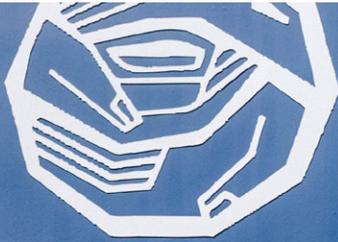


The Record

Summer 2021-22



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



Vinnies

good works





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

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

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

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

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.

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



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On the cover... Vinnies enthusiast Geneva Vanderzeil is an author ('Home is Where You Make It'), Instagram magnet (300,000 followers), and host of Collective Gen a website for home decorators. She was in second-hand heaven in early October when all Vinnies shops in Queensland offered a 30 per cent discount on every purchase as a celebration of National Op Shop Week.

'I love the feeling of going to Vinnies and finding fashion from brands I love at a great price', Geneva said. 'On one of my recent Vinnies trips, I filled my trolley with a handful of pieces from Mister Zimi, Levi's, Cue and Max Mara for a grand total of \$50, all at the one shop.'

That's bargains for her and more money to help fund our good works.

Vinnies Queensland General Manager of Operations, Drew Eide said, 'As good as it feels to find something unique for a great price, you can also feel good knowing the proceeds from every sale at Vinnies go towards helping people in your community experiencing poverty or homelessness'.

Because of COVID-19 restrictions many Vinnies shops took a hit this year, with closures in NSW and Victoria seriously impacting on sales. As the year ended, shops were re-opening and volunteers were pleased to get back to work with their colleagues.

See why Geneva Vanderzeil is so popular by going to www.instagram.com/genevavanderzeil/

Were the ‘good old days’ in the Catholic Church really that good?

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

Some positives emerged from the Plenary Council and those strengths should be acknowledged. But some displayed a nostalgia for a past time when the pews were full on Sunday and marriages didn't end. We now know that while those pews were full, children were being abused, unmarried women were being forced to give their babes up for adoption, and Indigenous kids were stolen from their families.

The church's teachings on a number of matters would be more readily accepted if people could see that those teachings are anchored in love and respect for the dignity of the human person.

But the church has become an inward-looking club that has closed its doors to many of the faithful.

I'm not sure what Jesus would make of recent decades, given his tendency to hang out with society's outcasts. He confronted oppressive structures born of religious law and custom and encouraged a loving relationship with God and each other.

The week-long First Assembly of the church's historic Plenary Council began on 10 October this year.

In the lead up there was deep scepticism about the council's agenda and about what had become of the recommendations and concerns raised in the 17,500 submissions made by individuals and groups of people deeply concerned about the future of their church.

I was one of the 280 members who gathered virtually in this First Assembly for a week of prayer, reflection and deep listening and I have to say I am quietly confident that the majority are optimistic about the mood for change that will lead to a church that can serve



Claire Victory

the world in the 21st century.

Each of us was allocated to a group of 30, and a smaller group of 10, which explored the 16 agenda questions. Most of the proceedings were held in-camera, but daily reports from each of the groups were livestreamed, along with a pre-recorded Mass.

Evidence of our broad church was on display during this week of generally respectful listening and dialogue.

Diverse opinions ensured rich discussion as many laid bare their concerns for the church they love.

Through various Plenary Council processes, I called for greater inclusion in the church and for the church to go to the people on the margins, to begin the deep healing which is so desperately needed.

I was not alone.

There seemed to be a consensus among those who spoke with conviction about the exclusion of various groups of people from the church, including people who are gay, trans or gender diverse; people who are divorced and remarried; and those living with a partner but not yet married.

I participated in a series of nightly webinars produced by the church's national reform

movement. I spoke in particular about my experience of the Plenary Council processes and joined a lively discussion about the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ people.

There was a great strength in the 'interventions' by Plenary Council members, both written and spoken, which will form part of the First Assembly's official record.

Many of those interventions have been welcomed by faithful people who are hanging on by their fingernails — from among the Plenary Council members and from the broader community.

People responded with optimism to many of the reports aired in the open sessions of the Council, and to the quality of the discussion in the mainstream media.

And many were heartened by the frank and open discussion on issues close to their heart in the Plenary Tracker – the nightly webinar discussion presented by former ABC presenter, Genevieve Jacobs, and hosted by the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform and Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn.

Fellow Council members Professor Emeritus John Warhurst and Francis Sullivan each penned a daily blog, also well-received.

But not all submissions looked to the future.

Some displayed a nostalgia for a past time when the pews were full on Sunday and marriages didn't end.

As I pointed out during one of the plenary sessions: we now know that while those pews were full, children were being abused, unmarried women were being forced to give their babes up for adoption, and Indigenous kids were stolen from their families.

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PHOTO: UPNORTHMEMORIES ON FLICKR.COM

By bemoaning the fact that marriages today don't last like they did in the 'good old days', we ignore the lived experience of so many women for whom a life-long commitment was akin to a life sentence; women who were abused but who were legally, socially, financially unable to leave.

As Vincentians we travel with people who are struggling — materially, psychologically and spiritually. Many people see their work with Vinnies as an authentic expression of their faith, even though they may no longer feel welcome in the pews.

People do experience love and respect in the church, through welcoming and supportive practices, but so often it's through schools, social services agencies and specific communities or individuals (including some priests and bishops, and many religious women and men).

But when the official structure or leadership of the church is seen to treat those welcoming, supportive groups or individuals as outsiders, outliers and trouble-makers — then we should question what the institutional

church is telling the Australian community about who it is.

The Gospel is clear that human life — all human life — is sacred and should be protected. It's hard not to feel that this simple truth has been all but lost in a church where the leadership is seen to perpetuate the legalistic, hierarchical structures that deliver power to a few in an outdated monarchical model that has been protected by Canon law and dogma in recent centuries.

I am optimistic that a strong, pastoral, Christ-centred church will rise from the ashes of the child sex abuse tragedy. This Plenary Council is an important part of that process, as is an ongoing commitment to listening to a diverse range of voices from within the church and from the margins.

Forty proposals came out of the First Assembly's discussions, and they include the church publicly backing Indigenous Australians seeking constitutional recognition; adoption of innovative models of governance with lay and clergy working closely together; expansion of programs for contemporary lay and religious formation; professional supervision

for clergy and church workers; expansion of the influential participation of women; and the establishment of forums for open dialogue and discernment, especially with groups who feel excluded in the church.

The proposals will be considered by a team of experts in the lead-up to the Second Assembly in July next year.

We have a lot of work to do before then. But we've made a start.

The National Council is in discussions with other social services organisations and people committed to social justice. We will work together in the lead up to the next assembly to further engage and animate our people. We will continue to reflect on and deepen our understanding of Catholic Social Teaching and how our Catholic faith and identity form and inspire us.

And we will lead by example, as we reach out to people who are marginalised and welcome all, the way Jesus did. **R**

Claire Victory is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. She is a Member of the Plenary Council.

Christmas Joy to end a challenging year

BY SR THERESE
HAYWOOD DC

Christmas is generally and rightly seen as a time of joy, a time for family and spending time with loved ones. This year's planning has been complicated by the COVID-19 restrictions, although let's hope things work out well and we are able to unite safely with our friends and relatives to celebrate together.

As I reflect on this my mind goes back to the first Christmas. The Holy Family experienced more than their share of stress and uncertainty during that first Christmas.

We are all familiar with the events of Jesus' conception. Mary as a young woman has an encounter with an angel and says 'yes' to God despite the challenges this presented to her. Joseph, when he learns of this, is troubled but when he has his own encounter also trusts and believes. As the birth approaches, they set out on a journey and are far away from home. There is no room for them when they arrive, and the birth takes place in the stable.

The Holy Family experienced uncertainty and life on the margins from the very beginning. Brendan Byrne writes:

The visitor from God, who could not find hospitality in his own city, will nonetheless institute in the world the hospitality of God. The poor, marginalised shepherds of Bethlehem will be the first to experience it.¹

The location of Jesus' birth meant that shepherds – people on the margins – were the first witnesses. From the very beginning of his life Jesus shows us that he is about inclusion, particularly of those who are on the margins, regardless of their backgrounds.



PHOTO: WALTER CHÁVEZ ON UNSPLASH

Our Vincentian tradition is about inclusion. St Vincent's words remind us of our connection to one another:

All of us make up a mystical body, but we're all members of one another. It has never been heard that a member, not even among animals, was insensitive to the suffering of another member, or that one part of a person's body may be bruised, wounded, or injured and the other parts don't feel it. That's impossible. Every part of us is in such sympathy with one another and so interconnected that the pain of one is the pain of the other.²

We are all one family... a sentiment we have been made even more aware of during this pandemic.

Vincent goes on to say:

Since Christians are members of the same body and members of one another, with even greater reason should they sympathise with one another.³

In reflecting on what we as Christians and Vincentians are called to give to each other Vincent highlights the need for love of our brothers and sisters.

To be a Christian and to see our brother suffering without weeping with him, without being sick with him! That's to be lacking in charity.⁴

Vincent however goes further in his reflection on what real charity means.

Another effect of charity is to rejoice with those who rejoice. It causes us to enter into their joy. Our Lord intended by His teachings to unite us in one mind and in joy as well as in sorrow; it's His desire that we share one another's feelings.⁵

Reflecting on joy at this time I think of the simple things that I have taken for granted, like visiting a loved one or being able to go out of my local area, and I will take the time to enjoy them more.

As we hopefully enjoy greater freedoms that will enable us to come together in our conferences, councils, special works and centres may we seek out the joys we can share together. Most particularly of course, let us be creative and find ways to ensure that we share the joy of Christmas with our companions after this challenging year. **R**

Sr Therese Haywood DC is Spiritual Adviser to the National Council.

1. Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, 32.
2. CCD Vol 12, 221
3. CCD Vol 21, 221.
4. CCD vol 12, 222.
5. CCD Vol 12, 221.

I paint, therefore I relax

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Meet David Kennedy, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council member and WA Council Co-Vice President.

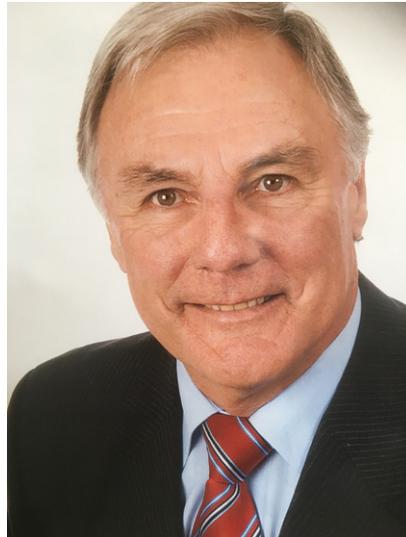
With so much on his plate it is hard to see how a languid pursuit like painting could fit into David Kennedy's lifestyle. It's an endeavour where, as he says, 'Ten minutes becomes two hours before you know it... and it's so relaxing.'

As David has been painting for 30 years there's been no rush to recognition, although his popular appeal has a truly modern story, with people commenting on the works visible on his Zoom meetings, which he conducts from his studio. This has led to several donations to St Vincent de Paul staff and fundraising raffles. His paintings range from portraits to landscapes and much in-between.

When he isn't painting or babysitting grandchildren (seven so far) or golfing or swimming or cycling David is the Co-Vice President of the Society's WA Council (with Chanda Chisela). He joined the Society a decade ago at the urging of Kevin Quinn, a veteran Vincentian who was on a mission to attract members. Sadly, Kevin died in early October 2021, and is dearly missed by the Society in WA.

David came to the VP's role after a term as Regional President Perth and active membership of St Joseph's Conference Subiaco, which he continues to attend. The conference has ten members, plus a few associate members.

He now sits on St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council after WA State President Gladys Demissie asked him to take over her role, which will expire in 2022. This



David Kennedy

new role will be in addition to Chairman of the Members and Conferences Committee.

David was born and raised in Perth where he attended Catholic schools, completed a degree at WA Institute of Technology/Curtin University, while employed as a trainee valuer with the government and later in the private commercial real estate industry as a valuer before progressing to hotel sales and land development as Senior Director of CBRE Group.

Along with his wife Noeline he is an active member of St Joseph's Parish, able to recount how much money the Conference raises from maintaining the candles at the c1934 Gothic-style church, from donations at Mass, and from sausage sizzles: 'At the end of a year we can accumulate up to \$50,000 in the kitty, which we share with other conferences. We're strong supporters of looking beyond the square, so to speak.'

David said St Joseph's Conference, in a relatively well-off part of Perth, currently sees only five or so companions a week, half that of recent years. Statewide, the total

number of Conference interviews and home visitations is around 60,000, with core priorities being food, utility bills, school needs and rental-associated problems.

'It's important to remember that a lot of Vinnies support doesn't have a dollar cost, as important as the tangibles are. It's often about listening to people, just offering a friendly ear. Let's face it, we all like a good chat.

'With the aftereffects of JobKeeper and JobSeeker, however, we have had demand due to threatened evictions for keeping a roof over peoples' heads. I am a huge supporter of financial counselling where appropriate and we have some great folk we can call on to provide this expertise at a very professional level.'

David said Vinnies WA in recent months has established a special fund to 'help people get over the line by providing a couple of thousand dollars, not just a few hundred. They are mostly desperate cases including people affected by domestic violence or refugees and migrants who have been left stranded.

'This fund is overseen by the State President and myself. The base-line is to exercise common sense, to know what people really need and what support will be truly sustainable.'

There's another part of David Kennedy's life that goes to the core of his identity: his heritage is, as he puts it, one-eighth Chinese, deriving from a forbear named Wah Shing who emigrated from Canton to Ararat in the Victorian goldfields in 1854 where he met and married an English girl and proceeded to have ten children.

