works undertaken by the Society.

The late **Daniele Velcich was born into an Italian family in Cherso (or Cres), Croatia in 1931, fleeing by boat at the age of 18 because of Yugoslavian**



president Tito's discrimination against Italians. From Venice he began a series of transfers to refugee camps before finally being approved for Australia. He arrived in March 1950 on what he called 'a beautiful sunny Sydney day'.

Daniele would go on to live what his daughter Linda calls 'a life of service and being charitable', which began with organising a dance in a local hall and donating the profits to the local hospital. He was a parishioner at several local churches, including St Patrick's at Blacktown, St Andrew the Apostle Catholic Parish at Marayong and the Croatian Church at Blacktown. He assisted members of the community with visits to the hospital, transport and conversing with family members overseas.

'He was always there to help a mate and would never say no to someone in need,' as Linda says.

Daniele Velcich established the vibrant, well-appointed club,

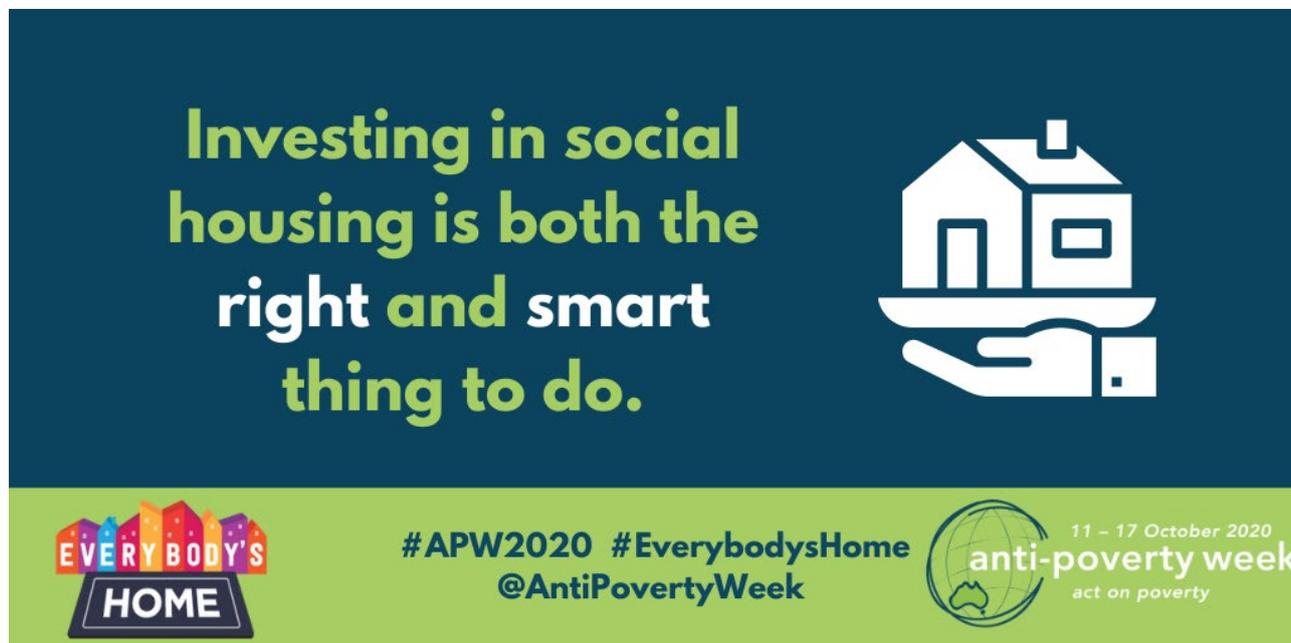
which ran many functions and events, bringing migrants together to celebrate their culture. A picturesque 1402 chapel in Beli, near the Adriatic island town of his birth, is also named in honour of St Maria Magdalena of Cherso.

Following the 88-year-old's death the decision was made to wind up the Association and the property was sold. To date, around \$1.9M has been donated to charities across Australia. In the 2020 Australia Day awards his adopted country honoured Daniele Velcich with the Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division (OAM).

While the honour was posthumous this extraordinary migrant would, as his daughter says, have been incredibly proud to know that his community efforts were appreciated and that the proceeds of the club's sale would be used to help so many worthwhile causes. ♦

Robin Osborne is Communications Partner, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

Anti-poverty week message from the President



The graphic features a dark blue background with a white icon of a house being held in a hand. The text 'Investing in social housing is both the right and smart thing to do.' is written in green and white. At the bottom, there are logos for 'EVERYBODY'S HOME', '#APW2020 #EverybodysHome @AntiPovertyWeek', and 'anti-poverty week 11 - 17 October 2020 act on poverty'.

