



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

# 2019–20 NATIONAL OVERVIEW





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# OUR VISION AND PURPOSE

## Our Mission

The St Vincent de Paul Society (the Society) is a lay Catholic organisation which 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.

## Our Vision

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

## Our Aspiration

An Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice. The Society advocates on several pressing social justice issues such as homelessness, poverty, and asylum seekers. To read more about the Society's work in these areas and others, please visit the 'Our Impact' section of our website.

## Our Key Values

We have identified seven key values to which we are aligned. They include commitment, compassion, respect, integrity, empathy, advocacy and courage. We are proud of the key values for which we stand and invite you to find out more through the 'Get Involved' section of our website.



### Commitment

Loyalty in service to our mission, vision and values.



### Compassion

Welcoming and serving all with understanding and without judgement.



### Respect

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



### Integrity

Promoting, maintaining, and adhering to our mission, vision and values.



### Empathy

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



### Advocacy

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



### Courage

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

## Faith in Action

Vincentians believe that Jesus Christ is not only God, but also truly human and at home in our world. When the voice of the poor calls, they willingly leave their prayers, or other religious practice knowing that they are leaving God for God.

They seek to honour, love and serve their truly human God by honouring, loving and serving the poor, the abandoned, the victims of exclusion and adversity. Inspired by the compassion of Jesus Christ to all people, Vincentians seek to be compassionate, kind and deeply reverent to all those they serve. With trust in God's help, they see their work as a continuation of Christ's own work. Vincentians express their love for God and for all God's people, by the sweat of their brow and the strength of their arms. They seek to do this with gentleness and humility, striving to be selfless and genuine, yet passionate about the needs of the poor.

*The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to their elders both past and present.*

# President's Report

St Vincent de Paul Society founder Frederic Ozanam was a prolific letter writer. On 4 November 1834 he wrote to his friend Leonce Curnier, who was setting up a new conference in a different city. He advised Leonce as follows:

*Your city probably has different needs than the capital and provides different resources. The assistance bureaus are set up differently. Besides, in such a work it is necessary to give yourself up to the inspirations of the heart rather than the calculations of the mind. Providence gives its own counsel through the circumstances around you, and the ideas it bestows on you. I believe you would do well to follow them freely and not tie yourselves down with rules and formulas.*

This past year, we have been confronted constantly with extreme and challenging circumstances which have forced us to abandon or adapt, at least for a time, our usual ways of doing things. The ongoing drought, floods, the fires that ravaged large parts of the country over summer, and then the pandemic and its associated restrictions, have in many cases rendered our members and volunteers unable to undertake home visits or special works in the normal fashion.

Society personnel have been personally affected in large numbers by ill-health, bereavement, job losses or pay cuts, property damage and destruction and the stress and anxiety associated with pandemic and lockdowns, all while still trying to carry out their Vincentian work or being prevented from doing so.

We have seen new people turning to us for help – and existing companions facing new challenges as the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed swell. We have been called upon to work with governments and other agencies at new levels, and with a new sense of urgency, to address the successive waves of natural disasters and disease that have posed such an extreme risk to our population.

The circumstances have forced us to be creative and responsive; to come up with new ways to live out our mission 'to do without hesitation whatever good lies at our hands'.

I am sad for the Vincentians who, due to ill-health, shop closures, or age-related restrictions, have been unable to undertake the volunteer work that gives them so much joy. I am hopeful that many can resume volunteering when it is safe to do so, and I am confident that our Councils, our shop managers, our volunteer support workers and leaders at every level are doing whatever they can to ensure that our conferences, shops and special works are safe for members, volunteers and companions alike as soon as they are legally permitted to re-open or resume their activities.

In some cases, restrictions and new ways of doing things will be with us long term, and I expect that will be in equal parts sensible, challenging, frustrating and rewarding.

I am also inspired by the members and volunteers who have met challenging circumstances with creativity and determination to ensure that we can still offer a hand up to those who need it.



Many conferences, and the workers who support them, have come up with ways to continue offering food and other assistance through telephone and socially distanced visits; this is not a complete replacement for a personal visit – *'climbing the stairs to the poor man's garret, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him'* – but it has enabled us to continue to show love and concern for so many people who are otherwise excluded from society and burdened by loneliness.

The lesson that I hope we have learnt from ourselves and our fellow Vincentians this year is that we can and should be creative in carrying out our good works; that as we seek to 'become better and do a little good' in our world, we cannot and should not always do things just because *'we've always done them this way'*; that we need to be responsive to changing circumstances and new challenges and to let the *'inspirations of the heart'* guide us to new ways of living our faith through our good works.

**Claire Victory**  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

# CEO's Report

There has been a strong strategic commitment to focus on the Vincentian Vocation throughout the reporting period. Many activities of National Council have sought to support our members, our volunteers and our employees in ways that strengthen the demonstration of Christ's love in the external world, and hence our companions.

The work of National Council over the last 12 months, as our National President highlights, has been conducted at a time when Australia and the Society were facing a number of challenging circumstances. In other parts of this report there are examples of the initiatives National Council Secretariat pursued to further advance some of the governance and collegial goals of a federated, national organisation.

In the past, National Council has not directly delivered support services to those in need. Rather, the National Council has fulfilled the important role as advocate pursuing better living conditions for people facing disadvantage in their community. Over the past year, National Council through its employees, accepted the responsibility to offer support to families experiencing the effects of the long-lasting drought across Australia through the distribution of Commonwealth Government cash grants. It also assisted the Councils in a number of states and Canberra-Goulburn respond to the victims of the Black Saturday Bushfires. National Council continues to act as the conduit between the Commonwealth Government and Vincentian councils and their members on a range of bushfire recovery matters.

The success of these initiatives depended heavily on working closely with regional and local conferences. This partnership ensured our members were well informed and kept safe as they went about their good works, with empathy, bringing Christ's liberating love to those individuals, families and local communities in

distress. Collaboration took different forms across regions but all the time there was common purpose amongst those involved to bring a humanness to the support offered.