Wah Shing developed a furniture business in Melbourne that included five of his sons. Charles Wah Shing was the main driver



*'Twilight church in field'
- David Kennedy*

and started the business in Perth. They Anglicised their family name and established the highly successful Washing Brothers Furniture Factory, while struggling against the campaign by government, unions and white business to eradicate 'Asiatic' firms.

David's brother Michael spent eight years researching the family and enabled him to complete a history [Charles Washing and](#)

[Racist Furniture](#), which was published in June this year. Now it's out he has more time for the other things in his life, like painting, reducing his golf handicap and being a stalwart of the Society's activities in Australia's great western state and nationally. **R**

Robin Osborne is National Publications Officer,
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

Plenary Speaking: Light From The Southern Cross

BY FRANCIS SULLIVAN

I have left the First Assembly of the Plenary Council [ending 11 October 2021] optimistic that change is coming. What that looks like is unclear. Plenty of balls have been tossed in the air. Resolutions have been crafted somewhat hastily. But the Show is moving and the collective imagination has been ignited. Councillors have been positive and constructive.

The magnitude of the task is dawning as the diversity of views and appreciations of the role and purpose of the church percolate through the discernment groups reports and the interventions from Members. I assumed that this was always going to be the case. The organisers deliberately designed a process that would elicit the varieties of ways Catholics understand their faith, their practice and their church. So, to that end, the Assembly has done its job.

Yet, the real job is to confront the crisis the church faces. A crisis that is both of its own making but also one that asks squarely what is the value of religious faith in our world today?

People have left the church either through disgust with the history of abuse scandals or because they no longer could relate to it for various reasons. Certainly, on the latter, it seems Pope Francis wants the Church to make the shift from its usual propositional stance to one of mission. A shift that emphasises mercy and compassion before seeking to engage in a dialogue of ideas and philosophy.

When it comes to the abuse scandals, the church has nowhere to hide. The civil authorities did what the church could not do for itself. That is, fess up! The culture of the institution is ingrained with a self-protective instinct. There are endless excuses why those in



positions of authority and influence did not discharge their duties morally and legally. There is an almost knee jerk submission by the laity to senior clerics that stifles honesty and perpetuates secrecy and concealment.

Church leaders and their advisors take an 'institution first' risk management approach to victims' complaints and abuse allegations. This is a culture that is prepared to set itself up against the world to the very point that it paid lip service to the laws of the land and the dictates of human decency. It is this culture that must change and change quickly.

Calls for improved governance come straight from the Royal Commission's damning finding on the church leadership. Calls for increased participation of women in governance and

ministries, like the diaconate, come from revelations at the Royal Commission over the toxic influences of clericalism.

These are just two areas that must be addressed upfront. Let's not kid ourselves; with all the best will in the world, these issues will be strongly contested. That contest will be held within the context where Councillors are grappling with the balance between a restorationist/rehabilitation instinct and a reimagination/reformist instinct.

It's time for a 'Catholic Third Way' in order to triangulate these tectonic plates on which the Assembly teeters. In a structure as conservative as the church, gradual change is in itself a major step forward. However, some steps have already been laid out clearly by the Royal Commission findings

Membership and Conferences

and they must be implemented in full and seen to be. Otherwise, the same instinct to dismiss criticism as unwanted and misguided will only further entrench distrust and have the church itself dismissed and unwanted.

Fortunately, there is a considered and intelligent roadmap available. *The Light From the Southern Cross Report*, commissioned by the bishops and religious leaders, published in 2020, outlines measures to improve church governance within the confines of the Canon law. It addresses the findings of the Royal Commission and instils contemporary standards of accountability and transparency. It offers solutions to the paucity of formation of Catholic adults and it suggests measures for the renewal of seminaries.

Frankly, it has done the work but awaits the nerve from church leaders to be implemented in full across the whole church. Councillors could do themselves a big favour between now and next July's Second Assembly. They could read it! **R**

Francis Sullivan is Chair, Catholic Social Services Australia.

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](#). **R**

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

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John Feint

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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](#). **R**

Called to Serve Together

Annual Founders Day 2021 address (edited for length) to the St Vincent de Paul Society in Tasmania, 27 September 2021 by Claire Victory, National President, St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

It's a privilege to be able to travel and gather together like this, unlike our friends in lockdown. I pay my respects to the past and present elders of this land. Sovereignty was never ceded and I acknowledge the ongoing connection of Aboriginal people to the land and the deep and abiding hurt caused by colonisation.

We heard this morning the rich story of our founders: Rosalie, Louise, Frederic and Vincent. We explored their character and sought to find a little bit of that in ourselves. And we discovered a few things about them that made them both completely average people and also quite extraordinary.

As we heard earlier, in the face of overwhelming poverty and suffering, Vincent urged his followers to bring God's justice and love to people who were unable to live a full human life. He said 'Deal with the most urgent needs. Organise charity so that it is more efficient.... Teach reading and writing, educate with the aim of giving each the means of self-support. Intervene with authorities to reform structures... there is no charity without justice'.

It was a simple message, and we can see why the conferences of charity were placed under his patronage and became the Society of St Vincent de Paul. That message is one that informs and directs us still, all these years later, on the other side of the globe.

Today's theme is 'Called to Serve



Anne Rowe as Rosalie Rendu

Together'. There are three parts to this: Called; Serve; Together: I think of that as the why, the what and the how.

We are called: our faith, our values, the voices of the founders call to us across the years to commit our time and energy and talents to this cause. What we are called to do is to serve: to do whatever good lies at our hands. In your case it might be visiting with companions as part of a conference or working in a shop or a hub or on a van, or in the state support office. And, in this call to service, we're asked to work together.

Without the unique contribution of each of us, we couldn't do what we are individually and collectively called to do. Even Frederic didn't purport to be the font of all wisdom, and he encouraged

everyone to give their own opinions and feedback, and to inform and support each other. And of course, he sought out advice and support from Emmanuel Bailly and Rosalie Rendu.

On my first visit to Paris I visited the sites of significance to the Society's history. It was extremely moving to know that I was walking the same streets as Ozanam, Rendu, Bailly, Le Taillandier, Devaux, Lamache, Lallier and Clave had all those years before.

On that trip I also went to London to spend some time with my cousin, and he took me to see *Les Miserables*. I'd grown up with the 'Les Mis' soundtrack, and despite having never actually read the book (it's on my list!), I was familiar with the story, but this was my first time actually seeing the musical

live. And it was a really interesting and moving experience, having just walked those Paris streets and immersed myself in that Vincentian history, because it is easy to see the parallels between the fictional story and our real one.

Victor Hugo's novel was partly set in the same period in which Frederic and the others were establishing the Society. Frederic and his confreres, like the fictional Marius and his fellow revolutionaries, were wealthy, educated young men witnessing the suffering born of the extreme poverty and disease on the streets of Paris and compelled to act; both groups had a desire to address, in their own ways, this social injustice.

And of course, there is that line we hear in *Les Mis* which I think also really captures the essence of what we do in the Society and how we go about our work: "To love another person is to see the face of God".

Now, Frederic et al may have ultimately been as unsuccessful as Victor Hugo's young revolutionaries had they not taken advice of those more knowledgeable than themselves. Marius, Enjolras and their friends realised too late that they had not brought the people of Paris along with them and so ended up alone at the barricades; the fledgling Society could likewise have faltered, and perished on the figurative barricades, had they not sought and followed the advice of Rosalie Rendu and others.

Over 50,000 members and staff are part of the Vinnies family in Australia. And I use the term 'family' on purpose – in Australia, we're not always great at acknowledging and celebrating that, but I can tell you that if you're ever overseas in one of the 130+ countries where the Society is present and you come into contact with other Vincentians, you will quickly realise that you are in fact part of a big, loving family. In every state and territory, Vinnies

is a respected name. Our work in grass roots communities is known and understood by most people. Each of you here today is part of our mission.

We are more than service providers. We live out Vincent's vision – a vision articulated, informed by and rooted in simple gospel values. We at Vinnies are a broad church. We come from many different backgrounds and walks of life. We've lived very different lives and have a wide range of views across some really important issues. But anyone who shares our vision for a dignified life for all is welcome in our services – as members, as volunteers and as staff.

Our commitment to a dignified life extends beyond our companions – to each other – to our fellow workers, volunteers and members. What you may not know is that around 28,000 people engaged with the Society are under 40. This includes Mini Vinnies, members of high school and college conferences, and volunteer members working in our shops and in other special works. This is a cause for optimism and celebration. There is much we can and should learn from our Gen Y and Gen Z colleagues, whether they be conference members, volunteers in our special works, employees or members of councils and committees.

An organisation can do lots of good work in the community, but if its commitment to its values and mission doesn't extend to the way people treat each other within the organisation, or the way its leaders behave, then young people will vote with their feet and leave, and find another organisation in which to spend their time and energy.

This can be particularly challenging in a volunteer environment, where codes of conduct and disciplinary policies may be less well developed,

understood or applied than in a standard workplace.

Our founders weren't perfect people. They were flawed people, who were learning; as 'Vincent' [a participant playing this role at the Founders Day celebration] told us earlier, he was an imperfect person.

It's good that he had some self-awareness around that, but it's a reminder that our founders – even those that actually are saints – were not necessarily completely saintly; that they were flawed and learning too. So, as it was for our founders, this is actually a journey that we're all on together, where we can learn about ourselves and learn from others, and it's one where younger people in particular can help us.

We are a church to many people. Every single one of us has got important work to do – whether it's working at the coalface one-to-one with some of the most disadvantaged people, or walking the halls of Parliament House in advocating for systemic change that can and does change the lives of thousands.

Through each small, everyday action, we are collectively capable of achieving much needed transformation in our community – our daily experiences with those doing it tough enable us to be effective and authentic advocates: to tell the government, the community and the church how Australians are living and struggling, which is the ultimate result of laws and policies that seek to divide, exclude and punish.

We must speak as actively as possible to those in positions of power about the importance of treating everyone with dignity and respect. **R**

Claire Victory is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. She is a Member of the Plenary Council.

Society's work embodies the spirit of Christmas

Vinnies has launched the nationwide Christmas Appeal, managed by the Society in NSW, at a time when many families experience increased stress. Heidi and Nikolas are the faces of Christmas Appeal 2021.*

‘You'd hear someone walk past and think 'are they going to do something to us or are we going to be ok?'

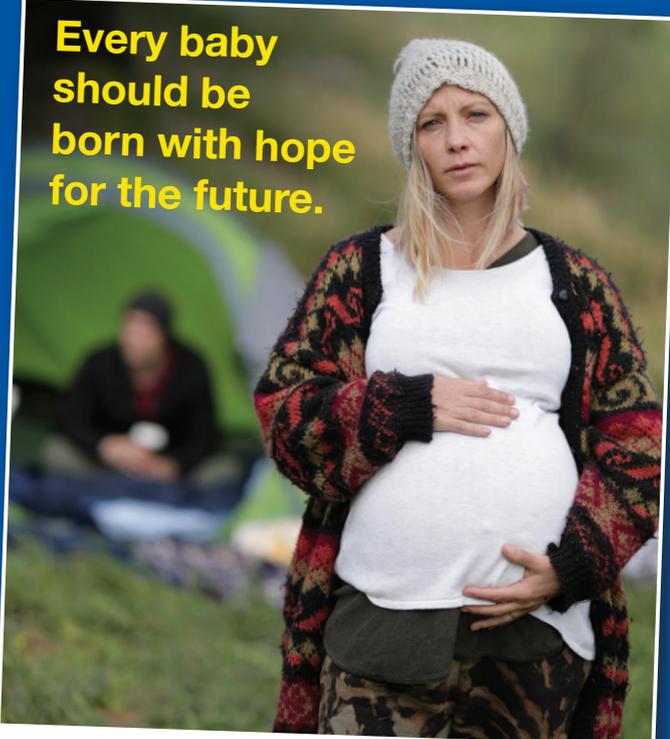
For Heidi and Nikolas, each day living while homeless was gripped with fear. Fending for themselves in a small tent, with only a dog named 'DJ' for companionship, the couple's circumstances were all the more dire because Heidi was halfway through her pregnancy.

They had both struggled with substance abuse, which spiraled to the point of homelessness. Nikolas reached out to Vinnies for assistance with food and pillows to add some fleeting comfort to their makeshift residence. Staring down the prospect of bringing a baby boy into the world, without the security of a place to call home, Heidi felt a despair only divine intervention could ease.

'We spent two weeks in the tent, [that] was the most that I'd ever prayed, just for some sort of movement in our lives,' recalls Heidi.

Experiencing the reality of homelessness faced by more than 116,000 Australians on any given night, the relief Heidi had hoped for came in the form of Ian and Sheila. As long-term Vinnies members experienced in supporting vulnerable people, Ian and Sheila acted on instinct to restore stability in Heidi and Nikolas' time of need.

'When the woman [Heidi] came out of the tent and we saw she was pregnant, I thought 'We're not leaving her here. We've got to do something'', says Ian.



Every baby should be born with hope for the future.

Your support can provide financial and emotional assistance to families spending Christmas in poverty.

DONATE NOW Please call 13 18 12, visit vinnies.org.au or scan the QR code.

CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2021
INFORMATION KIT

Vinnies Christmas Appeal
St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Managing to secure temporary accommodation in a motel for a few nights, follow by a short-term stay at a nearby caravan park, the trade-off for a roof over their heads saw the couple forced to surrender 'DJ'.

For Nikolas, the loss of man's best friend was a bitter pill to swallow.

'When he got picked up, he went straight to the back, past the shelf of the car, and he just stared at me the whole time as he drove off,' he says.

'He's the reason why we could fall asleep at night and know we were safe.'

Adjusting to a stable routine in the caravan park, which saw the couple begin the road to recovery, a fateful call from Ian and Sheila a few months later brought news that proved life changing. Thanks to the generosity of a Vincentian offering a vacant house in the area to a family in need, Heidi

Need for successful Christmas Appeal never greater

and Nikolas were able to welcome their baby boy into the world with the certainty of a home.