St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Claire Victory called on the Federal Government to take urgent steps to address the chronic shortage of affordable, secure housing in Australia for low-income earners.

Speaking at the beginning of Anti-Poverty Week 2020, Ms Victory called again for the Federal Government to establish a Social Housing Fund of \$10 billion.

She also repeated the call for a National Housing Strategy to address the shortfall of over 400,000 dwellings nationally.

'In the face of unprecedented unemployment, all governments must work to urgently address chronic housing shortage, rental stress and homelessness which have been on the rise for the past two decades and have escalated in the face of COVID-19.

'Currently in Australia 190,000 households are on waiting lists for social housing.

'Two-thirds of vulnerable private renters are currently in rental stress, and 170,000 households have less than \$250 to survive on each week after paying rent.

'The specialist homelessness service system is turning away 254 people each day.

'Half of households experiencing rental stress are still experiencing rental stress four years later.

'The Federal Budget which was brought down on 5 October delivered billions for roads, dams and transport, but no direct funding to support increased social housing.

'People have nowhere to sleep right now. This is only going to get worse as JobSeeker is reduced and the moratorium on evictions begins to be lifted.

'Increasing bonds issued by the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation to attract investment to increase the supply of affordable housing does little to address the chronic shortage that exists right now. The amount is too small, and the approach relies, unfairly, on other agencies being able to undertake this work and carry the risk, during a recession.

'And so, we add our voice to the many other sensible people calling for this urgent investment which will stimulate the economy and provide sorely needed housing stock.

St Vincent de Paul is a proud partner and sponsor of Anti-Poverty Week and this year Bernie Van Wyk, CEO St Vincent de Paul Canberra Goulburn and Louise Miller-Frost, CEO of St Vincent de Paul in South Australia are co-chairs in their respective states. ♦

Many Australians are in for a difficult time in the years ahead

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

A new report released in September summarises the extent and effects of income and wealth inequality before Covid-19 and provides a lens through which to assess the effects of Covid-19 as it continues, and governments and businesses respond.

The third 2020 publication from the five-year Poverty and Inequality Partnership between the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and the University of NSW is a multi-disciplinary collaboration that has enabled the exploration of the intersection of poverty and inequality with other dimensions of disadvantage – including housing, health and justice.

The St Vincent de Paul Society is proud to be one of 12 ACOSS member and philanthropic partners providing financial and other support to allow this important work to be undertaken.

The report's worrying findings should be on everyone's radar, not just those of policy writers and decision-makers.

The report has simplified complex data, and the commentary about levels of income inequality makes it readily accessible to everyday people with an interest in these important issues.

The key findings show that the highest 20 per cent of households have six times the income of the lowest 20 per cent.

Average household wealth has now surpassed \$1m, but it is very unequally distributed with the highest 20 per cent having more than 90 times that of the lowest 20 per cent.

In the last 20 years, income inequality has grown during periods of income growth and flattened during periods of income stagnation.



From 2003 to 2017, the average wealth of the highest 20 per cent grew almost twice as fast as that of the middle 20 per cent and over 10 times faster than the lowest 20 per cent.

And the report concludes that the longer-term impact of COVID-19 and mass unemployment on income and wealth inequality will depend very much on how governments respond.

The supplementary report: *The impact of COVID-19 on income inequality* shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has already had a profound effect on employment and earnings in Australia, reducing paid working hours by 10 per cent and employment by 6 per cent between March and May 2020. It notes these income losses have impacted women and young people disproportionately.

COVID-19 will likely further exacerbate income inequality due to the spike in unemployment, with the biggest job losses occurring

in lower paid industries. Unless economic recovery strategies focus on job replacements, (including in many industries in which women and young people make up the majority of the workforce) and provide an adequate income floor through social security, income inequality is likely to become more severe.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Accounts data released in September confirm Australia is now officially in a recession following a massive fall in GDP of seven per cent in the June quarter.

This is the largest quarterly decline since 1990 and comes off the back of a 0.3 per cent decline in the March quarter.

The Federal Government also confirmed that JobSeeker (the rebranded Newstart allowance) would drop to \$800 a fortnight from the end of September. It had initially doubled to around \$1,100 a fortnight with the introduction of the Coronavirus supplement in March this year. A number of other

payments will also be affected. The Federal Government announced in early November that JobSeeker supplement will continue till the end of March 2021, but at a reduced rate of \$150 a fortnight.