We recognised just how central the Society's members and volunteers have been to walking alongside the people we seek to help when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world in February 2020. Suddenly, the social distancing and acknowledgement that most of our members were in the high-risk age cohorts meant we needed to find new ways to provide a hand up during the pandemic. These new approaches demonstrate the intrinsic value of local members and local conferences.

Indeed, governments are keen to work with the Society because we deliver what no government can – face to face support to people who are facing a crisis, whether this is a personal matter or the result of a catastrophic event such as flood, a bushfire or an earthquake. Vinnies are often the first to establish a response to disasters in their local communities – a demonstration of the lived Vincentian vocation. Members act as the founders imagined, when they see need and respond.

This is why the Commonwealth Government included the Society's National Council in its planning processes when responding to the three crises of 2019-20. The same is true of our Council representatives at the state and territory level. Through our members on the ground in local communities, we provide timely, accurate advice to governments in the face of a crisis and during the recovery phases.

At the same time, the fact that our members can relay to us through conferences and councils the situations people are confronting on the ground means we are well equipped to advocate on behalf of people in need when we sit at the table with the Prime Minister and his ministers. This information allows the Society to contribute to important policy discussions through our submissions to Federal

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

*The Rule, Article 1.2*

and relevant state inquiries, royal commissions and through other opportunities such as Productivity Commission inquiries. In every event, the work of the National Council is informed by the experience of Vincentians, volunteers and staff who are close to the people who stand to be directly affected by the issue in question.

Yes, it has been a challenging year! In spite of all the challenges, the joined-up initiatives outlined above demonstrate how National Council can link with state and territory and regional Councils to provide support at the local level in times of national crisis. In this way we contribute to an authentic Vincentian vocation. And, as 'Vincentians serving in hope', we honour the vision of Frederic Ozanam to adapt the ways we respond to the grief and the sorrows our contemporary world visits upon us.

National Council Secretariat employees continue to bring much enthusiasm to the work they perform to bring about a fairer Australia. I thank them for their work and I take this opportunity to acknowledge the agility and the leadership provided by the National Council in these difficult and puzzling times.

The work to date on the Strategic Plan 2020-2023 is further evidence of that leadership and we at the National Secretariat look forward to the year ahead with its inevitable challenges and rewards.

