



the Record

Spring 2014



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

When we see our neighbours suffering, we will always try to assist,
no matter who they are or how they arrived on our doorstep.

PAGES 16-24



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

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

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

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The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia wishes to acknowledge 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.

Available online:
www.vinnies.org.au



Car park hunger

Tattoos and paunches
school kids on skateboards
4wds and Beemers
charity bins overflowing.
A topless man shuffles into Coles
The Big Issue seller is liked and avoided.
Buskers who specialize with the night
streetlights mooning the spaces that never close.
Each day is a rush to pick a few things up
keeping busy with baskets, not trolleys.
Tension builds after school pick-ups –
snarls at exits, windscreens for protection.
The day-before-public-holiday-gridlock
a line of drivers stare resolutely ahead
refusing to make eye contact. Like shoals of fish
other drivers angle in.
Barometers of wealth in a trickle down
economy. Each car space equals a business case
equals a Range Rover forcing its way through.
We lock our cars with a backward flick of the wrist
hungering for a quick exit, settling for a close park.

Brendan Ryan
Victoria

This poem was first published in
Eureka Street (www.eureka.com.au)



Australia

In the wide brown land
of desert, green and sea,
may the sun's long stand
unfold your mystery.
May we see more
than a shadow of your face,
with grateful awe,
in our own large space.
May the waves that crash
on the homely sand,
and the trees that thrash
at the wind's command,

and the delicate flowers
and the jagged hills,
show the underlying power
more clearly still,
and may that vision
of constructive force
inspire our strong connection,
so that our lives endorse
your work and harmony.
Australia my then be
a green and desert place
that better shows your face.

Reg Naulty

FRONT COVER: Image of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council
Social Justice Dairy in 2013. www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au ©ISTOCK.COM/WORAPUT

IN THIS ISSUE

2 POETRY

Inspirational poems.

4 FRONTLINES

From the National President Anthony Thornton.

5 NEWS IN BRIEF

The latest Society news, including Commissioning Masses held for two State Presidents for the Society in Queensland and Victoria in July and the establishment of new Vincentian Networks.

6-7 HOME TRUTHS

By John Falzon

It's always the big lies that must be tackled first. Otherwise the other lies look like the truth writes St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Chief Executive, Dr John Falzon.

8 PROFILE

State President of the Society in Victoria, Michael Liddy reflects on his time in the role so far and his plans to consult widely and wisely with members, volunteers and staff.

9 DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

By Graham West

St Vincent de Paul Society Vice President explains the concept of Justice Reinvestment and how the Society came to be involved in a partnership with the Indigenous community in Bourke, NSW.

10-11 TAKING A STAND

By Misha Coleman

The Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce wants an independent Commissioner appointed to be the guardian of children in detention; a person who will make decisions in the 'best interests of the child'.

12-13 ALTERNATIVE POLICY

By Julian Burnside

The leading QC and human rights advocate says he does not support an open borders policy, rather initial detention for people who arrive without papers limited to one month, for preliminary health and security checks.

14-15 TURNING POINT

By John Menadue

The Patron of the Asylum Seekers' Centre in Sydney calls on refugee advocates to reconsider their total opposition to transfers and regional processing.

16-24 VINCENTIAN REFUGEE NETWORK

Members of the Society's Vincentian Refugee Network provide unique insight into how Vincentians across the country assist asylum seekers and respectfully advocate on their behalf.

25 FROM THE ARCHIVES

By Michael Moran

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia archivist finds historical accounts of the Society's efforts to embrace diversity in times gone by.

26-27 VIOLENCE AND GENDER

National Research Officer, Rik Sutherland explains how intimate partner violence does not affect everyone equally and why the Society is calling for a national plan on gender equality to combat domestic violence.

28-29 DIVERSE NEEDS

By Sue Carlile

The Chief Executive Officer of Family Access Network provides an overview of a ground-breaking service that has filled a gap in specialist support services for young people at risk of homelessness in Melbourne.

30-31 ENCOUNTER

Participants in the Society's 2014 Encounter Program to the Philippines at Easter time share their experiences and reflect on their own commitment to service.