JobKeeper will be extended till the end of March next year, but that payment also fell dramatically from the end of September. For people working at least 20 hours a week before JobKeeper was introduced, the payment dropped from \$1,500 a fortnight to \$1,200. This will fall further in January to \$1,000 a fortnight. Payments for part-time workers dropped from \$1,500 to \$750 a fortnight at the end of September and will drop again to \$650 in January.

A number of changes will give newer employees access to the JobKeeper scheme. However, some particularly vulnerable groups remain excluded. These include many casual workers who have lost their jobs, asylum seekers on bridging visas and temporary visa holders including refugees, temporary migrant workers and international students.

The Society is currently using mostly its own resources to provide housing and emergency assistance to these people. Based on the amount of total Emergency Relief funds the Society delivered last year, approximately 25 per cent is from Commonwealth grant funds and 75 per cent is from the Society's funds.

The situation has also been made worse by cuts to the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS), the effect of which was being felt well before the pandemic.

The SRSS was put in place to provide regular payments to help with basic living costs while someone's immigration status is being determined.

Several states have reported

an increase in the number of asylum seekers requiring support services. In one jurisdiction, our members have estimated that over 100 additional people have sought assistance as a result of the changed eligibility criteria and funding cuts to the SRSS implemented in early 2018.

In another jurisdiction, our members are telling us that finding sustainable housing and covering rental costs continues to be a significant issue for this group. Research commissioned by the Refugee Council of Australia in partnership with a number of community-based organisations including the Society has found that changes to SRSS have forced people into situations of material poverty, rather than assisting them to find employment.

Almost four in five people seeking asylum are at risk of homelessness. Only one in five are job ready. Removing income and case management support also shifts federal welfare costs and responsibilities to state agencies as well as to community-based organisations, many of which depend on private donations and volunteer support.

The total costs to the states and territories is estimated to be between \$80 to \$120 million per year. The changes represent an unnecessary penalty for a group already rendered vulnerable by the drawn out and unsatisfactory immigration status resolution process.

At July 2020, there was only one job vacancy available for every 13 people on JobSeeker or Youth Allowance. Unemployment increased to almost a million people, or 13 per cent. From March to May 2020, employment fell by 6.5 per cent (835,000 jobs) and hours worked by 10.2 per cent. Altogether, in both April and May

2020, over 2 million people (20 per cent of people employed) either lost jobs or had their paid hours cut. These are truly daunting times for many of our younger community members.

We know that many people on the old Newstart payment who were on the increased JobSeeker payment were finally able to access essentials like prescription glasses, a fridge, warm clothes and school supplies for their children. People benefitted directly – the number of people skipping meals dropped by over half, to 33 per cent, while the number of people struggling with medical costs dropped similarly by over 40 per cent.

Most concerning is the impact the \$150 per week reduction will have on more than 1.1 million children whose parents receive a qualifying payment for the coronavirus supplement.

The Government would do well to heed the 27 recommendations made by the Community Affairs References Committee's inquiry into the adequacy of Newstart and start by defining poverty, reviewing the income support system to ensure recipients are not living in poverty and increasing emergency relief housing and social housing.

Research has commenced on understanding poverty and measuring inequality in Australia.

Tackling some of these key social policy issues would significantly improve the lives of many people living in Australia and provide a shot in the arm for an economy that will take an even bigger hit if the incomes of the lowest-paid people are cut back in line with the recent announcement. ♦

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

Federal Budget a missed opportunity

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

This year's Federal Budget, brought down on 6 October, relies heavily on a number of optimistic assumptions. It targets people who are already comfortable, and it overlooks the plight of low-income Australians.

This is the most important budget in our lifetime. And yet it is a precarious budget reliant on stimulated business and consumer confidence – assuming that reforms will boost economic activity and jobs will follow as a result.

The plan is fraught, relying on assumptions including that the recession will be over by this time next year, international borders will be open in the second half of 2021, a population-wide vaccine will be available by end of the year, investors will invest and consumers

will spend, increased confidence will lead to employment and spending and tax cuts will motivate people to spend, not save.

We welcome some initiatives including the additional 23,000 aged care packages, the doubling of concessional psychology visits, the \$2 billion concessional loans to help farmers cope with the drought and additional funding to address the reduction in funding of frontline social services impacted by the cessation of the Social and Community Services Special Account. One-off payments for people on pensions are also welcomed. However, the stimulus is effective only if the money is spent.

There is no guarantee that large amounts of this stimulus won't just sit in people's bank accounts.

And the absence of funding for social housing defies logic. We continue to hold that a significant investment in social housing would have provided a shot in the arm for the construction industry, immediately boosting jobs

including apprenticeships, and helped to address the chronic shortage of social housing for people on low incomes.