**Toby oConnor**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

# National Council Members

## Claire Victory

President from March 2019  
Appointed May 2011

## Warwick Fulton

Deputy President from March 2019  
Elected March 2016

## Ryan Erlandsen

Secretary  
Appointed June 2019

## Sr Therese Haywood DC

Spiritual Advisor  
Appointed June 2019

## Paul Trezise

Treasurer  
Appointed July 2019

## Catherine Beaton

State President SA  
Elected effective May 2017

## Glady Demissie

State President WA  
Elected effective July 2018

## John Feint

Territory President Canberra-Goulburn  
Elected June 2019

## Mark Gaetani

State President Tas  
Elected effective January 2019

## Fay Gurr

Territory President NT  
Appointed September 2016

## Dennis Innes

State President Qld  
Elected effective June 2018

## Kevin McMahon

State President Vic  
Elected effective March 2018

## Peter McNamara

State President NSW  
Elected November 2019

## Maurice Ryan

Vice President  
Appointed June 2019

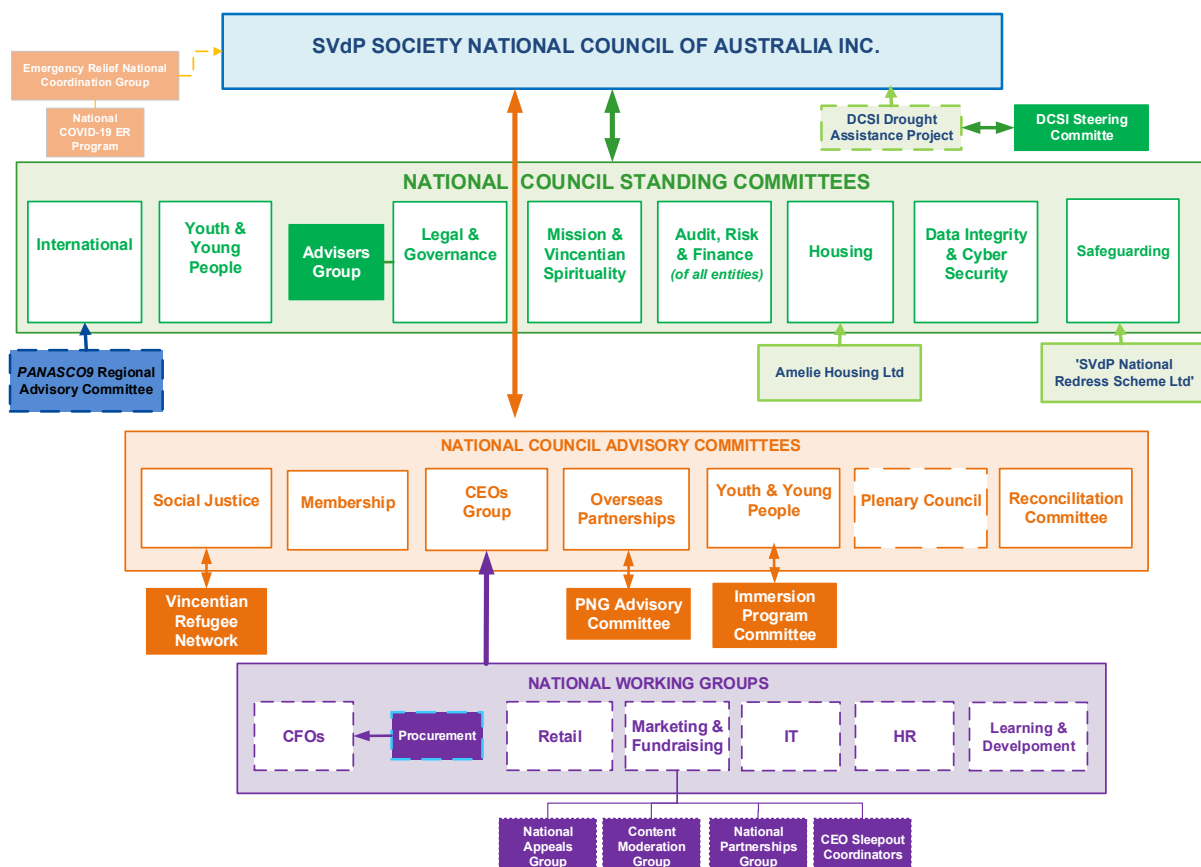
## Patrick Wallis

Vice President  
Appointed June 2019

## Denis Walsh

State President NSW  
Resigned November 2019

## SVdP Governance Chart





# National Council Secretariat Staff

## CEO

Toby oConnor

## Executive Officer

Donna Scheerlinck

## Executive Assistant

Kara Gibbs

## National Policy and Research Director

Rose Beynon

## National Communications Director

Judith Tokley

## National Web & Digital Manager

Vincent Nguyen

## Overseas Development Program Facilitator

Jude Blacklock

## Technical Writer

Peter Brady

## National Coordinator COVID-19

### Emergency Relief Program

Patrick McKenna

## National Marketing Projects Manager

Bianca D’Rosario

## Senior Marketing Coordinator (Outgoing)

Catherine Braybon

## National Digital Marketing Lead

Samara Gentle

## Marketing Officer

Chriselle Correia

## DROUGHT TEAM

### National Manager Drought Relief Program (Incoming)

Cassandra Bull

### National Coordinator (Outgoing)

Ngaire McCubbin

### Drought Relief Coordinator (Outgoing)

Maureen Galvin

### Drought Relief Coordinator (Incoming)

Sally Babbage

### Drought Relief Team Leaders

Kay Barby

Frances Neuss

### Drought Relief Operators

Elizabeth Doughty

Christopher Evans

Mary Anne Fletcher

Juliet Forward

Jacob Gallagher

Merah Hashmi

Lyn Holt

Suzan Secko

Desne Stevens

Catherine Vonarx

### Media and Communications Officer (Outgoing)

Sarah Bucknell

### State Drought Coordinator WA

Carmel Tigwell

### Accountant Drought Relief Program

Hannelore Patton

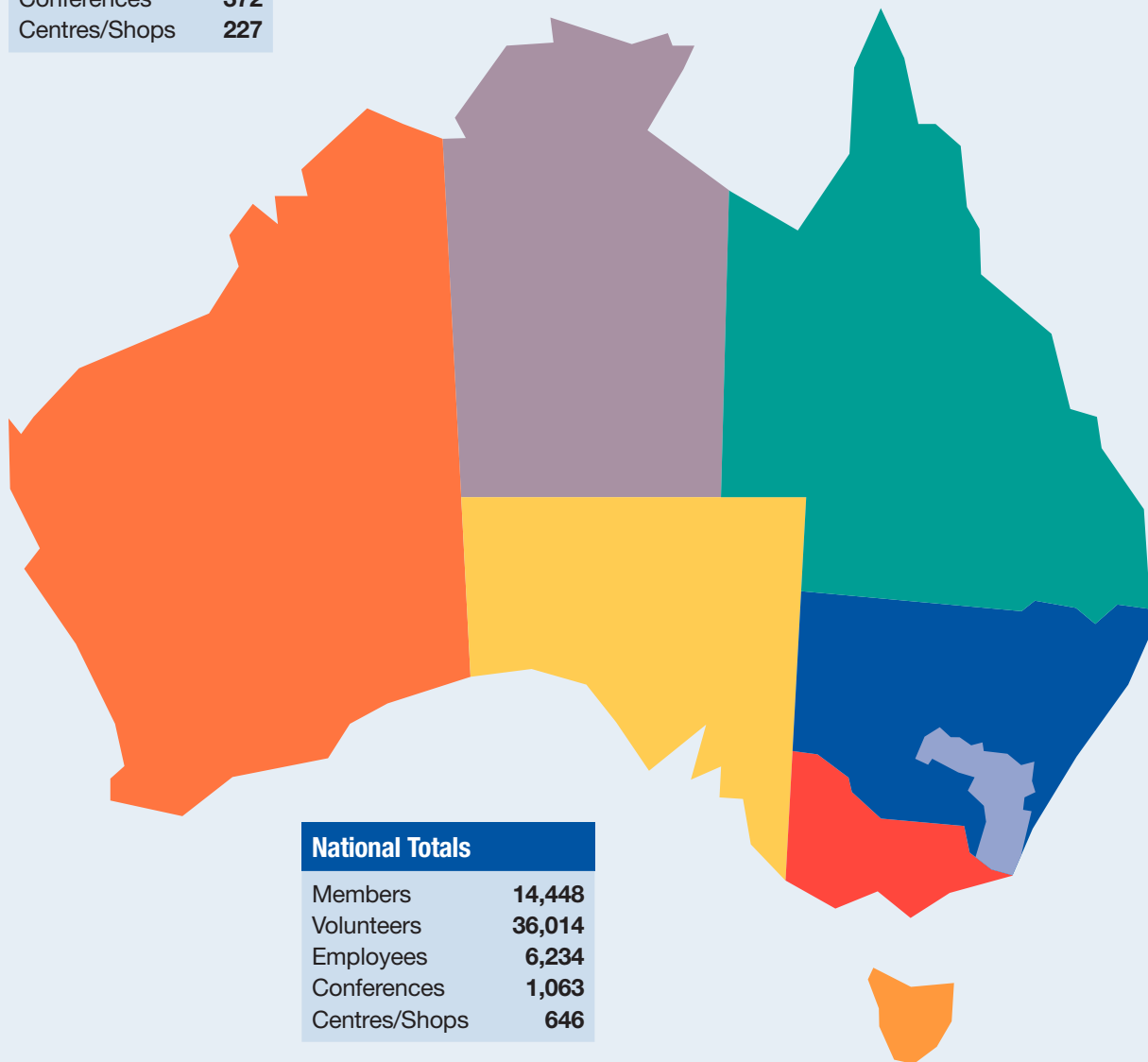
### Drought Relief Media, Marketing and Communications Officer (Incoming)