‘We couldn’t actually believe that we went from a tent to a three-bedroom house in only a few months,’ says Heidi.

Heidi, Nikolas and baby Matthew are currently doing well in their new home. Heidi has reconnected with her children from a previous partner, Nikolas has resumed part-time work with an eye towards something permanent, and DJ is back as well.

Ian and Sheila continue to keep in touch and provided furniture, donated by Vinnies, to give the house the feel of a real home.

Now living with stability of a place to call their own and remaining clean of illicit substances, the couple have also been able to reconnect with family members.

Heidi and Nikolas are determined to make the most of the assistance provided at the lowest point of their lives.

‘We’re very lucky, we couldn’t have done it without Ian and Sheila. There was no judgement and they respected us as people and not as drug addicts,’ says Heidi.

‘Through the help and support of our Vinnies family, we are so blessed to have the opportunity to work on our relationships with our own families. We want to thank everyone who has supported us moving forward. We feel so lucky.’ **R**

* This is a true story, names have been changed for privacy reasons.



Preparing Christmas gifts at Vinnies in Redfern, Sydney were Volunteer Taylor Morrell, Client Support Assistant Ladan Ghavamizadeh and Member Lorna Lynch.

The need for the annual Vinnies Christmas Appeal is more pressing than ever as COVID support payments are being wound back, leaving many families behind.

This was the view of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO, Jack de Groot when the appeal was launched in late October 2021.

‘With the ending of lockdowns, I wish I could say it’s going to be a hopeful Christmas for everyone this year,’ Mr de Groot said.

‘But the reality is it won’t be and the need to give generously to our Christmas Appeal is greater than ever because people doing it tough this year have additional pressures as a result of the extended pandemic-related lockdowns.

‘As we start to reopen, emergency COVID support payments have started being wound back. For people who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and have been relying on those payments, their immediate futures are looking dim. Employment opportunities are typically pretty slim at this time of year and the reaching of vaccine

thresholds has not simultaneously recreated all the jobs that were lost.

‘This alone is placing a great deal of strain on many families. Many more families than usual are heading into the festive season behind the eight ball...’

The Society’s NSW Vice President – Social Justice, Brooke Simmons, added, ‘Throughout the COVID pandemic, we’ve noticed an interesting thing about the COVID support payments. When JobSeeker was increased, raising more people above the poverty line, we saw fewer requests for help.

‘Now that COVID payments are being wound back, we are expecting a significant increase in calls for assistance. The fact that this is happening just before Christmas, when demand for our services typically goes up, means we are now facing a deluge.

‘Our members and services have worked throughout the pandemic to provide help to people who need it.’ **R**

The Vinnies Christmas Appeal can be supported [here](#).

Youth have always been 'notable drivers of innovation'



The Spirit of Youth Committee at a recent meeting.

BY WINA ZHU

What a year for Australians! Many of us thought we would be easing back to 'normal' life but this year still proves that life is full of surprises. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people across the world both positively and negatively. For the Society, although faced with disruption in our services, compassion has not faltered, and we have shown how adaptable and resilient we are to ensure we stay connected and support our communities at need.

'The Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions' - Part 1.6 of The Rule.

As we approach the end of 2021, I reflect on all the kindness, care and generosity of humans in spite of the challenges we may be facing individually. Despite the uncertainty, staff, members, and volunteers of the Society have all been crucial in pivoting the way we usually serve.

With their passion for our mission, the Society has strived to continue the connection to our companions

and together built innovative ways to stay connected and continue our work in our services and advocacy.

Youth and young people in our society have always been notable drivers of innovation, this year showing great resilience, adaptability and creativity when faced with vast limitations and restrictions on our services. They have offered different ways to stay engaged and given a hand-up to our companions. Youth have been an essential part in staying connected. In states that have been affected with long lockdowns, youth members and volunteers kept services running and inspired connection through new platforms such as podcasts, advocacy and engagement in social media with self-care snippets from youth representatives and continued conversations on social justice issues via virtual platforms.

Together we have risen up to some great challenges and have grown in solidarity in our One Society.

With their voice at the table they keep our Society effective in our mission, adding to the diversity of thought. I hope the spirit of 'youth' within us all continues to give us

courage to try new things, adapt quickly and continue growing to serve others.

I look forward to the year ahead to see the growth of our youth in leadership in the new State Youth Representatives and the Spirit of Youth Committee.

Young members keep the Society young. They see with new eyes and often look far ahead. The Society works constantly to form Youth Conferences and welcomes young members into all Conferences. Their experience in a community of faith and love and their exposure to poverty deepens their spirituality, spurs them to action and helps them to grow as human beings. The senior members assume the responsibility of assisting them along their path of training, respecting their personal choices and their aspiration of Vincentian service.

'Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.' - 1 Timothy 4:12 R

Wina Zhu is a youth representative for St Vincent de Paul Society.

The 'common good' is central for human dignity



PHOTO: ASHWIN VASWANI ON UNSPLASH

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society reiterated its commitment to Catholic Social Teaching principles – those Gospel values that uphold the dignity of every human being – on the 5th World Day of the Poor, marked on Sunday 14 November 2021.

National President Claire Victory said that as Vincentians we oppose individualism as we commit to the common good.

'We encourage the empowerment of people through participation at whatever level might be possible,' Ms Victory said.

'We stand with others who share these values and above all we defend the preferential option for people living with the structural causes of poverty and disadvantage.

'These principles guide us through economic, political, personal and

spiritual encounters. As Vincentians we travel closely with people in local communities right across Australia. We live and work in those communities and the people we help are literally our neighbours,' Ms Victory said.

This year Pope Francis issued a call for the world community to oppose the culture of indifference and injustice directed at people living with poverty. He said poverty is the result of selfishness and called on people to recognise the varied and excessive forms of social disorder that are generating ever new forms of poverty.

'There seems to be a growing notion that the poor are not only responsible for their condition, but that they represent an intolerable burden for an economic system focused on the interests of a few privileged groups,' Pope Francis said.

'A market that ignores ethical

principles, or picks and chooses from among them, creates inhumane conditions for people already in precarious situations. We are now seeing the creation of new traps of poverty and exclusion, set by unscrupulous economic and financial actors lacking in a humanitarian sense and in social responsibility.'

The Pope encourages us to engage in enduring, mutual sharing to restore lost dignity and ensure necessary social inclusion, actions he says will strengthen solidarity and lay the necessary foundations for achieving justice.

He noted that the poor have increased disproportionately as a result of the pandemic and called on all of us to find the most suitable means of combatting the virus at the global level without promoting partisan interests. **R**

Read the Pope's Message for the 5th World Day of the Poor [here](#).

Community sector calls for faster climate action

Ahead of the UN's 26th climate change conference in Glasgow in November this year a coalition of 100 community service organisations and charities, including St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, signed a historic [Community Sector Climate Declaration](#) calling on the Federal Government to commit to stronger emission reduction targets and fair and inclusive policies to cut climate pollution.

The coalition, organised by the Australian Council of Social Service, agreed that 2050 is too late to protect people from more dangerous climate change.

ACOSS CEO Dr Cassandra Goldie says the community sector was compelled to speak out because rapidly worsening climate change is hurting people with the least in our communities hardest. Without fair, fast and inclusive action on climate change, poverty and inequality will grow.

'Community organisations are increasingly on the frontline of helping communities hit hard by the impacts of more intense and frequent bushfires, drought, floods, storms, and heatwaves, made worse by climate change.

'We have seen firsthand the increasing devastation of climate change on communities – affecting their mental and physical health, homes, jobs, general quality of life and sadly loss of life.

'People with the least are impacted by climate change first, worse, and longest. This is made even worse by a slow or poorly managed transition because people who are financially or socially disadvantaged have to fewer resources to cope, adapt and recover.'

St Vincent de Paul Society explained its reasons for joining the declaration:



Retail volunteers Jeannette, Pat, Diana, Leonela and Sandra in the shop in Moruya, south coast NSW... Vinnies people are seeing the impact of climate change on community members already struggling to survive.

'Climate change does not discriminate but some in our society will feel its impacts more. If we act now, we can avoid the worst injustices of climate change and other ecological crises and take hold of the opportunity to create more sustainable and equitable communities in which everyone can enjoy the quality of life many people today have been privileged to experience.'

St Vincent de Paul staff and volunteers have lent their support to a push for a stronger commitment from the Federal Government to reduce emissions, with the retail team from the Moruya shop featuring in coverage by *The Canberra Times*.

The Society's Canberra Director Community Engagement, Erin MacArthur said low-income households suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change.

'Poor quality housing, inefficient heating, lack of cooling, and a reduced ability to pay high

energy bills results in low-income households enduring freezing winters and unbearable heat in summer,' Ms MacArthur said.

'Consequently, these already vulnerable households suffer from increased illness, greater bill stress, increased sick days from work and school and increased mental distress.'

Ms MacArthur added that Vinnies staff and volunteers have witnessed the effects of climate change in Canberra, with hotter summers and colder winters locking low-income households into cycles of debt with their energy providers, as residents attempt to heat and cool their homes.

'It's not just vulnerable tenants who are impacted, but the community and our staff as well,' she said.

ACOSS's CEO, Dr Cassandra Goldie said the community sector was compelled to speak out because without fast and inclusive action on climate change, poverty and inequality will grow. **R**

Vinnies and Salvos join forces on climate change

Prevention and early intervention, and people on low incomes must be a priority when developing the National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy according to the National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia and The Salvation Army.

In a joint submission to the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's Taskforce the two national organisations said it will take national leadership and cooperation across all jurisdictions to address the mounting risks posed by climate change and to support communities to respond, especially the people who have the least means to build resilience and adapt.

The submission cites research and experiences of the two organisations, particularly during bushfires and drought crises. National Council President of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Claire

Victory said the increased risk of natural disasters and extreme weather conditions is associated with a rise in domestic and family violence, mortality, severe financial hardship, social isolation, poor physical and mental health and homelessness.

'The Australian Government's response to climate change must provide for additional services including prevention and early intervention approaches such as improving home energy efficiency ratings for people vulnerable to heat stress, assisting vulnerable communities to move out of disaster-prone areas, and training more mental health professionals,' Ms Victory said.

'It should also provide for a post-disaster response including access to financial counselling services and specialised mental health support.

'Our combined drought funding delivery experience showed us that people continued to experience

significant levels of hardship, even after receiving assistance through payments of up to \$3000 and access to other support services.

'This leads to increased and sometimes ongoing demand for costly crisis response services, such as emergency relief, homelessness and family violence support. Climate change is already limiting access to safe, affordable housing options, especially for First Nations people and people who do not have the resources to simply relocate.

'All governments must urgently increase the stock of social and affordable housing, establish a 'buy-back fund' for at-risk properties, increase access to Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) assessments for homeowners and landlords, and ensure that new housing developments are not built in areas of high risk,' Ms Victory said. **R**

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

Government's 'net zero' plan is hot air for low-income Australians

BY ROSE BEYNON

The last 30 years have seen Australia's policy position on climate change oscillate wildly, thanks to inconsistency from both governing parties.

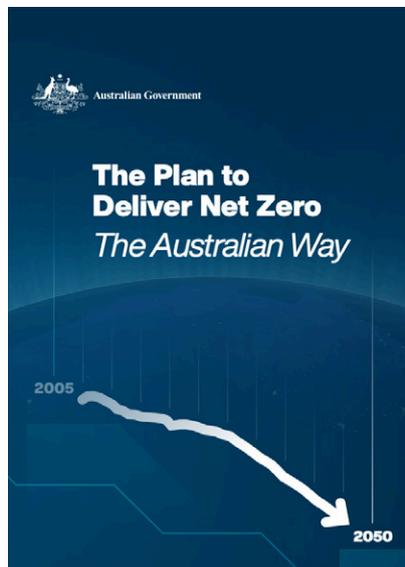
As amazing as it now seems, we established the world's first government agency dedicated to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (the Australian Greenhouse Office) in 1998 and the world's first emissions trading scheme (in NSW, 2003). Then we disbanded, recreated and disbanded it again. A Carbon Price Mechanism was enacted by PM Gillard in 2012 and repealed by PM Abbott in 2014.¹

Climate change policy has featured significantly in political mandates in the lead up to several federal elections and attributed, in part, to the downfall of federal leaders such as Turnbull (in 2009) and Rudd (in 2010) who both paid heavy prices while the passage of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill failed.

Gillard says her decision not to argue against a fixed carbon price emissions trading scheme being labelled a 'tax' damaged her politically.^{2, 3}

Rudd's commitment to transitioning from a fixed price for carbon to a full emission trading scheme in 2014 never came to fruition, as the newly elected Abbott government set about dismantling four climate change programs and making significant governance changes. These included abolishing the Climate Commission and Climate Change Authority and ceasing Climate Energy Finance Corporation investments.

In 2016, around 350 positions were lost from the CSIRO, largely from the Climate Research Division.



The brochure containing the plan the Prime Minister took to the COP-26 conference in Glasgow.

Turnbull's signature energy policy, the National Energy Guarantee, sounded his death knell with internal party disagreements over the proposed emissions reduction target for the electricity sector resulting in legislation being tabled and then withdrawn. The demise of his prime ministership followed shortly thereafter.⁴

A *chronology of Australian climate change policy to 2015*, accessible on the Australian Parliament House website⁵ summarises almost 165 climate change actions taken by Government since the early 1970s. It makes for heavy reading.

So, it is no wonder that Australia's [Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan](#), spruiked as the roadmap to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, has been less than warmly received (no pun intended) by most analysts outside government. Responses have ranged from cynicism to criticism, largely for lacking credible detail.

Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan

Under the Australian Government's *Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan*, net zero emissions will be reached by 'taking advantage of new economic opportunities while continuing to serve Australia's traditional markets'. Five principles are cited – technology not taxes, which has fast become a political slogan, expand choices not mandates, drive down the cost of new technologies, keep energy prices down with affordable and reliable power, and be accountable for progress.⁶

The Plan states that:

- emissions are already 20 percent lower than 2005 levels
- the Technology Investment Roadmap will reduce emissions by a further 40 percent
- shifts in demand for Australian exports and global technology developments will reduce emissions by a further 15 per cent
- high-integrity offsets (such as storing carbon in soils and vegetation and working with Indo Pacific neighbours) will reduce emissions by a further 10 per cent, and
- investing in future new and emerging technologies will reduce emissions by a further 15 per cent.

Australia will keep clean hydrogen under \$2.00 per kilogram, solar costs to under \$15 per MWh, energy storage to under \$100 per MWh, low emissions steel to under \$700 per tonne and aluminium to under \$2200 per tonne, carbon capture and storage to under \$20 per tonne of carbon dioxide and soil carbon measurement to \$3.00 per hectare per year.⁷

Australia's Long-term Emissions Reduction Plan builds on other Australian Government strategies including:

- the [Technology Investment Roadmap](#)
- the [National Hydrogen Strategy](#)
- the [Future Fuels and Vehicles Strategy](#)
- the [Modern Manufacturing Strategy](#)
- the [Critical Minerals Strategy](#), and
- the [Global Resources Strategy](#).

What the critics think

Former PM Turnbull calls the carbon capture and storage pillar – which the Government is relying on to cut emissions in manufacturing and mining – a ‘con’, a proven failure that is being pushed by the fossil fuel sector as a way to defer action.⁸

ACOSS also believes the Government should not be investing in costly and polluting technology like carbon capture and storage and locking communities into jobs where there is a declining demand for fossil fuels.⁹

The Grattan Institute notes that adding carbon capture and storage to a manufacturing or mining process will be costly.¹⁰

The Australia Institute is running a [Morrison's Net Zero Fraud campaign](#) because it claims the Government is planning to double coal exports, open vast new gas fields and prop up coal-burning power stations while missing out on huge economic opportunities by not driving the clean energy transition.¹¹

The Grattan Institute's latest report, [Towards net zero: A practical plan for Australia's governments](#), stresses the importance of Australia acting now and of governments working together with industries, markets, policies and technologies. The Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan is acknowledged as an important step that builds on the Government's Technology Investment Roadmap but the Grattan Institute

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considers the approach to net zero emissions must be about more than technology, especially that which is yet to be developed.

Momentum can be built in the transport, industrial, agriculture, and electricity sectors through sector-specific policies with actions that do not have to wait for technology development and do not require new carbon prices or new taxes. They include:

- a cap on vehicle emissions
- bigger roles for the Emissions Reduction Fund (through which the Federal Government has been paying for reductions under contracts), the Safeguard Mechanism (whereby safeguard facilities must keep emissions below their baseline and satisfy reporting requirements), and energy efficiency obligations
- giving priority to research and development into emissions-reducing technologies and their supply chains
- more investment in the electricity grid, and
- better integration of state renewable electricity schemes.¹²

The Grattan Institute calls for funding into research and development, to drive down the costs of technologies such as hydrogen electrolyzers and fuel cells. And some technology needs to be brought forward quickly as outlined in the Government's Technology Investment Roadmap, including cement manufacturing, cattle feed supplements and deep storage to support a high-renewables electricity grid.¹³

Climate change debate ignores the people, especially those on low incomes

For too long the climate change debate has ignored the many people likely to be adversely



impacted by government inactivity. This is because the debate has been monopolised by political parties trying to 'walk the fine line' between the electorate and the 'big end' of town, notably the fossil fuel and agricultural industries.

The Society certainly does not dismiss the concerns of communities, especially in vulnerable regional areas, about the importance of industry and jobs, but the reality is that the voices of individuals, especially on low incomes, have been lost in the debate.

The Society shares the concerns raised by Catholic Social Services Australia that low-income families should take little comfort from the Government's *Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan*.¹⁴ This document does not address how Government intends to protect disadvantaged families and communities who will be left behind if it is left up to 'the

market' to provide all the answers. History shows that 'the market' has little room for the disadvantaged. No provision has been made for implementing large-scale energy efficiency programs for social housing or rental stock that would drive down energy prices and benefit the environment.

As ACOSS notes, people with the least are impacted by climate change first, worst, and longest. This situation will be worsened further by a slow or poorly managed transition (towards net zero emissions) because people who are experiencing disadvantage have fewer resources to cope, adapt and recover.¹⁵

This is why the Society continues to advocate strongly on behalf of low-income households who currently expend a disproportionate amount of their income on utility bills, especially electricity and gas. On any

given year the Society responds to around 450,000 requests for Emergency Relief assistance by distributing around \$32 million, a significant portion of which goes to covering these bills.

Energy costs are a disproportionate burden for people on low income

Research shows that for people living below the poverty line, living costs, particularly associated with energy use, impose a disproportionate burden.¹⁶ In 2018, energy costs were estimated to account for 6.4 per cent of income for Australia's poorest households, compared with just 1.5 per cent for high income households. The main income source for roughly 65 per cent of these households is social security such as pensions, and for another 20 per cent it is from (low) wages and salaries.¹⁷

The burden of high energy costs on Australia's financially disadvantaged has worsened in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Australian Energy Regulator (2020), from the end of March 2020 to 19 October 2020:

- Total household electricity 90-day debt grew 14 per cent to \$15 million, with average debt owed increasing 17 per cent to more than \$1,100.
- Total debt for households on hardship programs grew nearly 9 per cent to \$114 million, with average debt increasing 17 per cent to \$1,390.

Higher energy costs among Australia's financially disadvantaged reflects in part greater energy use. This stems from low energy efficient housing that requires greater consumption to maintain a modicum of comfort. In Australia the average energy efficiency rating of existing homes is only 1.7

stars compared with an average of 6.1 stars for new homes and households with low energy efficiency are mostly occupied by low-income populations.¹⁸

Vinnies' Tariff-Tracking Project

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria is responsible for the Vinnies' Tariff-Tracking project. Each year, national and state-specific energy reports are developed that track and document changes to domestic energy prices and analyse market developments.

The aim is to inform the broader community about the various energy tariffs available and potential savings, how these tariffs are changing and how they impact on households' energy bills and energy affordability more broadly. Improved community awareness and understanding should result in a fairer and more transparent regulatory framework, particularly with respect to price information and disclosure, and promote a competitive retail market. The reports track and monitor the impact of price and tariff changes on household bills, and the affordability of this essential service.

Energy reports and maps showing key electricity, gas and solar bills data are accessible at: vinnies.org.au/energy.

National Low-Income Energy Productivity Program

In 2020, the Society signed on to the [Joint Proposal for Economic Stimulus Healthy & Affordable Homes: National Low-Income Energy Productivity Program \(NLEPP, June 2020\)](#).¹⁹ The NLEPP is supported by more than 50 organisations whose purpose is to reduce the burden of high energy costs among Australia's low income households by implementing a

range of renewable energy and energy efficiency programs.

The aim is to help communities recover and build back stronger by creating healthy and affordable homes and improving the energy productivity of low-income existing homes. NLEPP has four target areas: Social housing, Low-income home owners, Inefficient rental properties and Low-income appliance replacement offer.

Deloitte estimates that delivering energy efficiency specifically to low-income households through the NLEPP would deliver between \$3.4 billion (low) and \$4.9 billion (high) in GDP between 2021 and 2025. The NLEPP's specific targeting of financially disadvantaged households is also projected to deliver a 17 per cent higher economic impact than an equivalent program delivered across a broader base.

These positive impacts are sustained long-term as improved energy efficiency delivers ongoing productivity improvements for the Australian economy. The additional GDP and employment gains complement other effects of the NLEPP program including reduced 'energy bill stress' and reduced costs to the public sector in managing health issues arising from poorly heated or cooled housing.²⁰

Australian Infrastructure Plan 2021

In response to the Australian Infrastructure Audit conducted in 2019, the Society prepared a [submission](#) calling for increased social and affordable housing and maintenance and upgrade programs aimed at improving energy efficiency in existing and new social and community housing stock.

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For the first time, Infrastructure Australia 2021 has included social and affordable rental housing, and associated energy issues, as part of social infrastructure. The Infrastructure Plan notes that the quality, supply and design of social and affordable housing are inadequate across the country and more must be done to drive investment, improve the standard of dwellings, address the growing shortfall and provide a greater range of housing types.²¹

Recommendations for new social housing include improving energy efficiency by increasing performance standards and updating the National Construction Code in line with the Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings; and creating and implementing a work program for updating energy performance

standards in social housing that streamlines approval processes and includes regular reviews.²² While these recommendations have been made, no additional funding commitments have been announced to date.

Finally, promotion of the Government's *Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan* has not been helped by the fact that no new policies or legislation have been announced to support the 'cornerstone' of the Plan, the Technology Investment Roadmap. And while the costings that underpin the Plan have now been released by Government, they have been criticised for only achieving an 85 per cent reduction in emissions based on 2005 levels, with the remaining 15 per cent to be achieved through technology that does not, as yet, exist.²³

Labor, the Greens and environmental groups have all called for more information.

The Society also looks forward to seeing further commitment, in the form of policies, legislation and funding, to help transition Australia towards net zero emissions by 2050 while at the same time addressing the energy needs and reducing costs for low-income households.

No doubt much will be forthcoming from the major political parties on the closely linked subjects of climate and energy supply in the months leading up to the 2022 federal election. **R**

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

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New authority must develop national housing strategy

Claire Victory, National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia said only a national housing strategy developed by a new, independent authority will begin to address the chronic and growing shortage of affordable housing in Australia.

The National Council's submission to the Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue's *Inquiry into housing affordability and supply* lists 10 recommendations, including measures to address funding gaps for community housing providers.

'The size of the funding gap depends on a number of issues, including whether community housing providers already own land that can be assigned to new housing,' Ms Victory said.

'The Society currently holds land in NSW and South Australia but requires funding to progress the development of new dwellings.

'State and territory governments have recently handed down budgets with variable commitments to increase social, community and affordable housing and the Commonwealth, at the very least, should be matching the funding.

'The Society's housing profile includes short-term crisis accommodation, transitional housing, medium to longer-term community housing, accessible housing for people living with disability and specialist homelessness services.

'Every day we see evidence that access to safe and affordable housing leads to increased individual and community wellbeing, as well as better outcomes in health, education and employment, and economic and social participation.

'And if the evidence isn't clear enough, for the first time,

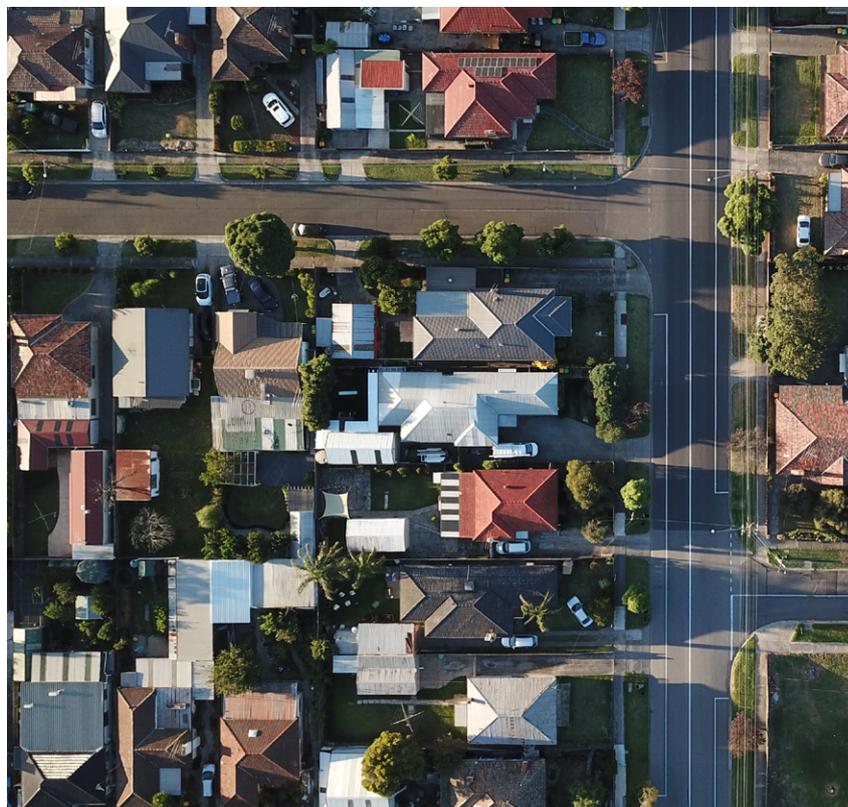


PHOTO: TOM RUMBLE ON UNSPLASH

Australia's Infrastructure Plan 2021 includes social housing and notes that housing quality, supply and design are inadequate across the country.'

In its submission the National Council calls for:

- A National Housing Strategy developed with key stakeholders and endorsed by all jurisdictions
- A review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance to ensure it is appropriately targeted and funded
- Alternatives to the National Rental Affordability Scheme as it gradually winds up to full closure in 2026
- All governments to commit to recommendations in Australia's Infrastructure Plan 2021 concerning social and affordable housing
- Government funding incentives

and targeted assistance to encourage community housing provider investment in new community and affordable housing

- National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation to extend the term of its loans (to 25 years), limit General Service Agreements to the project being funded and reduce fees and charges.
- A reform agenda for the National Regulatory System for Community Housing to address the findings contained in its Review Report and done in consultation with key stakeholders, especially Indigenous Community Housing Providers.