There are billions for roads, dams and transport, but nothing for people who have nowhere to sleep.

The \$12 billion tax cuts which have been brought forward benefit the well-off. Someone on \$35,000 will receive \$255 a year yet someone on \$120,000 will receive \$2,565 a year. But there was no commitment to provide certainty to people on JobSeeker.

We agree that one of the pathways back to economic recovery involves job recovery, but what happens to young apprentices after their year of subsidised wages run out?

What happens to the many women looking for work for whom the Women's Economic Security Package does not apply, such as those in education, nursing, child-care, and aged care?

And almost one million people, including those over 35, will be ineligible for JobMaker.

Further, those on temporary visas continue to have limited access to financial, housing, and medical assistance. They have lost their jobs and are unlikely to find suitable employment at this time. They have very few options and yet this Government continues to ignore their plight.

While we should be looking to support the most vulnerable people, this year's Budget prioritises the business sector and the well-off. This is a missed opportunity. ♦

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



What a year

BY TOBY O'CONNOR

This time last year we were living in the depths of one of the worst droughts in the country's history. Bushfires were already raging across two states and we couldn't have imagined the treacherous summer that was to follow. Internationally, concern was deepening about the state of social divisions in the USA and COVID had not yet turned the globe on its head.

The fires got worse. The pandemic hit like a tornado. It took a while but the rains did fall and offer hope to communities in drought. Jobs were lost. Many businesses failed because of the social isolation necessary to tackle the spread of COVID-19.

The collective toll on individuals, families and whole communities throughout all of 2020 has been big.

Vinnies was part of the story. Our members could not deliver good works. Our volunteers had to stay home. Our shops had to close. Our donations diminished in the face of hardship. We all had to live with deep uncertainty about the future – our future.

Working from home had its challenges as childcare centres and schools were closed. And isolation posed new challenges, especially for school students and young people.

A silver lining in a bad year was temporary housing for people living with homelessness where services and care were provided. Income support dramatically increased, enabling some of the most vulnerable people to live with a moment of dignity as they paid down bills, fed and clothed their children and even replaced a broken fridge or washing machine. That's all changing, but hopefully we can depend on a reasonable



Toby O'Connor.

Government to see the benefit of a more dignified living and ensure we never return to the pre-COVID levels of income support.

At the time of writing, our Victorian friends have beaten the pandemic. As we move closer to the close of this extraordinary year, COVID is at bay in Australia – for now. Borders are opening, people are moving around, and families dare to hope that they might celebrate Christmas together. Rains have continued to fall in many drought-declared areas and we can see people are slowly getting back on their feet. In fire-ravaged communities people continue to rebuild their lives and in doing so are rediscovering the resilience that makes us Australian. Our good works are beginning to flourish again as members are able to travel around their local communities. The Society is again shining its light to relieve the darkness and despair that so many in our communities are feeling in these times of unknowing.

As we leave this extraordinary year behind, we are mindful of the people who have lost so much. I look forward to 2021 and to all that that year will bring. I wish you and your families a safe and happy Christmas and peaceful holidays. We will come back in 2021 full of optimism and hope that we can continue our work to bring about a more just and kinder Australia where everyone has the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

Because as Vincent said:

We must be full reservoirs in order to let our water spill out without becoming empty, and we must possess the spirit with which we want them to be animated, for no one can give what he does not have. ♦

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

Videos bring strategic plan to life



BY WARWICK FULTON

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia launched its 2020-23 strategic plan in August this year.

Across five strategic goals and six long-term objectives the plan lays out a blueprint for the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia for the next three years, but it also sets the foundations for the next decade. The five priority areas are:

- Our Spirituality and Membership
- Our Advocacy
- Our Governance and leadership working in a federated environment
- Our Work together
- the Sustainability of the Society in Australia in an ever-changing world

The National Council Secretariat has been working with the National President and other members of the Council to publicise the Strategic Plan. As part of that launch, we have produced a number of videos

featuring our National President, Claire Victory. There are three different versions of the strategic plan videos – one long, one short, and one which includes a nod to Frederick Ozanam.

National Council Strategic Plan Videos

- [Strategic Plan \(Short\)](#)
- [Strategic Plan \(Long\)](#)
- [Strategic Plan \(Overview\)](#)

Four additional videos are also available, which focus on the National Council's social policy priorities.

National Council Social Policy Videos

- [Social Housing](#)
- [Income Support](#)
- [Income Inequality](#)
- [Asylum Seekers](#)

Ideally the videos will be used in the onboarding of Council members, state and territory CEOs and executive staff and our Society members and volunteers.