Bryce Taotua



# National Statistics

<b>National Council Office</b> Employees 30	<b>Northern Territory</b> Members 47 Volunteers 345 Employees 32 Conferences 5 Centres/Shops 13	<b>South Australia</b> Members 810 Volunteers 1,858 Employees 101 Conferences 59 Centres/Shops 34	<b>Victoria</b> Members 4,607 Volunteers 13,378 Employees 388 Conferences 267 Centres/Shops 117
<b>Canberra/Goulburn</b> Members 638 Volunteers 2,164 Employees 146 Conferences 51 Centres/Shops 27	<b>Queensland</b> Members 2,894 Volunteers 5,755 Employees 3,691 Conferences 205 Centres/Shops 147	<b>Tasmania</b> Members 232 Volunteers 915 Employees 98 Conferences 28 Centres/Shops 28	<b>Western Australia</b> Members 1,084 Volunteers 2,521 Employees 216 Conferences 76 Centres/Shops 53
<b>New South Wales</b> Members 4,136 Volunteers 9,078 Employees 1,532 Conferences 372 Centres/Shops 227			



National Totals	
Members	14,448
Volunteers	36,014
Employees	6,234
Conferences	1,063
Centres/Shops	646



# Strategic Plan

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia had all but completed its strategic plan for the next three years in the year under review ready for launch in August 2020.

Across five strategic goals and six long-term objectives the plan lays out a blueprint for the work of the Society for the next three years, but it sets the foundations for the next decade.

The five priority areas are spirituality, advocacy, leadership and governance, working in a federated environment and the sustainability of the organisation in an ever-changing world.

The Plan will continue to support people in their Vincentian spiritual journey through a positive and supportive environment where people are welcomed and feel valued and committed to contribute to our mission.

Our advocacy will influence Australian national priorities by connecting the voice of people experiencing disadvantage with those who can make a difference.

Through leadership and good governance, we will provide the practical support opportunities that allow us to serve local communities.

The Plan also clearly sets out the roles and functions of the National Council and the ways in which it supports the State and Territory Councils in facilitating good works.

Importantly, across these priorities, the National Council has determined measures to gauge our success in achieving the strategic goals.

The Plan is the culmination of nine months' discernment, drawing heavily on Vincentian spirituality. It outlines new horizons for cooperation and collaboration within the Society and with like-minded partners who are committed to bringing about a fairer Australia.

It will bring about a stronger, more integrated Society that, as we enter what might well be the most difficult period in Australia's recent history, positions us to meet the new and uncertain challenges that lie ahead.

Once completed, the full Strategic Plan and the Overview will be available on the St Vincent de Paul National Council's website [here](#).

**Claire Victory**  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT



# Changes to The Rule

## *National Council looking at possible changes to The Rule III*

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council has proposed a number of changes to The Rule Part III in an effort to clarify provisions related to reputational damage.

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

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

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

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

A right of appeal process will also be clarified and will outline the role played by a State or Territory Council and the National Council.

As I write this report, the National Council is planning detailed consultation with the States and Territories and others likely to be affected by the proposed changes before finalising any changes.

**Claire Victory**  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

# National Redress

The National Redress Scheme is a response to the findings of the 2013 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Scheme provides redress to people who were sexually abused as children in institutional settings.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has a long involvement in offering a range of direct support services where children were present. This includes involvement in the operation of such services offered by other Catholic organisations. The latter activities might have seen Society members involved in another organisation's board of management responsible for an institution that delivered services to children.

In the previous reporting period, National Council confirmed an earlier decision, reached in July 2018, that determined the best way for the Society in Australia to participate in the Scheme would be to establish a single legal entity. This decision recognised that one point of contact covering the many Society institutions that offered supports or services to children would make it easier for persons seeking to lodge a potential claim involving one of the Society's institutions.

Under the *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018*, the Society in Australia can join the Scheme as a 'Participating Group'. A Participating Group allows all of the Society's various institutions to be represented in one legal entity.

In July 2019, National Council resolved to establish a company limited by guarantee as the vehicle that represents the Society in Australia within the National Redress Scheme. Preparing a constitution for this entity involved consultation with National Council members and with the State and Territory

Councils. St Vincent de Paul Society National Redress Scheme Limited was registered as a company on 19 March 2020. The company is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission.

Directors of the company are Mr Denis Walsh as Chair, Ms Elizabeth Callaghan and Mr Damian Wallis.

Throughout 2019, considerable effort was made to identify all of the Society's past and present legal entities as well as addresses of properties from which the Society offered a range of supports and services to children aged under 18 years. This research covered the past 90 years. The efforts of the states and territories to assemble this information was extensive.

When an allegation is brought against a Society institution by a Scheme Applicant, it is assessed by the Scheme's Independent Decision Maker. If the Independent Decision Maker determines the allegation is 'reasonably likely' to have occurred, then the Society has agreed to provide to the Applicant one or all of the following:

- (i) access to **counselling services**;
- (ii) a **monetary payment** of up to \$150,000; and
- (iii) a **direct personal response** from the institution responsible for the abuse, where an Applicant wants such response.

Throughout the reporting period a number of agreements about how the Society would respond to monetary payments were developed involving the National, State and Territory Councils. These agreements recognise the Society's first priority is the care of and compassionate response towards Scheme Applicants who make an allegation against the

Society. These agreements cover protocols to be followed in the event that an obligation on a state or territory to pay a claim might bring financial hardship to that jurisdiction.

In June 2020, National Council gave a written assurance to the Minister of the Society's intent to join the Scheme by the end of the year.

At the end of the reporting period, the National Council was finalising all the Scheme and internal documentation that is required to be complete before being provided to the Scheme Operator accompanied by a request to the Minister for Families and Social Services to join the Society to the Scheme.

We are working towards gathering all the necessary signatories to all of the internal documentation by the end of July 2020. This will enable the signed Scheme documents to be submitted.

**Toby oConnor**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



# National Bushfire Response



The Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20 tested the resilience of the Australian community and took a terrible toll physically, emotionally and financially on those living and working in the more than 100 bushfire-affected local government areas. However, the willingness of Vincentian members and volunteers to give a hand up to those who needed help, while often putting their own needs aside, shone through. The generosity of Australians was also much-needed, truly appreciated and heart warming, as was the Australian Bishops' Australia Day long-weekend appeal, the proceeds of which went to bushfire-affected communities.