Vinnies has invited members of the committee to visit one of the Society's many community housing projects. A copy of the submission is available [here](#). **R**

Australia's housing crisis is 'intergenerational theft'

Australia's housing crisis should properly be known as 'intergenerational theft', according to Liberal MP Jason Falinski, the Chair of the current parliamentary inquiry into housing affordability and supply, a sentiment endorsed by the National President of the St Vincent de Paul, Claire Victory.

Picking up on comments by housing industry experts on ABC television's *Four Corners* program 'Going, Going, Gone: What's driving Australia's property frenzy' in November 2021, Ms Victory repeated the National Council's call for urgent action on housing inequality.

Ms Victory said the program provided further evidence of Australia's unprecedented housing crisis and reflected many of the issues raised by the Society in its recent [submission](#) to the [parliamentary inquiry](#) into housing in Australia.

'We heard that across Australia house prices have surged by 20 per cent in the last year and 550 per cent since the early nineties,' Ms Victory said.

'This represents the strongest growth in 31 years, dramatically increasing the gap between those who have property and those who don't. Home ownership among younger adults is lower now than it was in the 1950s. A home of their own is no longer a guaranteed asset for young people who work hard and save a deposit.'

Ms Victory called the housing market 'a perfect storm of high demand, low supply, low interest rates, tax incentives for investors and accessible loans due to the de-regulation of the finance sector.'

The result has been 'a buying frenzy, risky and irrational



behaviour and soaring house prices.... Adding to the problem is the migration during COVID-19 of cashed up folk from the major cities to the regions in pursuit of a mortgage-free life with the benefits of country living, including working from home. They are paying unprecedented prices, putting home ownership beyond the reach of locals.'

She added, 'Low-income earners have historically retreated from metropolitan areas to regional towns where housing was cheaper. This safety net is fast disappearing. As more people are priced out of the market, pressure increases on the rental market.'

'As interest rates rise, we expect further demand for our services as people try to meet growing mortgages.'

The solution to the problem includes increasing housing supply, Ms Victory said, which is why the Society calls on state and territory governments to continue their funding commitments towards expanding housing options for people

on low incomes and for the Federal Government to match that funding.

'In the lead up to the upcoming election, housing affordability and accessibility must be a policy priority. All governments and key stakeholders should commit to a National Housing Strategy, with an independent authority established to develop, monitor and report on the Strategy and with the Housing Minister into Cabinet.'

Ms Victory noted that Jason Falinski MP acknowledged Australia has some of the least affordable housing in the world.

When the inquiry was announced Mr Falinski said, 'As data provided by the Reserve Bank of Australia, the Treasury and the Australian Bureau of Statistic shows, home ownership, one of the building blocks of Australian society, has been falling for the last 30 years. In my view, this represents an urgent moral call for action by governments of all levels to restore the Australian dream for this generation and the ones that follow.' **R**

The 'we' of community and Church includes migrants and refugees

On 26 September 2021, this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the National Council of St Vincent de Paul celebrated the significant contribution of migrants and refugees to the Australian community, calling on the Federal Government to step up efforts to ease the suffering of many, especially in the wake of the Afghanistan Crisis, which has starkly exposed the true brutality of indefinite temporary visas.

National President, Claire Victory noted that [Pope Francis](#) says 'we are all in the same boat and called to work together, so that there will be no more walls that separate us, no longer 'others', but only a single 'we', encompassing all of humanity'.

'The security situation in Afghanistan demands that we must give permanent protection to 4,300 Afghans already here but still on temporary visas, and we must give at least 20,000 additional places to Afghan refugees including family members of all Afghans already here,' Ms Victory said.

'Afghans still on temporary visas after 10 years remain in indefinite limbo, or more accurately purgatory, with no permanent home and no chance to re-unite with their family.

'Beyond the Afghan crisis, the National Council continues its call for policy changes that would allow a more compassionate welcome for asylum seekers and new migrants more generally, including the rejection of legislative change that will force new migrants to wait four years to access critical social services payments.

'Supporting people, as they fight an intrinsically unfair process, with many left destitute because they are unable to access Government benefits, has been one of the



PHOTO: FATEME SHAHABI ON UNSPLASH

toughest challenges for Vinnies and other refugee support organisations in the last five years.

'Over 20,000 refugees are still on temporary visas, unable to bring their families here and another 10,000 people are still struggling through a refugee application process, condemned as unfair by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

'The problems facing refugees on temporary visas for nearly a decade have become more acute recently. As their visas expire, they must struggle through the same, unfair application process a second time, compounding their insecurity and stress,' Ms Victory said.

The National Council continues its advocacy through a number of campaigns, including Christians United for Afghanistan – an unprecedented coalition of Christian organisations encompassing Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Pentecostals and the Uniting Church.

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office produced a [resource kit](#) to help parishes and other church communities celebrate World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

Tim McKenna, Chair Vincentian Refugee Network, delivered this [speech](#) to the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn. **R**

Festival Mass hears plea for more refugee compassion

St Vincent de Paul is working with like-minded organisations to raise awareness about Australia's refugee and asylum seeker policy in order to make legislative change. Recently, Society members heard from Queensland's [Vincentian Refugee Network](#) representative Rebecca Lim and [Catholics for Refugees'](#) Michael Hollewand at a Festival Mass for Queensland's Rosalie Regional Council conferences,

held at Sacred Heart church in Rosalie in Brisbane.

This year, Catholics For Refugees embraced an initiative by the Sisters of St Joseph which called for *150 Days of Action for Refugees*. The initiative ran from May until September 2021, concluding on Refugee and Migrant Sunday on 26 September with an online *Lamentation and Commitment* meeting that was recorded and sent to all of Australia's Federal politicians.

The key focus of the campaign was a call to political leaders with three demands for policy change:

1. To provide income support and a financial safety net for all people seeking asylum in Australia.
2. To end temporary protection visas and create a clear pathway to permanent residency.
3. To ensure access to family reunion for refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia.



Dr Michael Hollewand, Catholics for Refugees, Address to SVdP Festival Mass, Sacred Heart, Rosalie, Qld, 30 October 2021:

Over the last two years, I have been involved in my local parish project supporting refugees. Through that, I came to know Rebecca Lim. It was Rebecca who introduced me to a new movement in Australia called Catholics for Refugees.

To help explain why Catholic For Refugees is important, Rebecca and I will share some of the details of Australian refugee policy and its impacts.

Rebecca is a long-serving refugee advocate. She has worked for many years as a migration agent and co-founded the *Brisbane On-Arrival*

Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Group. She is also member of the Vincentian Refugee Network and represents Queensland on the national committee.

So, let's start with the global picture.

The [UNHCR](#) estimates that today over 80 million people are forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or serious public disorder. That is more than three times the entire Australian population.

Every human being has a fundamental right to seek asylum from conflict, persecution, violence and violations of human rights. Under international law, to do so is no crime.

Now, at one level, Australia plays a positive role in humanitarian aid. 13,750 places are usually allocated per year to refugees and others with humanitarian needs.

Australia's contribution was ranked by the [Refugee Council of Australia](#) at:

- 14th in the world in terms of the number of refugees resettled
- 20th on a per capita basis
- but only 60th relative to national GDP.

Today, it is not the numbers I want to focus on. Instead, I want to discuss *how* we treat refugees in Australia.

For many years, Australia had a good international reputation for helping refugees. This is hardly surprising. After all, over the last 100 to 150 years migration has helped build this nation – and many migrants were refugees who have gone on to make important contributions to the community.

But about 20 years ago, Australia's policies towards refugees began to change – creating the legacy issue we have today. In 2001, in response to public concerns about the large numbers of refugees attempting to reach Australia by boat, the Howard government struck agreements with the governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea to set up detention facilities offshore, where refugees could be held and processed without coming to Australia.

Around 2012, when boat arrivals picked up again, the Rudd government strengthened the policy, so that any refugee who arrived in Australia without a visa, so-called 'illegally', would never be allowed to settle in Australia permanently. The policies are too complex, confusing and punitive to be able to provide a detailed analysis here. Reliable information is available from the [Refugee Council of Australia](#) and the [Kaldor Centre, University of NSW](#).

Visa conditions and Federal government support varies for people with refugee or asylum seeker status, according to the date and mode of their arrival. People who arrive by air are treated differently from people who arrive by sea who are subject to mandatory immigration detention.

People who arrived by sea between 13 August 2012 and 1 January 2014, and who were not forcibly transferred to offshore processing and detention in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, are referred to as the *Legacy Caseload*. They are treated differently from people who arrived before these dates. They have faced many challenges and have had to wait years to have their asylum claims processed under a “fast-track” assessment. The protracted periods of uncertainty have impacted negatively on the *Legacy Caseload* group’s physical and mental health.

Fast-track applicants don’t have the opportunity to have their cases reviewed before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal which has important fairness safeguards. If they are granted refugee status, they will be on a three-year temporary protection visa (TPV) or a five-year Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV). Temporary visas do not provide certainty, stability, the opportunity to rebuild your life or family reunion.

The TPV was first introduced in Australia by the Howard Government in October 1999 and abolished by the Rudd Government in August 2008. The Abbott Government reintroduced TPVs in December 2014.

People who were medivac’d to Australia from regional processing centres in Nauru and PNG for medical treatment are also treated differently from the groups above. While some people have been resettled in the USA from Australia, more than 80 men remain in locked detention centres across Australia.

There are other people, including family groups in Community Detention or on Bridging Visas with work rights, but no Federal Government income or housing support. Many people with the right to work cannot do so because of physical and/or mental trauma, or because they do not have the skills – including English language – to work in Australia.

This creates a huge demand for support on charities and other community groups. Vinnies makes an important contribution to meeting this humanitarian need across Australia caring for the *Legacy Caseload*.

When challenged on humanitarian grounds, the government responds by saying that this treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum is justified because it deters future people seeking asylum and the people smugglers that help them make the perilous journey.

So, as a nation we justify the inhumane treatment of one group of people (the refugees and people seeking asylum that have already arrived) on the grounds that it will deter another group.

You will not be surprised to learn that Australia’s policy is widely condemned by the international community. For example, at the latest UN five-year periodic review of Australia’s practices towards refugees, 45 member nations made submissions calling out Australia’s practices as contravening human rights and requiring reform or improvement.

In late 2019, a group of Catholic Leaders went on a fact-finding mission to Papua New Guinea to see first-hand the conditions under which refugees were held and to speak to local stakeholders. The group included Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen – the Bishop of Parramatta and the Chair of

the Australia Catholics Bishops Conference Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service. Bishop Long is himself a refugee, having fled by boat from Vietnam in 1979.

Following this visit, the group realised that while Catholics are doing a lot to support and advocate for refugees, there is no overall focus or coordination of efforts as a wider Catholic community.

Bishop Vincent Long said ... *“We have often walked in isolation from each other and the wider community. Catholics for Refugees is, we hope and pray, a way to bring everyone from across Australia to a place where we can keep each other informed. We can build on our shared experiences and together create a more compassionate and caring Australia for those who ‘have come from across the sea’ looking for protect and freedom.”*

So, the visit to PNG led to the creation of the Catholics for Refugees movement.

The basic idea is that no matter where you are in the church, practising or non-practising, whether you are part of a refugee support or advocacy organisation (such as the Vincentian Refugee network), a member of a Parish Social Justice committee, a senior student at high school or part of a religious order advocating for refugees, Catholics For Refugees is a movement, a network that allows us all to come together and support each in other in striving to help Australia reform how we treat refugees.

An important part of the focus of Catholics For Refugees is to advocate for change in government policy. Because without fundamental change, we cannot achieve a just and sustainable situation. **R**

Dr Michael Hollewand is a member of the Parish of Saints Peter and Paul in Bulimba, Queensland and co-ordinates the Queensland [Catholics for Refugees](#) group.

Catholic bishops endorse Uluru Statement from the Heart

Australia's Catholic bishops, on the recommendation of their key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisers, have endorsed the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference made the decision as it gathered online for its biannual meeting in November 2021.

The bishops' consideration was informed by the words of St John Paul II, who, in a visit to Alice Springs in 1986, said to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: 'Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear... Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost.'

Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE, chair of the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, said the Bishops Conference had been awaiting guidance on the Statement from the Heart.

'We are very grateful for the reflections of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council in helping shape our thinking on this important subject,' Bishop Macbeth-Green said.

'That Council recently endorsed the Statement from the Heart, and we have listened carefully to their reasons for doing so. We also heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Plenary Council at our recent assembly of their desire for the Church in Australia to follow NATSICC's lead.'

The Plenary Council's agenda called for the Church to 'honour and acknowledge the continuing deep spiritual relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit



ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation'.

Among the key recommendations of the Uluru Statement are the establishment of a First Nations 'Voice' to the Australian Parliament and a commission to supervise a process of 'truth-telling' between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

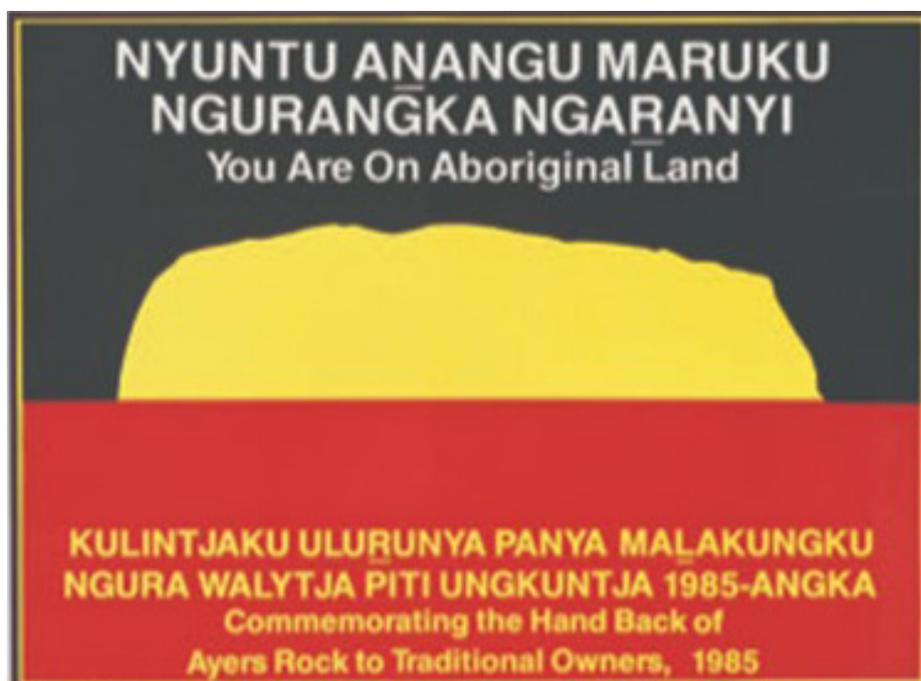
Bishop Macbeth-Green said the bishops acknowledged there remain diverse views within Indigenous communities on the Uluru Statement, but the principles of reconciliation and walking together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fit well in the Catholic understanding.