They might also prove useful for your own planning days and for distribution to individual conferences for their local meetings.

They may be of interest to the public should there be capacity to show them in shops and service outlets on some video rotation basis.

While the essential work of individual conferences is necessarily focused on local communities, the videos provide context to help conference members better understand the organisation as a national entity.

Hopefully at some level these resources help to acknowledge the essential work of the Society in local communities, and the collective strength of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia as a national organisation.

Sincere thanks are extended to those people at the state and territory levels who were able to provide additional breakaway footage which showcases our good works in these videos. ♦

Warwick Fulton is National Deputy President.

Ministry Leadership Program helps keep Catholic ethos alive

BY SUSAN SULLIVAN

The Ministry Leadership Program (MLP), offered by Australian Catholic University (ACU), aims to support the continued delivery of Catholic ministries in the spirit of the Gospel, the same spirit which inspired their founders. This spirit strives for a very special and distinctive approach to the care and compassion provided within all our Catholic services.

Catholic ministries are today largely governed and managed by lay people. Alongside the requisite professional skills, today's leaders bring diverse backgrounds and relationship to Church. The need has long been acknowledged for formation opportunities where leaders can reflect on and deepen their understanding of Catholic thought and practice.

The MLP program offers leaders the knowledge, skills and resources to better understand, integrate and live out the distinctive mission, identity and ethos of our ministries of service. It brings together senior leaders from the diverse Catholic ministries of service around the country, enabling critical collaboration towards cultivating a mission-inspired culture. Overwhelming evidence from formal and informal evaluation data shows a dramatic increase in leaders' understanding of and capacity to confidently integrate a mission focus in their role. This growth is specifically attributed to MLP.

MLP is a highly practical program where in-session learnings are immediately applicable on return to the workplace. This practical integration is central to ongoing leader formation and development, while simultaneously contributing to the mission. Each session offers insight into a particular

set of values and concerns of the Catholic tradition and invites participants to make connections to their leadership knowledge and experience, and the day-to-day responsibilities and challenges they face.

While MLP complements other formation offerings, the mutual understanding and trust developed through the diverse cross-sector engagement at MLP sessions builds a sector wide community of leaders better able to collaborate, innovate and grow the mission.

Consultations ahead of the Plenary Council and the implications of the Light from the Southern Cross Report highlight the growing demand for well-formed leaders. The imperative to join in support of collaborative formation initiatives for leaders has never been greater. MLP continues to demonstrate its success in this arena.

MLP enables the Catholic tradition to continue to find expression, practical relevance and be an instrument for hope in the world through its ministries of service, so the mission of the Gospel is handed on to future generations.

In January 2016 there was resounding endorsement by Catholic health, aged care and social services providers for development of a collaborative national formation program. The MLP commenced in July 2017 under the auspices of Catholic Health Australia. Now transitioned to ACU, 120 leaders from over twenty organisations have participated to date.

Applications are now open for our next cohort, commencing May 2021. For further information email susan.sullivan@acu.edu.au ♦

Susan Sullivan is Manager, Ministry Leadership Program at the Australian Catholic University.

The Ministry Leadership Program has provided credible and in-depth formation for leaders of ministries working alongside those living with disadvantage, denied access to services and suffering injustice. As a CEO, I appreciate that the MLP has given an in-depth adult learning experience to executives who have little opportunity for formation. With the MLP experience, executives not only lead with an informed mind but a capability to articulate their passion for the Mission and ministry of our work. We are contemporary and consistent with our founding traditions in the Catholic community and with a renewed courage to be prophetic because that is what the Gospel asks of us and what the MLP builds the supporting scaffolding to achieve. ♦

Jack de Groot,
CEO St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW

Support our Overseas Partners through the Assist A Student Program



BY JUDE BLACKLOCK

The Assist A Student (AAS) Program is a special work of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia that recognises that improved levels of education reduce barriers and help individuals to reach their full potential.

The Program commenced as a pilot in Victoria in 1986 as the Adopt A Student Program, providing \$70 per student sponsored in Australia's Twinned countries. The program became national in 1995.

The program was reviewed in late 2019 and a number of recommendations of that Review have now been implemented. The Review found that the program is making a real difference to the lives of students and families supported.

From conference members interviewed for the Review:

Students feel a sense of being part of a bigger community. Students strive harder ... and feel that there must be something special in education to have outside help like AAS.

If students cannot pay school fees they build a debt, so money can be used to pay this off a little bit. When parents get money, they feel relieved. Students also feel happier and can study better.