The conditions leading up to the bushfire were unprecedented, with fires starting in Australia's hottest and driest year on record. Thirty-three lives were lost, over 30 million hectares of land destroyed, nearly 3 billion animals killed or displaced and over 3,000 homes and other buildings destroyed. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were also impacted by the bushfires, particularly in New South Wales.

The economic impact on communities was enormous, with an estimated \$2 billion in insured losses alone. The impact on tourism, hospitality and agriculture is projected to be around \$3.6 billion, with a further \$2 billion in health costs.

The scale and rapid spread of the bushfires dictated an immediate response. In the aftermath of the

**The economic impact on communities was enormous, with an estimated \$2 billion in insured losses alone.**

bushfires, members and volunteers were on the ground offering help to companions through bushfire recovery centres, Vinnies shops and centres and outreach services. Vinnies conferences were actively involved in local community groups and information sessions and worked with their schools, parishes, local councils and land councils to identify what aid was needed, where and how best to distribute it.

In the first four to six weeks after the fires, crisis assistance was directed to impacted households and businesses. Urgent cash payments (\$3,000 Vinnies Bushfire Appeal, \$1,000 Commonwealth Emergency Relief) were made and material assistance with food, water, clothing, bedding and essential items was provided. People who had lost





everything were able to access emergency hotel accommodation or were referred to organisations that could provide crisis accommodation and specialised services.

We recognise that for many people, it will take years to recover and rebuild. The Society's work is far from done and, at various stages throughout the year, a different approach was adopted due to the pandemic. Where we can, members have continued to provide additional support to companions and, for the more complex matters, this may involve specialised assistance through a case worker.

Transitioning to recovery has also meant a shift from assisting individuals to assisting communities, although assisting individuals continues where needed. Members have helped to identify local community needs which vary and range from construction of a local men's shed and community hall to building community resilience through local support groups, online forums, and information sessions on a range of topics. Community grant rounds have also been conducted to identify, assess and respond to these needs.

Through the generosity of everyday Australians, the Society has distributed just over three-quarters (\$19.1 million) of donations received (\$25.2 million). The remaining one-quarter of

donations (\$6.1 million) will be committed to recovery projects through to December 2021. Around 80 percent of additional Commonwealth Emergency Relief funding has also been distributed (\$9.8 million), with the remaining 20 percent to be allocated by year's end (\$2.4 million). In all, an estimated 7,600 people have been assisted.

The Society continues to advocate for changes to responses to natural disasters, including improved coordination and information sharing with other agencies and all levels of government and adopting a case-managed approach so that people only need to seek assistance and tell their stories once.

The Society has given evidence before the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian Bushfire Season 2019-20. Submissions are accessible on the [website](#).

As our members and volunteers are often local people, they will be there for the long haul to provide ongoing emotional support and assistance to help bushfire-affected communities get back on their feet. We thank members and volunteers for their continued generosity of time and spirit to helping Australians in need.

**Rose Beynon**  
NATIONAL POLICY AND RESEARCH DIRECTOR



# Social Justice Report



Even though the Australian Parliament was not sitting for a significant part of the 2019-20 year, much has occurred on the social justice policy front. Government business continued in the form of parliamentary inquiries. Significant policy announcements were also made, often quickly and with limited opportunity for input or feedback. However, the Society made the most of these opportunities to advocate for, and on behalf of, those we assist.

Additionally, the National Council's Social Justice Advisory Committee confirmed its membership, revised its terms of reference and met twice during the financial year.

After consultation with the states and territories, five social justice priority areas were identified and agreed namely:

- Community housing and homelessness (safe and secure homes and communities)
- Newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers
- Low income support (promoting just and equitable welfare and support)
- Long term unemployment and the changing nature of work (enabling economic engagement)
- Personal health including mental health and addiction (health and wellbeing)

In addressing these priority areas, the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with disability have been prioritised.



As asylum seekers and refugees are a priority area – the Vincentian Refugee Network was reconstituted in February 2020. Its membership and terms of reference were finalised and it has been actively engaged in advocating for the rights of people on bridging and temporary visas.

A National Bushfire Taskforce, comprising members from bushfire-affected states and an independent expert, was also established to provide advice to National Council on how best to manage and respond to the bushfires and the reporting of how donated moneys were allocated and spent. This work informed the Society's submission on the Proposed Cross Border Recognition Model For Charitable Fundraisers developed by the Charitable Fundraising National Working Group.

The Society continues to work closely with its key stakeholders including Catholic Social Services Australia, the Australian Council of Social Service, National Shelter, Refugee Council of Australia, Mental Health Australia, Catholic Health Australia, the Salvation Army, UnitingCare Australia, Anglicare Australia and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

The Society enjoys productive working relationships with various ministers' and senators' offices, as well as the Department of Social Services and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. Meeting with ministers and senators provides an opportunity to explain the Society's activities, challenges and policy positions on key social justice matters. This helps to raise the Society's profile, shape public debate and influence government policy direction and funding.

The Society also has representation on the Community Services Advisory Group, managed by the Department of Social Services. In early 2020, the Minister for Families and Social Services sought assistance to establish a small office to provide support to the Emergency Relief National Coordination Group, established to advise on the distribution of Emergency Relief funds directed to address the impact of COVID-19.

All in all, eight submissions were prepared on a range of issues including income support (parliamentary inquiry), the bushfires (parliamentary inquiry and Royal Commission), mental health (Productivity Commission), transitioning from income management to the cashless debit card (Bill), COVID-19 (parliamentary inquiry), housing and homelessness (parliamentary inquiry) and the

2020-21 Budget (The Treasury). The Society was also invited to give evidence before the bushfire inquiry and Royal Commission, the COVID-19 inquiry and the housing and homelessness inquiry. Policy statements were prepared on drug and alcohol testing of income support recipients, expansion of the cashless debit card and repeal of the Medevac legislation.