'Sadly, we within the Church have not always lived up to our Gospel calling in our engagement with our Indigenous brother and sisters,' he said.

'The endorsement of the Uluru Statement is another step in our journey of addressing those shortcomings, but it will be an ongoing journey with First Peoples.

'Part of that will see us listening to the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, rather than a tendency to talk about them. That is the model we seek to emulate with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, and that has brought us to this point.' **R**

We are on Aboriginal Land...



Some 36 years ago, on 26 October 1985, the title deeds for Uluru-KataTjuta – Australia’s greatest icon – were handed over to the Traditional Owners (TOs) by the Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen. The agreement was to lease the park back to the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service for 99 years, with a board of management featuring a majority of Anangu (Aboriginal) members.

The park continues to be managed jointly but is rarely out of the news. Despite some (predominantly white) opposition, climbing ‘Ayers Rock’, named in 1873 after Sir Henry Ayers, the Chief Secretary of South Australia, was ended in October 2019.

The handover was immortalised in a photo published widely and held in the archives (and displayed on the [website](#)) of the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. Along with the TOs and Sir Ninian were two Labor Ministers, Clyde Holding and Barry Cohen. Ten years earlier an icon of their own, Gough Whitlam, had participated in another memorable photo shoot, pouring sand into the hands of Vincent Lingiari to mark the return of traditional lands in the Northern Territory to the Gurindji people.

Dominating the Uluru photo was a striking piece of poster art, signed by the TOs and presented to the Governor-General to mark the occasion. The original poster, which also resides in the Museum, was designed by Chips Mackinolty, a poster artist who had achieved a reputation with silk-screened works done at The University of Sydney’s Tin Sheds.

Mackinolty, who still lives in the NT, recalls how the Uluru-KataTjuta handover poster was created in, of all places, distant Wollongong, where he was visiting with one of the TOs, the late Brossy Brumby, who finalised the words in language... *Nyuntu Anangu maruku ngurangka ngaranyi*, ‘You are on Aboriginal land’.

Community adviser Ross Johnston came up with the idea of producing limited edition signed prints commemorating the handback, along with T-shirts and explanatory brochures.

‘It would make a few bob for the community, as well as providing an enduring record of the historic event,’ Mackinolty says. **R**

Uluru still at the centre of Indigenous rights debate



Robin Osborne looks at Uluru's symbolic role at the heart of the Indigenous rights movement.

A year ago the Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt expressed the hope of seeing legislation to create an Indigenous voice to government pass Federal Parliament before the next election. As time ticks on, with an election expected in the first half of 2022, this seems increasingly unlikely.

Even less likely is his government's support for enshrining a First Nations Voice to Parliament in the constitution. Unlike a 'voice to government', this would require a constitutional referendum yet it was a key demand in the 2017 [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) formulated by delegates to the First Nations National Constitutional Convention, 'coming together from all points of the southern sky', held near Uluru in Central Australia.

On 21 April 2021 the National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia provided a

submission in response to the Indigenous voice co-design interim report to the Australian Government, noting, 'The approach outlined by the From the Heart campaign will give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a say on the policies and laws that impact their lives'.

The Society's submission supports the From the Heart campaign with respect to the interim co-design proposal, namely:

- The National Voice must be representative of the diverse population and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- The National Voice must speak to the Commonwealth Parliament and Government on policy and legislation.
- The National Voice must not be a third chamber of Parliament
- The National Voice must not deliver programs or services
- The National Voice must act and operate independently from Parliament and Government

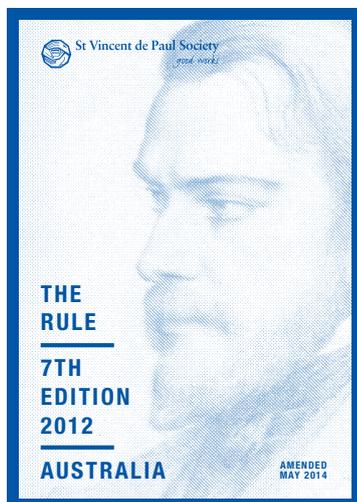
The Society:

- calls on the Australian Government to honour its election commitment to hold a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled
- supports the passage of enabling legislation for the Voice to be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament, and
- supports a membership model for the National Voice that ensures previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance of being selected as established leadership figures.

View full submission [here](#).

The path to progress may be painfully slow but that mighty rock in Australia's heartland continues to symbolise the changes that must be made to enable First Nations people to properly participate in the country's decision making processes. **R**

Review of *The Rule Part III* – date for input extended



The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council is undertaking a review of *The Rule Part III* – the first since 2012. The National Council would like to hear from members about what does or does not work for them in *The Rule* as it is currently drafted.

A detailed discussion paper is available on the National Council's website for your consideration at [this link](#).

It has been decided to extend the consultation period of September-December 2021 until the end of January 2022.

Please note that there will be further consultation on any changes to *The Rule* that the National Council proposes once the review has been undertaken.

Your comments and suggestions can be forwarded to karen.hutchinson@svdp.org.au **R**

Help us rate *The Record*

The quarterly magazine of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia is produced at our National Council office in Canberra by our own staff along with input from Vinnies people around Australia.

Publishing online is economical as well as enabling it to be read by anyone – here or worldwide – who is interested in how the Society assists people in need as well as advocating for important social justice issues. These topics include affordable housing and homelessness, gender and wage equality, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights, fairness for people with disability and the elderly, and the rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

The feedback we receive for *The Record* is very positive but we seeking more information from our readers in order to keep the magazine relevant and make it even more stimulating.

Conducting a readership survey can be expensive and, like any polling, is not always representative of people's

views, even if comments can be valuable food for thought.

We would greatly appreciate your views about *The Record*.

A few areas to consider might be –

- Do you find it easy to access the magazine and read it electronically? (we are working on improving how it is delivered and can be viewed)
- Do the stories interest you, and what topics are of the most interest/relevance?
- Does *The Record* present a suitably positive picture of the Society, reflect our spiritual heritage and portray the diversity of work done by our members, volunteers and staff?

We would greatly appreciate your comments on these and other aspects of the magazine.

Kindly send your emails to admin@svdp.org.au by the end of January 2022.

Thank you helping us make The Record even better. **R**

Scan this code to receive an email link to *The Record* every third month.



Spirit of the Society inspires another challenging Christmas

BY TOBY O'CONNOR

There was much media talk about the 'freedom days' announced by the states most impacted by COVID-19... after extended periods of isolation residents of Victoria, NSW and the ACT would be able to hit the pubs, enjoy restaurants and of course visit families and friends in greater numbers.

This was certainly to be welcomed. Despite the political ups and downs – and some bizarre opposition – Australians can be proud of how our nation worked hard to stay safe in order to keep the pandemic at bay. We have been vigilant in heeding the advice of our health experts. On the whole we have trusted our governments and played our own part in staying as resilient as we could when maintaining the common good.

Just as in times of natural disaster, we have recognised during this pandemic that governments alone cannot respond to community and individual need. It was very much a team effort.

Yet a great many folk whose livelihoods were shattered by COVID-19, notwithstanding JobKeeper (because many were low-paid casual workers, and thus unentitled) did not celebrate at pubs and clubs, or at Melbourne Cup events, but continued to struggle to make ends meet.

This impact was particularly noticeable within our many ethnic communities where families tend to be large and where people often struggle with special needs, for example in accessing culturally appropriate foods. This may sound simplistic, but if we don't eat well, we don't stay well. Yet people within and outside those communities rallied to assist, showing that our individual



Toby O'Connor

humanness makes us many, and our shared humanity makes us one.

The good works of the Society in providing safe and secure living environments and pastoral care to people who were homeless and highly vulnerable to the virus saw outstanding feats from our members, volunteers and employees. The capability of our people to respond to and contain COVID-19 outbreaks in supported accommodation facilities reflected leadership and compassion. Risks well managed and the wellbeing and dignity of so many was maintained.

Thank you to all our people. You promote St Vincent de Paul's dedication to serving those in need and in so doing, you inspire others to join us in working for a kinder Australia.

Our acceptance and welcoming of diversity without judgement sees the Society offer a welcoming to the many marginalised folk who have had to struggle with the idea of asking for a hand up.

The collegial approach our people adopt when working with governments and alongside other charities and community groups strengthens our reputation as a trusted and caring national organisation that is inclusive and respectful.

Members' feedback on the adequacy of food security measures and trends around the increased demand for Emergency Relief funds across locked-down LGAs is being brought to the attention of the Commonwealth Government through our involvement in the Emergency Relief National Co-ordination Group.

This advice has resulted in additional Commonwealth funds being quickly targeted to ER providers and food agencies in areas of identified stress. Good lessons for the future about our role in getting help where it is most needed.

As vaccination rates reach key milestones we now seek advice from members about the likely impact of withdrawing Commonwealth COVID-19 financial assistance (tied to vaccination rates reaching key milestones) on those on JobSeeker and those unable to immediately return to adequate hours of work because local economies are emerging slowly from the enforced hibernation.

As we move to Christmas 2021 and another much awaited holiday season it is a relief to see communities that were in lock-down opening up and allowing families to be together. But we know what will be, and should be,



a joyous time for most people can be a very stressful time for many families and individuals – nothing amplifies loneliness like seeing others celebrate.

Sadly, domestic violence rates in this period are always at a year-long peak, while pressures mount on parents to buy gifts for their children and put special food on the table. In both areas, Vinnies is very active at this time of year, with our conferences and phone help lines working flat out to help companions in need.

Despite this challenging year, support for the Society has been gratifyingly strong, with various state and national appeals being well supported, and the CEO and community sleepouts receiving

unexpectedly high levels of donations. Our supporters have again shown they are a key part of our team and a big ‘shout out’ is extended to them all.

The Vinnies Christmas Appeal is our largest annual fundraiser and is being widely promoted, both in Catholic parishes around the country and in all forms of media. This year, the generosity of Australians will be needed more than ever.

The theme of the Christmas Appeal, as described in a separate story in this issue, is of a young mother-to-be and her partner, homeless in a big city, wondering how they can survive until they are assisted by actual Vinnies members who saw them on the street. It

is a heartwarming and true story that reminds us of the difficulties faced by Joseph in seeking accommodation so that Mary could give birth to the Christ child over 2,000 years ago.

The kindness displayed by all Vinnies members typifies the Spirit of the Society, helping people in a practical sense because of their own spiritual focus - not expecting thanks, just doing the right and godly thing. Little has changed since the time of Frederic Ozanam whose work with his confreres, also at a time of pandemic, impacted in such a personal way upon people in need.

Stay safe all, and God bless. **R**

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

Canberra/Goulburn farewells CEO Barnie van Wyk

After nearly five years as Chief Executive Officer of the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn Barnie van Wyk has stood down. He joined Vinnies Canberra/Goulburn with more than 20 years of international management and strategic experience, and steered the Society through some very challenging and exciting times. These included the 2019 Summer bushfire recovery, rebuilding and community development efforts, the COVID-19 response plans and major organisational change and fundraising initiatives.

St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn President John Feint said, 'Barnie is an outstanding and passionate leader and has served the Society of St Vincent de Paul Canberra/Goulburn and the community with great commitment. Under Barnie's leadership, the Society has become a stronger, more capable, community-based and governance-focused organisation.'

Some of Barnie's many accomplishments included growing the Society's revenue base to \$30m per annum, forging partnerships with Catholic Care and the ACT Government, and with Amelie Housing to provide appropriate, secure and affordable rental housing to end homelessness and create inclusive communities.

He was also central in establishing Axial Housing to provide permanent homes and support services to disadvantaged individuals in the Canberra community and the Community Inclusion Program at Oaks Estate helping participants make optimum choices in relation to their health and wellbeing, gain access to mainstream services and support, and shape and influence their community.

The annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout



Top: Barnie van Wyk (kneeling, centre) with fellow participants at the launch of the CEO Sleepout 2021.



Left: Barnie van Wyk carrying his cardboard accommodation to his fifth Vinnies CEO Sleepout at the National Arboretum in Canberra, 17 June 2021.

became one of Barnie van Wyk's favourite events and over the last five events he raised \$107,000 for homelessness support services. He helped increase the CEO Sleepout's fundraising income by 60 per cent, making the ACT the highest per capita fundraiser in Australia, with seven times the national average. The 2021 CEO Sleepout event culminated in a record-breaking \$1m, the highest amount raised in the event's 12-year history.

Barnie van Wyk was committed to environmental support initiatives such as cutting emissions and generating solar power. This will deliver annual electricity cost savings of about \$60,000 for at least 10 years, reducing the Society's carbon footprint by about 300 tonnes per annum. Based on suitability, close to two-thirds of

Vinnies 27 retail shops have been selected for on-premise solar installations.