And from students:

Thank you so much. I really appreciate your financial support and your trust. No words can define my heartfelt thank you to all of you. May our Lord bless us always.

Click [here](#) for a special video thank you.

In 2020 the program is supporting 2,400 students from Cambodia, Indonesia, Kiribati, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The amount provided to individual students will increase to \$100 from 2021. Individual donors do not have to cover the full sponsorship for a student and as always, donations of any amount are gratefully received by the program.

Updated posters and brochures for the program will be available early in 2021 to allow promotion of Assist a Student through local conferences and parishes.

To contribute to this program, you can donate [online](#) which now includes an option to donate monthly. Or you can download a [donation slip](#) to fill in and post.

Thank you for your support. ♦

Jude Blacklock is the Overseas Development Program Facilitator.

NAIDOC Week – Always Was: Always Will Be

NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each year to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC is celebrated not only in Indigenous communities, but by Australians from all walks of life.

The National Council released this statement in November.

STATEMENT

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia acknowledges NAIDOC Week as an event of national importance for all Australians.

We stand with Indigenous Australians to celebrate not only Indigenous achievement but the history, rich culture, and survival of the oldest continuing living culture on the planet.

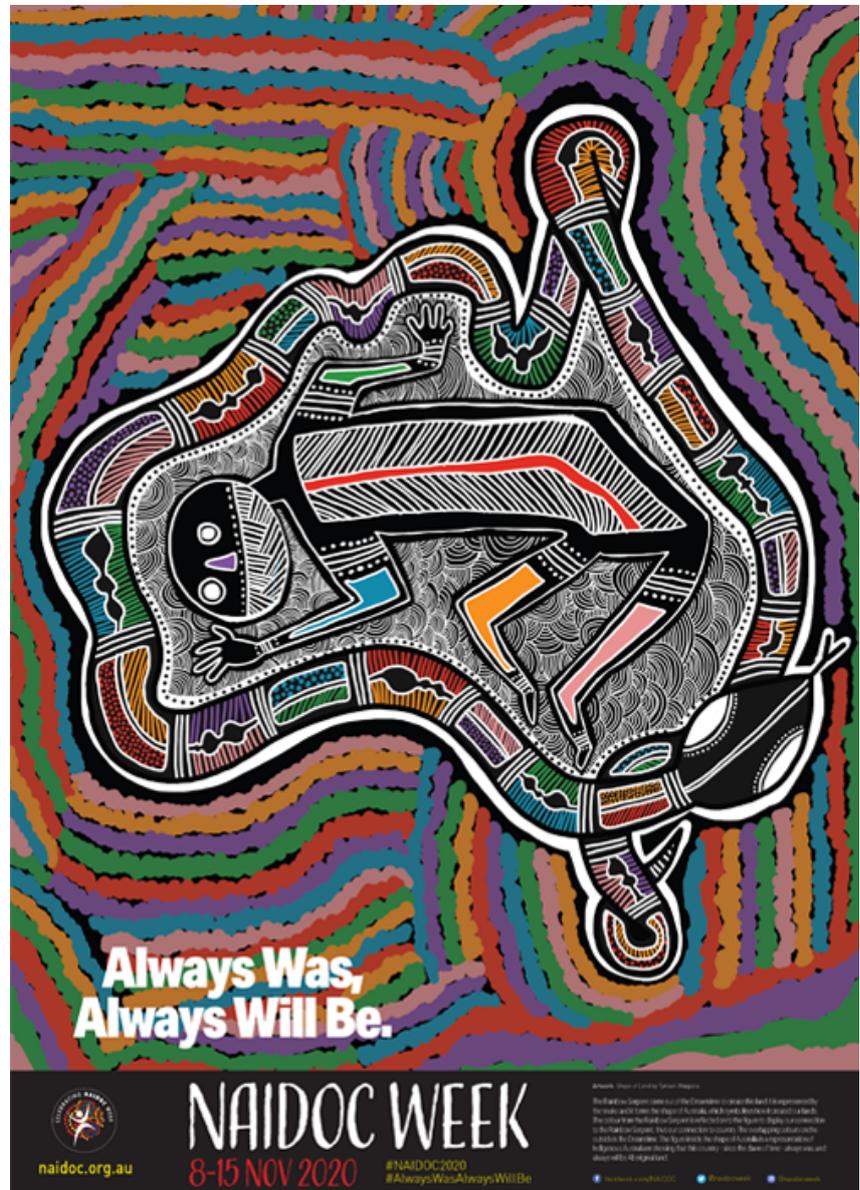
Together we celebrate the achievements of leaders and trailblazers of the past and we look with hope towards the future.