The Society signed on to various campaigns including ACOSS' Raise the Rate for Good, Everybody's Home Campaign, the Healthy and Affordable Homes Campaign, the Refugee Council of Australia's Nobody's Left Behind Campaign, National Shelter's Renting Campaign and FECCA's National Anti-Racism Strategy.

The Society is a proud sponsor of Anti-Poverty Week and the Everybody's Home Campaign, as well as UNSW/ACOSS' Poverty and Inequality Project.

The Society's advocacy activities and priorities align with, support and action its 2020-22 Strategic Plan. Through these activities, we will continue to build our public profile and advocate for reform of the structural causes of poverty and disadvantage. We are heartened that many of the recommendations in the Senate Committee's final report on income support aligned with the Society's recommendations for change. We also appreciate the significant difference made to the lives of many people through implementation of the JobSeeker supplement, additional Commonwealth Emergency Relief funding for COVID-19 and bushfires and the Drought Community Support Initiative. We await the final reports from the other inquiries and are hopeful that ongoing social justice reform, particularly in the areas of income support, housing and homelessness and long term unemployment, is forthcoming.

It would not be possible to articulate a clear social policy position, develop submissions and make representations to the Australian Government without input and feedback from each of the states and territories. This information is vital because it includes the on the ground experiences of members. In giving evidence before various inquiries, parliamentary representatives have expressed their appreciation for being able to hear these important, first-hand accounts.

We thank our members and staff for their contribution to this important work.

**Rose Beynon**  
NATIONAL POLICY AND RESEARCH DIRECTOR

# Emergency Relief

## *The Emergency Relief National Coordination Group*

On 29 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced an additional \$200 million would be made available for Emergency Relief to meet the expected increase in need for these services resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Emergency Relief National Coordination Group (NCG) was subsequently established to advise the Minister for Families and Communities, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, on the distribution of Emergency Relief funds. The NCG is comprised of leaders in the Emergency Relief sector, including the St Vincent de Paul Society, as well as the Deputy Secretary for Families and Communities of the Commonwealth Department of Social Services.

In addition to being represented on the committee by our CEO Toby oConnor, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council is contracted to provide secretariat services to the NCG. Patrick McKenna was seconded to fill this role in April, from his ordinary duties at St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn as Director of Strategy and Transition.

The NCG has provided advice to Minister Ruston regarding the emerging areas of greatest need for Emergency Relief services. Temporary Visa holders are the main group who require Emergency Relief support at present. Many Temporary Visa holders have lost their jobs and are not eligible for income support—they have no income, and many have no savings. The Minister has provided additional funding for ER providers to reach Temporary Visa holders in line with the recommendations of the NCG.

The NCG is in constant contact with sub-committees in each state and territory to understand the current and emerging needs. The second wave of COVID-19 in Victoria led to additional need for ER services in Greater Melbourne. The NCG provided further advice on this additional need, which was responded to with a recent announcement by Minister Ruston of additional Emergency Relief funding for Greater Melbourne.

The NCG is concerned about the conclusion of the JobKeeper and the JobSeeker Coronavirus Supplement payments, and rental moratoriums. The extension of these schemes is welcome news for Emergency Relief providers, however, the reduction in the amount is expected to lead to increased need for their services.

While the future remains uncertain, we can expect to see further hardship for people who are unable to find employment or are working significantly reduced hours. Our members, volunteers and employees are working hard to provide them with a hand-up, as are Emergency Relief providers across the country.

For further information regarding the NCG, visit [www.dss.gov.au/communities-and-vulnerable-people-programs-services-emergency-relief/the-national-coordination-group](http://www.dss.gov.au/communities-and-vulnerable-people-programs-services-emergency-relief/the-national-coordination-group)

### **Patrick McKenna**

NATIONAL COORDINATOR, COVID-19  
EMERGENCY RELIEF PROGRAM

EMERGENCY RELIEF SUPPORT NATIONAL  
COORDINATION GROUP – CORONAVIRUS  
AND BEYOND



# Drought Report

*No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation, and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.*

Twenty nineteen was one of Australia's driest on record, intensifying one of the most severe droughts of the past century. A core element of the Society's work in 2019-2020 was to respond to the needs of our farming communities. In the three years leading into January 2020, some 33 per cent of Australia and 96 per cent of NSW had a serious or severe lack of rain. The dry conditions were intense and persistent, and the Society remained concerned about the plight of farming households who were facing severely depleted cash flows.

Once again the Society partnered with the Australian Government to deliver the Drought Community Support Initiative, Round 2, a Federal Government funded project that provides a one-off \$3,000 cash payment to farmers, farm workers and farm suppliers and contractors affected by the drought and living in an eligible Local Government Area (LGA).

Farming communities have been significantly hit. The initial request for assistance when funding lines opened in November 2019, saw an unprecedented demand on Society support. By February 2020, just three months after opening applications, the Society had already administered just over \$15M to 5,016 households.

Due to this demand, in February 2020, the Australian Government announced further funding of \$15 million to existing LGAs, and an additional \$15 million for 36 new LGAs administered by the Society under DCSI Round 2. These LGAs opened in March 2020, and by 30 June, the Society had paid out \$3,405,000 in funding to 1,135 households,

alongside \$25,065,000 to 8,355 farming households across existing local government areas.

Whilst the effects of COVID-19 not only impacted the Society's ability to serve in metropolitan areas, the Drought Relief Team felt the impacts of COVID-19 significantly, with our impaired ability to move within regional and remote communities, promoting such essential funding support. Regardless, the National Council Secretariat and Drought Relief Team remained steadfast in its commitment to ensuring all avenues were explored to help promote and administer funding to the most regional and remote parts of our communities. We engaged in creative advertising and radio campaigns, with direct outbound calls also being made to key farming networks, ensuring that farmers across the nation were still aware of their eligibility for this federal government support.

The Drought Relief Team understood that with the impacts of Bushfires, COVID-19 and years of long-term drought, support such as DCSI 2 is essential for regional and remote communities, and for people like Trevor and Susan\* (names changed) the money was more than just cash to pay bills.