He was active in driving the Society's first Reconciliation Action Plan to begin a journey of understanding of First Nations Peoples and the challenges they face in accessing support, so as to better advocate and influence overall health and wellbeing outcomes.

Neville Tomkins, Chief Commissioner of Scouts NSW and long-time supporter of the Society said, 'Barnie has been an inspiration to us all. Through his servant leadership, advocacy and compassion, Barnie and the Vinnies team have made a genuine difference to the lives of so many Canberrans.'

National Membership Support Research Project

Dr Emma Campbell, CEO of the ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) added, 'We are grateful for Barnie's tremendous contribution to the shared goal of ACTCOSS and the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn of improving outcomes for vulnerable people in the Canberra region.

'Barnie has been passionate and outspoken in defending the rights of people facing disadvantage and calling for them to receive the support and services they deserve. We will miss Barnie but look forward to continuing our fantastic relationship with Vinnies to reduce inequality and achieve social justice.'

For his part, Barnie van Wyk said what makes Vinnies Canberra/Goulburn a truly unique place is the passion and commitment of its 2,300 strong workforce of members, volunteers and employees.

'The Vinnies team spares no effort in ensuring that anyone who looks to us for help receives the very best care and support, whether they are assisted at Vinnies outreach services like Street to Home or Night Patrol, local Vinnies drop-in centres like Blue Door or any of our Vinnies shops.'

At the time of publishing, Michelle Colefax, the Deputy CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, had been appointed as Acting CEO, making her the Society's first female CEO for this jurisdiction. **R**

One of the long-term objectives (2028) for the Society's National Council is ensuring we can create an environment of increased Vincentian spirituality, confraternity, and diversity as well as a genuine growth in membership numbers and sustainability overall.

To do this and to help keep a national perspective and focus on membership within National Council, a National Project Manager for Members and Membership Support position has been created after consultation with National Council and S&T CEOs. This position is funded in the 2021-22 budget. It is time limited. In its support of this project, National Council acknowledges there are some significant challenges when it comes to achieving and sustaining a strong, vibrant, and engaged membership base for the Society in Australia.

Cassandra Bull has taken up this role. She is a Society employee who has had multiple roles within the Society ranging from youth volunteer, Conference member and president, as well as previous employee roles working within the Queensland, Canberra/Goulburn and National offices in areas such as Youth, Membership, Regional Engagement, Compliance and Safeguarding, including more recently as the National Manager for Drought Program.

Cassandra is working alongside State and Territory Membership teams to:

1. identify current practices in Australia;
2. explore and integrate best practice around membership-based organisations, including different models from other SVdP National Councils across the globe; and
3. to work with membership stakeholders in the States and Territories to collaborate on new ways of supporting existing members and attracting new members.

This newly established Membership support research project will support National Council and the Society in Australia to fulfil the first strategic goal for the National Council's 2020 – 2023 Strategic Plan. The Membership Support Research project aims to facilitate the successful implementation of the Our Spirituality and Membership Strategic Goal. The project also endeavours to create a network of skilled membership champions from each of the States/Territories who will continue to think and work strategically to address the sustainability, vitality and relevance of the Society in a modern context.

For more information regarding the project please contact Cassandra.bull@svdp.org.au or speak to your State or Territory Membership key contact. **R**

Govt grants Disability Royal Commission extra time

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

The Royal Commission (RC) into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has been granted a 17-month extension to its term following a request by its Chair, the Honourable Ronald Sackville AO QC.

At the time of receiving this news in mid-September 2021 the RC was about to begin a week-long inquiry into the circumstances surrounding [First Nations children](#) with disability in out-of-home care.

Established by the Australian Government in April 2019, the RC is charged with inquiring into all forms of violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability in all settings and contexts.

Its final report is now due by 29 September 2023. Before the extension, the deadline was 29 April 2022. The RC has said the extension should allow it 'to discharge its wide-ranging responsibilities to a satisfactory standard'. One must hope so, given the time, effort and resourcing invested in the exercise.

On 30 October 2020 the Royal Commission presented its [Interim Report](#) to the Governor-General. The hefty (559-page) and handsome document was based on its work from 5 April 2019 to 3 July 2020, four months after it had suspended all activities involving gatherings of people or close contact between individuals due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning with the ominous words, 'What is happening to people is not okay...' the report flagged a litany of concerns and



Dr Dinesh Palipana, medicine and law graduate, co-founder of Doctors with Disabilities Australia and Queensland's Australian of the Year.

revealed some deeply disturbing testimony: 'She was hit, pushed, spat upon and had her property constantly stolen by both workers and other co-tenants.'

It seems highly unlikely that the tone of evidence and submissions presented to the RC will improve, while the continuing disruptions caused by pandemic constraints seem set to continue. However, the work goes on, with the RC releasing its fourth progress report in September 2021 covering the period 1 January to 30 June 2021.

This noted it had 'carried out a full program of activities during the reporting period... public hearings and private sessions, and again expanded our community engagement. We conducted and commissioned research; and released a number of new publications, including a public hearing report and research reports. We continued to receive and process submissions.'

'Community organisations play an important role for people with disabilities...'

- Dr Dinesh Palipana

A new face for the RC is Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM, current Queensland Australian of the Year, who was appointed as senior adviser on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability.

Dr Palipana was the first medical graduate and medical intern in Queensland living with quadriplegia. As co-founder of Doctors with Disabilities Australia, he has helped develop national policies for inclusivity in medical education and employment, is a senior resident at Gold Coast University Hospital, and holds a degree in law.

Speaking with *The Record* Dr Palipana said, 'Within the last two years, I have been privileged to engage with the Disability Royal Commission. More recently, I have been thrilled to be a senior advisor

New shop is a Far North Queensland hit

to the Commission focusing on culturally and linguistically diverse people with disabilities.

'This type of Intersectionality can amplify challenges that people with disabilities face. I am glad to live in a country where efforts like the Commission seek to unravel these challenges in order for our society to create equity.

'From my personal perspective, community organisations play an important role for people with disabilities. People with disabilities experience barriers in so many areas. Organisations that have a finger on the pulse, that are on the ground, can not only affect positive change for the individual but also generate systemic evolution by being a powerful voice.'

The vast swag of the RC's material, archived and emerging weekly, can be viewed on its [website](#) where timely matters covered in the public hearings include the education and training of health professionals in relation to people with cognitive disability (Public hearing 10); the experiences of people with cognitive disability in the criminal justice system (#11); and the experiences of people with disability in the context of the Australian Government's approach to the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out (#12).

Logistically, the RC could not have been held at a worse time. Morally, its commissioning could not have been delayed for a single day, given the urgency of airing – and as soon as possible, addressing – the serious issues raised. **R**



Pictured in front of the 'Mission Wall' at the newly opened Cairns shop are (l-r) General Manager – Operations, Drew Eide, Far North Queensland Executive Officer, David Monaghan, Far North Queensland President, Veronica Innes, State President, Dennis Innes, and State Transport and Logistics Manager, Stuart Roche. The 'Mission Wall' is a feature of new Vinnies shops in Queensland.



The CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland, Kevin Mercer, lent a hand during the busy first day at the new Cairns shop.

The second biggest Vinnies shop in Queensland opened on 16 October 2021 at the Cairns Showgrounds Shopping Centre, with a team of enthusiastic volunteers and two paid staff.

The new shop off the Bruce Highway will provide locals with unique, pre-loved bargains on fashion, homewares, antiques, collectables and more, according to Vinnies Queensland General Manager of Operations Drew Eide.

'As with all Vinnies Shops, sale profits go back to supporting the community – that new dress, that couch, those books, those toys, that new set of wine glasses – all of those purchases go towards helping local Queenslanders in need,' Drew said.

'Far North Queensland was hit particularly hard financially by the the COVID-19 pandemic and the opening of this shop will allow us to better support people in the community experiencing hardship, job losses or housing insecurity.

'The new Vinnies won't just be a great destination for shoppers, it will go a long way towards supporting people experiencing poverty, housing instability or family breakdown in the region.'

The shop's opening hours are 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday and 9.00am to 4.00pm on Saturdays.

Volunteers are always welcome and can inquire at vinnies.org.au/joinus **R**

Inala family support centre celebrates 20 years



Liza Dykstra (left) and Monica Tupicoff reflect on 20 years of supporting the community at the Inala Family Support Centre.

BY CALLUM JOHNSON

If walls could talk, the Inala Family Support Centre would have plenty of stories to tell – many of them heartbreaking, but many worth celebrating.

The Centre recently commemorated 20 years of providing support to the Inala community; celebrating two special decades of members working through the Centre, doing whatever they can to help locals in need.

Inala Conference (St Mary of the Cross) President Monica Tupicoff said in those 20 years the Conference Members have provided more than \$2.75 million in support in response to 52,524 calls for help.

‘The Centre has been a beacon of hope for Inala residents in troubled times,’ Monica said.

‘The house was bought for just \$57,000 20 years ago – some of us

would have memories of walking around the Centre, water pooling around our feet during floods! We’ve had extensive renovations since then, one of the most important additions being a food pantry that has allowed us to store food and supplies to distribute to Companions.’

Centre Coordinator Liza Dykstra has been with the Centre for 18 of those 20 years, starting as a Volunteer before becoming more involved over time.

‘The fondest memories I have are people we have supported coming back and thanking us – some even say we saved their lives,’ she said.

‘It’s such a nice feeling to see you have made a positive difference.’

Liza said despite the rewards, the work was certainly challenging, as locals continue to battle poverty and homelessness.

‘Since COVID-19 and the housing crisis, we have seen more and

more people needing help with rent,’ she said.

‘Most of the people we see live in poverty and the number of people coming to us who are homeless has been growing. While we have been part of the Inala community for so long, we are getting better and better at working as a team and collaborating with local organisations to provide better support to our Companions.’

The Centre celebrated their 20-year anniversary with a recent gathering of Conference Members and representatives from the local community.

‘When I look back on the last 20 years on how we have improved the premises and made a difference to so many – I am very proud of everything we have accomplished at the Centre,’ Liza said. **R**

Callum Johnson is Communications and Media Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society QLD.

One million test kits, and counting...

Teams of the St Vincent de Paul Society's supported workers have passed the one million mark in assembling testing kits to help NSW Health combat the COVID-19 challenge.

Vinnies Ozanam Industries – named after the Society's 19th century Parisian founder – operates work centres in the Sydney suburbs of Stanmore and West Ryde as well as in Coonamble, north-central NSW where a further 140,000 testing kits have been assembled so far.

In a community effort, the production line at Coonamble's Castlereagh Industries received assistance from volunteers at the SES, the Lions and Quota clubs, and local Aboriginal kids involved with the Clontarf Foundation.

The testing kits comprise nasal and throat swabs, a storage vial and a sealable poly-bag. Boxes of assembled kits are despatched to NSW Health Pathology, Australia's largest public pathology organisation, which commissioned Vinnies to undertake the work.

Along with vaccinating and contact tracing, testing is a key component in the fight against COVID-19 spread.

The Vinnies centres employ people with disability who undertake tasks and training tailored to their individual circumstances. They also do assembly-line work for organisations such as HarperCollins, World Wildlife Fund, Caritas and Future Logistics.

'We provide meaningful, sustainable and valuable employment to over 100 people with disability,' said Rod Silber, Business Development Manager Disability and Inclusion at Stanmore.

'This gives individuals a sense of worth, an opportunity to develop



Left: Workers and community volunteers assembling COVID-19 testing kits at Vinnies Castlereagh Industries in Coonamble. Photo: Oliver Brown/Coonamble Times



Right: Sue, a vision impaired team member at Ozanam Industries, Stanmore assembling a COVID-19 testing kit for NSW Health Pathology.

a variety of new skills and the chance to make new friends. The centres provide a professional, customer focused service to some of Australia's most respected companies, State Government departments and community groups.'

One worker, Sue, who is vision impaired, has been at Stanmore for more than 21 years. She enjoys the work because she can use her skill at 'feeling the job'.

'It's like I'm contributing in a small way to ensuring that the NSW community can be kept safe during this pandemic,' Sue said.

Income from the centres supports Vinnies' work with families and individuals doing it tough, never more needed than during this pandemic.

NSW Health Pathology's COVID-19 Operations Lead, Michael Crowther said at the start of the pandemic NSW Health Pathology staff were packing the test kits at the end of a busy shift in the lab and in the Newcastle office.

'As you can imagine our staff were exhausted doing this on top of the normal workload,' he said.

'Thanks to their help, we can get a steady supply of testing kits to

frontline staff who need regular testing in hotel quarantine and airports, special health hospitals and to testing clinics around NSW.

'I'd like to give a big shout out and thank you to everyone who has helped, from Sydney's Inner West and all the way out to Coonamble in Western NSW. It's a great opportunity to show that people with a disability are making a meaningful contribution to the community during the pandemic.

'The demand for these kits has never been higher, and the staff have assembled and packed over 1.2 million COVID-19 test kits for NSW Health Pathology.

'We couldn't do it without their help.' Michael said.

Rod Silber added, 'This work was extremely exciting for our supported employees and the support staff at both of our facilities. Our priority is to ensure that each person has the opportunity to develop their full potential as a member of the Australian workforce through effective, relevant and ongoing training.'

'Our support staff work with each employee to achieve their personal and individual goals.' **R**

New-look Vinnies shop opens in Dubbo

STORY BY
ROBERT CROSBY

A new-look Vinnies Shop opened in Dubbo, NSW just as COVID-19 restrictions were easing throughout the state.

Located in prime retail position in the town's main street, the 1,500 square metre site is one of the largest in the state and is sure to prove a hit with locals and shoppers from surrounding towns eager to discover pre-loved treasures.