We acknowledge the ongoing struggle experienced by many and we work to shape a more just and compassionate society.

Always Was, Always Will Be recognises that First Nations people have occupied and cared for this continent for over 65,000 years.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were Australia's first explorers, first navigators, first engineers, first farmers, first botanists, first scientists, first diplomats, first astronomers and first artists.

We have crafted our [statement](#) drawing directly from the National NAIDOC Committee's statement as a sign of solidarity with Australia's First Nations people. ♦



Drought Outreach

Our Drought Relief Outreach Coordinator, Bryce Taotua, has bit the road in recent months travelling within NSW and to Outback Queensland. These are his reflections.

What was the purpose of the outreach?

The purpose of the outreach was to provide some on the ground community engagement to towns in local government areas eligible for funding under round 2 of the Drought Community Support Initiative. In addition to other national campaigns run by the Vinnies drought relief team, outreach has been a good way to stimulate much needed conversation about the grant funding at a grass roots level.

This usually involved meeting with local council staff members, and key local stakeholders who would advocate and spread the word for us once we left town. Word of mouth is often the best platform to promote anything!

Where were some of the places you visited?

In the past couple of months outreach has taken me to the Riverina in regional NSW and other regional towns including Young, Hay, and down to Deniliquin. I also covered Oberon, Lithgow and Mudgee which are sort of west of Sydney.

Most recently I had the pleasure of doing a bit of outreach in Queensland starting from Bundaberg and then making my way out to the far west of Outback Queensland. I was able to visit drought-affected areas from Jundah and Windorah, to Birdsville and Beetoota. Outreach ended in the top outback areas from Boulia, Julia Creek and Richmond.

What struck you the most as you travelled through these regions in relation to drought?

A couple of things stood out.

One was the contrast in landscape with regional NSW, east Queensland (Bundaberg) and Outback Queensland. Regional NSW was relatively green having recently experienced a bit of rainfall this year. The Bundaberg area was quite tropical in appearance but still relatively dry. And outback Queensland was the outback. Dry, desert. Despite these differences every area had in some way been affected by drought. But their farming communities were still working away, with minimal complaints and doing their best to get by.

Another thing that struck me was the common reaction I got from individuals who would indicate that there were probably others worse off who needed the money – that they've had a relatively good year so the money could probably go somewhere else. They would often put others before themselves. Yet when asked about how drought has impacted them, personally, mentally and financially over the years, not a single person could deny the impact of drought on their livelihood. Their resilience and selflessness were inspirational and heart-warming.

What memory made you feel, 'this is why I do what I do'?

This is tough to narrow down to one.

One day in the small town of Bedourie, which is part of the Diamantina Shire Council area in Outback Queensland (17.5 hours' drive from Brisbane), I decided to pop into the Visitor Information Centre and leave some brochures with them just in case. It wasn't a planned visit, but I did schedule to visit the Council Office which just happened to be next door.

When I approached the centre to find a carpark (mind you the town was empty, quiet and plenty of carparks around) a ute suddenly did a you-turn in front of me, and parked in the spot I was going to park in. I didn't think much of it and found another space. I did find it amusing that I was having a carpark dilemma in a small town in the middle of nowhere.

When I eventually made my way into the Visitor Centre, I was greeted by two friendly women who asked how they could help me. After explaining why I was in town, one of the ladies quickly turned to the other and said, you should speak to Jeena. To my surprise and delight, Jeena just so happened to be the wife of a nearby station manager.

Jeena, also coincidentally was the driver of the ute that parked in front of me earlier. She quickly apologised and explained that she was rushing in for her afternoon shift at the visitor centre, which she does every now and then, whilst juggling her other roles which include working on the station, taking care of admin on the station, and looking after their children.

After a few questions, and a couple of phone calls to our wonderful drought relief operator team in Canberra, it was quite clear that Jeena and her entire station of up to eight workers were eligible for this funding.

Initially she was hesitant, like most people, suggesting that there were probably others worse off. But she worked hard all year around, with limited breaks or holidays if any, juggling multiple jobs. I couldn't think of anyone more deserving.

I then reassured Jeena that Vinnies understands the hard work put in by farmers, and farming families to get through drought seasons, to simply provide for their families and essentially support the agriculture economy of the country. That they deserved this funding and



were entitled to it. It was at this moment that Jeena with teary eyes expressed how grateful she was that we met, and for the support we were giving the community. We had a Covid-safe embrace and I was on my way.

It was these often unplanned and random encounters that were the most rewarding. I felt grateful to be part of a project that provides direct drought relief to the people who need it most.