*'Thank you so much for your help, we truly do appreciate all that you have done for us. We found asking for help very difficult indeed, but we have been backed into a corner with this drought and have only managed to find one day a week of income for the past six months, it will rain again one day. Until then, once again - THANK YOU.'*

This was a common sentiment echoed by many. The biggest challenge of the DCSI Program has been encouraging farmers to put their hand up for support, with many concerned that there were people far worse off than them.

Overall, whilst the DCSI 2 program extends through to December 2020, at the end of June 2020, the Society had completed payments totally \$28,470,000 to farming households in need.

**Cassandra Bull**

NATIONAL MANAGER DROUGHT RELIEF PROGRAM



# Partner Countries

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia continues to support fellow Vincentians to undertake its work in our partnered countries in the Asia Pacific region through Twinning, Project Support, the Assist-A-Student Program and Emergency Responses.

## Twining

Twining is the direct link between two Conferences or Councils. It promotes spirituality, friendship and an understanding between cultures, and consists of prayer, regular communication and financial support.

There are 1,046 Conferences and Councils in Australia that support overseas Conferences in the Twining program, with 531 Conferences and Councils supporting more than one twin. We assist Vincentians in Cambodia, Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk), India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

## Project Support

Conferences in the Asia Pacific region can request support from their Australian twin through their National Council for a small project to address a specific need in their area.

Two larger projects were funded this year. The Society in Myanmar purchased a unit in Mandalay to provide accommodation for people with family members in hospital nearby. In Myanmar, hospital patients need support to provide meals and to fill prescriptions for medicines as these services are not provided by the hospital. The hostel provides a safe place for family members to stay and seek refuge when supporting hospitalised family members. The Society in Thailand was able to assist Christian Pakistani refugee families through a large project funded by the Society in Australia. The refugees fled to Thailand for protection after facing religious discrimination in Pakistan. Twenty-six small projects were also funded, including milking cows, building latrines, brick making and providing Vincentian branded T-Shirts for the Youth in Kiribati.

The table below summarises the twinning and project funds provided in FY 19-20.

	Twining	Council-to-Council	Christmas and Easter Grants	Projects	Total
Cambodia	\$4,880		\$1,500		\$6,380
FSM (Chuuk)	\$320				\$320
India	\$381,380	\$18,720	\$110,900	\$17,800	\$528,800
Indonesia	\$71,600	\$4,490	\$13,980	\$5,101	\$95,171
Kiribati	\$320				\$320
Lao PDR	\$320				\$320
Myanmar	\$27,040	\$17,900	\$13,950	\$52,560	\$111,450
Philippines	\$78,560	\$7,480	\$23,790		\$109,830
Solomon Islands	\$400		\$400	\$1,839	\$2,639
Sri Lanka	\$1,280	\$2,400	\$200	\$5,556	\$9,436
Thailand	\$40,070	\$5,300	\$13,890	\$30,000	\$89,260
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$606,170</b>	<b>\$56,290</b>	<b>\$178,610</b>	<b>\$112,856</b>	<b>\$953,926</b>



## Assist-a-Student Program

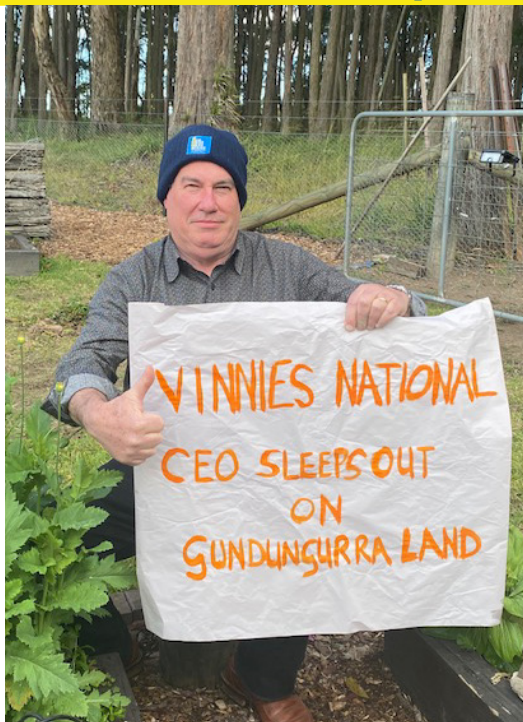
Unique to Australia, the Assist-a-Student Program recognises the importance of education as one of the key planks to help break the cycle of poverty. The National Council commissioned a Review of the AAS Program which was completed in late 2019. The implementation of some of the recommendations was deferred in light of the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The number of students supported under the program was 1,450. This figure is lower than previous years and is due to the timing of payments made (the program runs on a calendar year, not financial year) and the delay in payments for the calendar year 2020, as recommended by the AAS Review but also delayed further by the COVID-19 pandemic which slowed partner country's ability to receive and process student applications. As a small Oceanic country with few extra resources, Kiribati also received \$300 towards administering the AAS Program.

No funds were provided in response to emergencies in FY 19-20.

**Jude Blacklock**  
OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FACILITATOR

# Vinnies CEO Sleepout



**Vinnies CEO  
Sleepout succeeded  
against the odds,  
raising **\$5.7 million**  
for homeless.**

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

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

Originally set to take place in major cities with a focus on rough sleeping, the impact of COVID-19 saw the event revised for its 15th anniversary with participants nominating to sleep in cars, couches and backyards while tuning in for a live-stream hosted by television personality Dr Andrew Rochford. Initial fundraising targets which started out at \$2.5M in April 2020 as Australia grappled with the first wave of COVID were revised upwards as fundraisers saw greater participation and interest in the event. Thirty per cent of 2019 CEO Sleepout participants returned for the 2020 event, raising 45 per cent of total fundraising dollars.

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

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

Bernie Fehon, founder of the Vinnies CEO Sleepout, reflected on how the event has remained true to its original concept while evolving over the past 15 years. "We hear the voice of someone who has experienced homelessness," said Bernie. "Over the years the CEO Sleepout has grown, but all the way through that element has remained consistent."