Vinnies Dubbo will also act as a sorting hub for surrounding shops in the North West region, while plans are in place for the local Conference, St Brigid's, to move into the space in the new year.

The official opening was attended by Jack de Groot, Vinnies NSW CEO, and members of the Executive Leadership Team, as well as members and volunteers from neighbouring communities. Dugald Saunders, State Member for Dubbo was also present to share the occasion.

Vinnies Dubbo is the first shop to undergo a redesign featuring new-look signage which will be rolled out throughout the state.

2022 marks the centenary of the first Vinnies Shop opening in Newtown, Sydney. Over the past 100 years, Vinnies shops have become an institution of the Society's good works, with 225 currently operating in New South Wales. **R**

Robert Crosby is Communications Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.



VincentCare joins Vic Govt in big social housing build

VincentCare Community Housing (VCCH) and the Victorian State Government has announced a partnership to deliver new social housing dwellings within Bendigo, one of the state's largest regional centres but one that experiences a severe shortage of affordable rental housing.

The project will deliver 63 affordable units over two and half years, commencing in November 2022. VCCH will redevelop the site in St Aiden's Road to initially build 52 x 1-bedroom and 11 x 2-bedroom town houses for low-income seniors, both singles and couples, over 55 years.

The development of the St Aiden's Road site will take place in two stages to ensure all existing tenants in the 30 units will be accommodated into the new dwellings. The town houses will be owned by VCCH and leased to tenants at an affordable rent.

The new accommodation is intended to be safe and welcoming to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, consistent with the Society's commitment to reconciliation and social justice for First Nation peoples.

VCCH is well placed to successfully deliver this project and provide ongoing support and benefit to the community of Bendigo. The new town houses will be available to eligible people on the Victorian Housing Register who are in need of public or social and affordable housing. The development will meet all contemporary design requirements and aim to achieve 7-star energy ratings.

The aim of this project is to provide housing for people who are currently living in unaffordable private rental or in inadequate accommodation and importantly for those currently experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness.

VCCH will make a \$20 million contribution to the development, financed through a combination of existing equity, borrowings and cash. **R**



PHOTO: DAMON CAIR

From executive to the streets and back again

BY DEE RUDEBECK

How a hand-up from Vinnies literally saved Ben's life.

As Ben Aghajani (pictured) approached Vinnies' Soup Van hub in North Melbourne a mixture of emotions uncoiled inside him. It had been a long and, at times, desperate three years, during which he had gone from business executive to unemployment and homelessness.

While our volunteers are accustomed to people dropping in to ask for assistance, Ben surprised the 'Vannies' by saying that he wanted to thank them for providing food for a year – but he no longer needed it because he was back on his feet.

'I was so pleased to say that. I wanted the groceries to go to someone else who needed it now,' says Ben.

In 2017 when Ben's marriage of 27 years broke down and he moved out of the home he shared with his wife and daughter, his life took an unforeseen turn. He had been earning \$130k, but he found himself unable to hold down employment.

'When I went through three jobs in a year, I realised I was burnt out,' he says.

Ben, 57, began 'sofa surfing' with friends or sleeping rough.

'I didn't have any addictions previously, but I started drinking every day. Alcohol helps you sleep when you're cold on the streets, even though you know it's not good for you,' he says.

Ben also had suicidal thoughts.

'I truly hit rock bottom, but my daughter was constantly in my mind and that gave me the drive to keep going.'



Accessing nutritional food is vital to people's ability to recover...

Thankfully another agency assisted Ben into a social housing unit and he was put in contact with a mental health team and services, including Vinnies.

'Vinnies was brilliant,' he says. 'Every week, the Soup Van would provide me with food and that was a massive help.'

The hampers consist of fruit and vegetables, tinned food, rice, pasta, bread and other staples. Ben began exercising and using less alcohol.

'The more I felt physically fit, the stronger I became mentally,' he says. 'The fresh fruit and veg from Vinnies were particularly helpful, as well as the beans and tuna.'

Ben swears by making vegetables and salads the bulk of meals, accompanied by some protein.

Ben's story is testament to Vinnies' belief that accessing nutritional food is vital to people's ability to recover physical and mental well-being. He eventually felt well enough to work again and soon landed a position as the national business manager for a company.

'It's going fantastically well, and I'm enjoying working again.'

Ben is in touch with his ex-wife and spends some 'beautiful days' with his now 19-year-old daughter.

'It's great to feel as if I've come out the other side of this, and to know that there is help out there for people in trouble through organisations such as Vinnies.' **R**

Dee Rudebeck is PR & Communications Co-ordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria.

Vinnies WA Bushfire support to continue

Nine months after the devastating Wooroloo bushfire in the Perth Hills, Vinnies continues to help families get back on their feet.

The Vinnies WA Bushfire Assistance Fund was launched in the immediate aftermath of the February 2021 fire, which destroyed 86 homes and damaged a further 200.

The fund raised \$215,000 to provide direct support to residents, and came on top of \$1.4 million already raised during the previous Christmas and Winter Appeals. To date 58 families have been given direct support and another 35 families have been provided fencing and other items to assist their recovery.

Vinnies WA Executive Manager of Member and Volunteer Services Andrew York expects the help to continue for a while.

‘Many families are still at least one or two years away from rebuilding, so Vinnies will continue to provide services for another year,’ he said.

The stories from people affected



by the fires show that recovery will still take some time.

One local resident Vinnies is helping is currently living in a caravan on her property. The spot where her house once stood is contaminated with asbestos. Another resident lost the rental property she had lived in for 15 years, as well as the beautiful garden she had created.

In a cruel twist, her landlord kept

her bond, because the devastated property was not returned to him in a lettable condition.

Both residents received a bushfire assistance grant as well as food hampers and ongoing financial counselling support.

‘It has really helped financially as well as made me feel like some people do care,’ another resident said in response to the help they received from Vinnies. **R**

New scheme brings fine volunteers to Vinnies

A WA State Government program aimed at keeping people who can't pay their fines out of jail is paying dividends for participants - and for Vinnies WA.

Vinnies WA is part of an innovative program that allows people facing financial hardship to volunteer in lieu of paying court fines?

The Work and Development Permit Scheme began operating in the state just over a year ago and dozens of sponsors have since come on board.

The scheme is a partnership between the Department

of Justice, Legal Aid WA and the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, and it's part of a suite of law reforms passed by the State Government to overhaul the fines enforcement regime. The aim is simple – people shouldn't go to jail for being unable to pay their fines.

One participant who worked at a Vinnies store as part of the scheme says he'll continue to volunteer, even though he's completed his required hours: ‘It's a way of giving back and increasing social interaction,’ he says. **R**

Lift-off for WA Youth Crew Project



BY DAVID SETTELMAIER

A new project in Western Australia is helping young people experiencing homelessness deal with legal issues and navigate services.

Vinnies WA and the Street Law Centre WA Inc have received a joint Lotterywest grant worth more than \$380,000 to kickstart the Youth Crew Project.

John Carey, the WA Minister for Housing, presented the cheque to Vinnies WA CEO Susan Rooney and Ann-Margaret Walsh, the Principal Solicitor at the Street Law Centre WA Inc, at Passages Perth, one of two youth engagement hubs Vinnies runs in partnership with the Rotary Club of Perth.

The Youth Crew Project will deliver increased services to street-present young people aged 12 to 25 years, and assist them in addressing their socio-economic, health, housing, and legal issues.

Vinnies WA CEO Susan Rooney said the program couldn't come at a better time.

'We know young people have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many finding it incredibly difficult to navigate the various services they need to get back on their feet,' she said.

'This partnership between Passages and Street Law Centre will allow young people to deal with those challenges with targeted support.'

Solicitor Ann-Margaret Walsh said holistic wrap-around services were the key to breaking the cycle of homelessness.

'The Youth Crew Project will allow both Street Law and Passages to work with young people by assisting them to resolve their legal and non-legal issues and thereby provide them with pathways to exit homelessness,' she said.

Rachel (not her real name), a young person who left her family home and has experienced significant mental health issues, has already benefited from the Youth Crew Project.

After lending her car to someone, Rachel received multiple speeding infringements and lost demerit

points, resulting in her licence being suspended.

Not being able to get around, Rachel suddenly found herself far from her dream of studying to become a teacher. That's when the Youth Crew team got to work.

While Passages assisted Rachel by helping her secure transitional accommodation, the Street Law team helped her with her legal issues by providing legal advice and court representation.

Rachel's matter was successfully resolved and with the infringements against her withdrawn, her licence suspension was lifted and a spent conviction issued for her court matters.

Rachel said it would have been impossible for her to navigate her charges without the support of Street Law and Passages, who treated her with respect and without judgement.

'I can't say how much I appreciate you guys and how much you did for me,' she said. **R**

David Settelmaier is Media and Communications Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society (WA) Inc.

Society's overseas development program continues to reach out

BY TRICIA WILDEN

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia continues to support fellow Vincentians in the Asia-Oceania region to undertake good works through its Overseas Development Program (ODP). This is primarily ongoing Twinning relationships, Project Support and the Assist-a-Student (AAS) Program. The ODP also provides support in response to Emergencies.

The ODP is enabled through relationships between the National Council in Australia and the National Councils in our overseas partner countries of Cambodia, Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, one of the four states in the FSM), India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Good works at the Conference and Council level in each of these countries are supported by the Overseas Partnership Committees in Australian State and Territory Councils and the Overseas Partnership Advisory Committee at the National Level. For detailed information please see the *National Overview 2020-2021* on our [website](#).

Twinning and project support

Twinning is the direct link between an Australian Conference or Council and an Overseas Conference or Council to build solidarity and help others in need. As described in The Rule (Part 1, section 4) Twinning is 'one of the activities most cherished by the Society' that 'contributes to world peace and to understanding and cultural exchange among peoples'.

It achieves this by promoting spirituality, friendship and shared cultural understanding through prayer, regular communication and financial support.



St Clara Conference members who with support of their twin, St Thomas the Apostle in Claremont, WA, repaired classrooms and play equipment at a local school in Kompong Stiem District of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Under the Twinning program, 1,023 Conferences and 37 Councils in Australia twinned with 1,911 Conferences and 52 Councils as at the end of the financial year 2020-2021.

Two larger projects are –

- the Vidial Arul Avai Naduvam (VAAN) project in Tamil Nadu, India, funded to support the building of a 'help desk' centre near the government hospital to provide services to disadvantaged patients, including support for registration, making appointments, accessing services and providing short stay accommodation for care-takers and patients.
- the Pakistani Refugee Relief Project 2, funded through the National Society in Thailand to assist Christian Pakistani refugee families who fled to Thailand for protection after facing religious discrimination.

Other smaller projects funded included Primary school repair in Cambodia; Community Wellness Garden – COVID-19 Relief in Philippines; Small business revolving loan in India; COVID-19 relief in Indonesia; Fishing gear loan in Kiribati; Pig project in Myanmar; Training and agricultural support in Solomon Islands; and

Self-employment Small Business in Sri Lanka.

Emergencies

Over the financial year, during the COVID-19 emergency, Vincentians in Australia supported their overseas partners with grants to their twins as well as support for overseas National Councils to distribute to un-twinning conferences according to need. In 2020-2021, emergency relief was also provided to the Philippines for the Tulay sa Pagbangon (Bridge to Recovery) Typhoon Relief Project.

Assist A Student program

Unique to Australia, the AAS Program recognises the importance of education as one of the key planks to help break the cycle of poverty by providing payments of \$100 to support the educational requirements of students in need identified through nationally agreed processes.

In the 2020 calendar year, 2,400 students were supported in a range of countries, with an anticipated 1,470 students to be supported this year. **R**

Tricia Wilden is Overseas Development Program Facilitator, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia. overseasdevelopment@svdp.org.au

ASSIST A STUDENT

An education support program which assists in breaking the cycle of poverty



Scan to donate online

Assist A Student is a program of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. Donations from Australians are used to provide funds to students from partner countries in the Asia - Pacific Region to assist with education expenses.

The Assist A Student program reflects the Mission Statement of the St Vincent de Paul Society – to serve the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy. We do this by sharing some of ourselves – what we have – with those in need in our neighbouring countries.

Access to education is a proven way of assisting individuals to reach their full potential and is a pathway to breaking the cycle of poverty. Students are supported at all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary.

'Education is important to me to get a job. I want to work for government and need to do well at Senior Secondary School.'

(Student, Kiribati)

'The support helps students to fit in and work hard. It also supports the school as it means that students have the materials they need.'

(School principal, Indonesia)

In our partner countries, local Vincentians select students to participate in the program. The program is managed by conferences on the ground overseas and is highly valued by conferences and beneficiaries.

Privacy Statement

St Vincent de Paul Society collects the information you provide on this form for the primary purpose of processing your kind donation. We may also use your personal information to provide you with further information about the Assist A Student Program. If you do not provide the information requested on this form, we may not be able to do these things.

We may share your personal information with other St Vincent de Paul Societies and third parties who provide us with professional or technology services, including some that are based overseas.

Our privacy policy is available on our website: www.vinnies.org.au

visit donate.vinnies.org.au/assist-a-student to donate online

- I am an individual assisting a student; OR
 I am assisting a student on behalf of a group

NAME (group or individual): _____

CONTACT NAME (for group): _____

TELEPHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

SUBURB: _____

STATE: _____ POSTCODE: _____

EMAIL: _____

I would like to donate:

\$100 \$200 \$300 OR \$ _____

Payment method:

EFT: BSB 062-000 Acc 16047336

Debit my credit card (details below)

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Mastercard Visa Card Expiry: ____ / ____

NAME ON CARD: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

*Best wishes for a Merry Christmas
and a Happy, Holy and
Healthy New Year 2022*



– from the –

National Council of
St Vincent de Paul Society Australia
and staff of the National Secretariat.



St Vincent de Paul Society
supports the
Uluru Statement from the Heart.