I've since received confirmation that Jeena and her station have been paid their grant money.

Would you encourage others to travel outback and support these local towns?

Absolutely. There are plenty of businesses in these drought-affected towns that unfortunately are not directly eligible for this grant funding. So, any support they get from visitors is huge!

How do people find out more about the Society and DCSI 2 Drought relief program?

Go online to www.vinnies.org.au/drougthhelp or call our Drought Relief team on 1300 846 643. ♦



Build Homes, Build Hope petition achieves 10,000 signatures

NSW members and volunteers recorded a major win in the lead up to the State Budget with the *Build Homes, Build Hope* petition achieving the required 10,000 signatures to be tabled in NSW Parliament.

Jack de Groot, Vinnies NSW CEO, and Brooke Simmons, Vice President - Social Justice, delivered the 10,000 signatures to Alex Greenwich MP, Member for Sydney, outside NSW Parliament House in October.

The *Build Home, Build Hope* campaign was launched at the Social Justice Forum in September last year in an effort to increase the amount of social housing by an additional 5,000 new homes each year for the next 10 years to meet the demand of the social housing waiting list.

With more than 100,000 people waiting for a place to live, including some who have been approved for over 10 years, our members and volunteers have been hard at work collecting signatures, meeting with their local MPs and raising awareness of the urgent need for everyone to have a safe place to live.

Jack de Groot, Vinnies NSW CEO, urged the government to heed the call for more social housing ahead of the State Budget on 17 November.

‘The NSW Government has the opportunity to make a difference to the lives of thousands of people by providing the safety, security and stability of a place to call home,’ he said.

‘Having a home is the foundation from which people are able to plan beyond one day at a time. Without a secure place to live, it is incredibly difficult for people to live healthy lives in the present, let alone plan for the future.’

Alex Greenwich MP and Brooke



Jack de Groot, Vinnies NSW CEO, Alex Greenwich MP, Member for Sydney, and Brooke Simmons, Vinnies NSW Vice President – Social Justice, with the Build Homes, Build Hope petition outside of NSW Parliament House.



Vinnies NSW Social Justice representatives from around the state becoming the first to sign the Build Homes, Build Hope petition at the 2019 Social Justice Forum.

Simmons paid tribute to our members and volunteers for their efforts in gathering the required number of signatures.

‘Vinnies members and volunteers live and work in communities throughout NSW. They understand the needs of people who are struggling to get by and know that having a place to live is one way we can make a meaningful difference to improve lives,’ said Mr Greenwich.

‘I want to thank everyone who has supported the Build Homes, Build Hope petition over the past year,’ said Ms Simmons. ‘When we launched the petition in September last year, we knew it was an ambitious target, but one that was

essential to ensuring everyone was able to live with the safety and security of a place to call home.’

Vinnies NSW is grateful for the time and effort put in by members and volunteers to collect the 10,000 signatures over the past year. This achievement highlights the collective power the Society has, to bring about change and shape a more just and compassionate world.

A special mention goes to the Social Justice Team of Rhiannon Cook, Mark Ludbrook and Sarah Boyle for keeping track of the signatures and engaging with Alex Greenwich MP to have the petition tabled in NSW Parliament in the lead up to the State Budget. ♦

Vinnies launches 2020 Christmas Appeal



Claire Victory, National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia is asking people in a position to do so to dig a bit deeper this year as the Society launches its Christmas Appeal after a very tough year.

'Job losses, business closures and reduced working hours have placed many communities under an increased financial strain,' Ms Victory said.

'The Federal Government has reduced the Coronavirus supplement and it will drop again early next year, plunging many more people into poverty, and other supports such as the moratorium on evictions are also being lifted in some states.

'Even without border closures and travel restrictions, many people in our community find Christmas to be a particularly lonely time of year due to social isolation.

'Each year the Australian community provides generously to help Vinnies help people who have

fallen on hard times to enjoy something of the Christmas season.

'The pandemic has made it harder for Vinnies to meet the needs of the people we help due to social distancing restrictions and the need for the contactless delivery of food support.

'Belts have tightened around the nation, and our committed volunteers have been prevented from helping because of COVID risks. During lockdown, many Vinnies shops across Australia had to close or reduce their operations, reducing our ability to generate funds to distribute to people in need.

'This year's campaign has been launched at the end of a year many would rather forget.

'But with your help, we will be able to make this festive season that little bit brighter for people in our community who are doing it particularly tough,' Ms Victory said. ♦

You can donate to the 2020 Vinnies Christmas Appeal via vinnies.org.au/christmasappeal or by calling 13 18 12.



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