Mother, Cassie shared her story of caring for two daughters without a stable place to call home. After losing her strongest support network with the passing of her grandparents, Cassie was assisted by the Vinnies team Rozelle to secure social housing after years of moving between accommodation in Sydney's inner west. "When I had a place of my own the weight had been lifted off my shoulders – I don't know what I'd do without Vinnies," said Cassie.

Closing the night with a live cross to Adelaide, Nick Reade, CEO of Bank SA, was named the highest national fundraiser with over \$229,000 – earning the highly coveted pillow sponsored by The Australian.

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

To view the 2020 event livestream, please visit [live.createengage.com.au/vinniesceosleepout2020/index.html](https://live.createengage.com.au/vinniesceosleepout2020/index.html)

Register to take part in the 2021 Vinnies CEO Sleepout which will be held on 17 June 2021 at [www.ceosleepout.org.au](https://www.ceosleepout.org.au).



# Communications Report



The communications work of the National Council is largely focused on promoting strategic planning goals with strong attention on the Society's national social policy advocacy work. We do this through media and stakeholder engagement including distribution across the Society through State and Territory Council communication networks; within the broad network of Catholic communications outlets, including diocesan newspapers; major metropolitan media outlets; the other major charities; with other like-minded advocacy organisations; and with relevant Federal political offices.

The year under review saw the publication of 56 media releases and a number of opinion pieces on issues including housing and homelessness, income support, asylum seekers and refugees, racism, poverty and inequality, mental health, natural disaster response, response to COVID-19, religious freedom, cashless debit card, affordable energy and a range of environmental issues.

Both the National President Claire Victory, and the CEO Toby oConnor responded to requests for interviews from mainstream media outlets including ABC Radio National, ABC TV 7:30, The Australian and other major newspapers, and regular chats on 2GB's Sunday Nights with Rev Bill Crews.

## *Publications*

**eNewsletter:** Regular electronic updates about the work being conducted by National Council distributed to national, state and territory presidents and their councils, CEOs and their staff.

**The Record:** Our national magazine celebrating the work of members and volunteers across all states and territories. It focuses on our social policy advocacy; Vincentian spirituality; developments in governance; leadership; and the sustainability of the organisation.

**National Overview:** Annual update on the work of the National Council and its Secretariat, including national statistics and financial statements.

The National Council's Secretariat curates and distributes a **daily media clipping** summary across the Society.

In addition, **regular newsletters** are distributed by the Overseas Development Program Facilitator and the National Marketing team.

**Judith Tokley**  
NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

# Organisation Policies

Following the review of the National Council's policies and procedures, the need to put in place sound national governance documents was highlighted.

Accordingly, the National CEO developed a framework and a process within which strategies, policies, procedures and guidelines relevant to both National Council and the National Council Secretariat could be developed and endorsed.

A matrix was prepared that identified the documentation to be formulated, together with priorities, policy status and approval mechanisms.

Board of Governance policies and procedures, including the Board's charter, director's obligations, delegations and meeting arrangements, were given high priority – the final documentation for these initiatives were formally endorsed by the Board. In late 2019, a technical writer was engaged to assist with the completion of the suite of documents nominated in the matrix. Almost 50 draft documents have been prepared to date, which are the subject of consultation, or are to be considered by National Council for approval, or where appropriate, the National CEO. Key policies such as the Whistle blower Policy have been endorsed by the National Council, and the Privacy Policy and Safeguarding Policy will be completed in the weeks ahead.

Like most areas in the Society, COVID-19 has required significant attention, and additional documentation has been prepared such as a COVID Safety Plan and documents relating to working from home arrangements.

Those policies and procedures that have national significance are completed and endorsed by National Council will be placed in the Society's website.

**Peter Brady**  
TECHNICAL WRITER





# National Statement of Comprehensive Income 2019–20

The Society's financial accounting is done primarily at the State and Territory level, where the various incorporated entities function. This statement presents an amalgamated financial view of these entities.

	Revenue \$m	Operating Expenses \$m	Net surplus/(deficit) \$m
<b>COMMUNITY SERVICES</b>			
Aged Care	140.3	134.0	6.3
Community Housing	22.7	22.8	(0.1)
Disability Services	65.8	60.3	5.5
Help for People in Crisis	24.8	71.0	(46.2)
Home assist services	130.3	100.4	29.9
Homeless Services	80.4	97.0	(16.6)
Accommodation and Support Services	35.8	39.0	(3.2)
Migrants and Refugees	0.4	1.2	(0.8)
Drought Disaster Recovery and Relief	30.2	31.7	(1.5)
Other Natural Disaster Recovery and Relief	26.6	22.6	4.0
Overseas Development	1.2	1.2	(0.0)
Youth Services	0.3	2.1	(1.8)
<b>Total Community Services</b>	<b>558.8</b>	<b>583.3</b>	<b>(24.5)</b>
<b>SUPPORTING SERVICES</b>			
Fundraising	58.7	11.3	47.4
Operational Support Services	20.2	22.8	(2.2)
Retail Operations	171.4	138.5	32.9
<b>Total Supporting Services</b>	<b>250.3</b>	<b>172.6</b>	<b>77.7</b>
<b>SHARED SERVICES</b>			
Management and Administration Services	22.5	24.9	(2.4)
Finance Services	8.9	10.8	(1.9)
Human Resource Services	0.1	10.0	(9.9)
Information & Communications Technology Services	-	17.0	(17.0)
Legal and Compliance Services	0.1	2.2	(2.1)
<b>Total Shared Services</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>64.9</b>	<b>(33.3)</b>
<b>OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>			
Reclassification adjustment on sale of available for sale financial assets	-	0.1	(0.1)
Net changes in fair value of available for sale financial assets	(1.3)	1.7	(3.0)
<b>Total other comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>(1.3)</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>(3.1)</b>
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>839.4</b>	<b>822.6</b>	<b>16.8</b>





**St Vincent de Paul Society**

NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc.

*good works*

Responsibility for this document rests with the  
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#### **PRIVACY STATEMENT**

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

#### **NATIONAL COUNCIL OFFICE**

PO BOX 243, Deakin West ACT 2600  
Phone: 02 6202 1200  
Fax: 02 6285 0159  
Email: [admin@svdp.org.au](mailto:admin@svdp.org.au)