32-33 BOOK REVIEW

By Andrew Hamilton SJ

A review of two books; the first about the struggle to save St Bridgid's, a Victorian Western District church from decommissioning, and the second about the Irish immigrants who built the church.

34-35 REFLECTION

Homily delivered by Bishop Vincent Long OFMConv, Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne, at a prayer service during the Refugee March on Palm Sunday.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Let's welcome the stranger at every turn

In this Embracing Diversity issue of The Record it is our pleasure to bring you articles from high-profile refugee advocates such as Julian Burnside QC and John Menadue AO, in addition to a nine-page report from our very own Vincentian Refugee Network (VRN). The VRN is coordinated by the Society's National Research Officer, Rik Sutherland, and there are efforts afoot to set up similar networks on a host of other social justice topics. See page seven for more details.

As Karenna Alexander from the Society in NSW mentions in her piece, to discuss immigration policy we must firstly acknowledge that the situation has been changing at a remarkable rate. For example, on 25 September, 2014, the government announced it had struck a deal with the Palmer United Party that will more than likely see the reintroduction of TVPs and a new visa called a safe haven enterprise visa

(SHEV). Neither would allow for permanent settlement in Australia, leaving refugees in a state of uncertainty about their futures, and unable to reunite with their families.

On a tragic note, and as indication of the complications that arise from off-shore processing, on 5 September, 2014, a 24-year-old asylum seeker, Hamid Kehazaei, died in a Brisbane hospital, after developing a severe infection on Manus Island after he cut his foot. Vigils were held across the country to mark the young man's tragic death.

At the time of going to print, the so-called 'Cambodian deal' is imminent, and there are grave concerns about the human rights record of Cambodia and other countries Australia has entered into agreements with. For instance, there are real fears for some detainees who may encounter persecution because homosexuality is illegal in Papua New Guinea.

The Embracing Diversity issue of The Record also includes articles on the topic of embracing gender equality, as well as racial and cultural differences. We invite you to read the words of your fellow Vincentians and human rights advocates with an open heart. ♦

A voice for the voiceless

BY ANTHONY THORNTON

Following the 2014 Federal Budget we are deeply concerned that we are going to witness a ramping up of inequality in Australia.

We will do all that we can to give people a hand up. But as Blessed Frederic has taught us: 'Charity may heal the wounds but it does not stop the blows.'

We need to gather stories from the people we assist. By speaking the truth about poverty and inequality in prosperous Australia we can advocate for changes to the way society and the economy are organised. We want poverty, homelessness and marginalisation reduced rather than increased.

As the groundbreaking 1996 Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement argued:

In the main, people are poor not because they are lazy or lacking in ability or because they are unlucky. They are poor because of the way society, including its economic system, is organised.

Our people are routinely blamed for their poverty and marginalisation. The lies told about them, however, will be drowned out by the truth told by them.

As The Rule reminds us: 'The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.'

We are therefore putting out a call throughout the Society for stories from the front lines. We are aiming to publish a report on poverty and inequality in Australia before the end of the year. To make this possible, we are seeking your help in gathering stories and case studies from the people we assist. If



you would like to join the fight against inequality by collecting a story or case study, here is an easy guide:

The privacy of everyone we assist is of paramount importance. We will not breach anyone's privacy through the gathering of these stories.

Ask the person if it is ok with them for the Society to tell a part of their story so that we can advocate for changes to the way our society and economy are organised.

Note down some of the most striking facts about their condition, respectfully asking for information if they have agreed to provide it and as long as they are comfortable.

Significant facts might include:

- The number and ages of the people in their household,
- Household income
- Cost of housing
- Adequacy and security of housing
- Type of employment or Social Security benefit
- If they are comfortable, they might also be invited to share some of their insights such as:
 - Biggest pressures
 - Greatest fears
 - Deepest hopes

We would also love to know whether there are government policies that have helped their situation or government policies that have made their situation worse.

Finally, what would they like government to do to make their life better?

If you can help us by gathering material I would be very grateful. This is a wonderful opportunity for all Vincentians to get involved in our advocacy efforts.

Please send all notes to:

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PO Box 243
Deakin West, ACT 2600

or:

research@svdp.org.au

or:

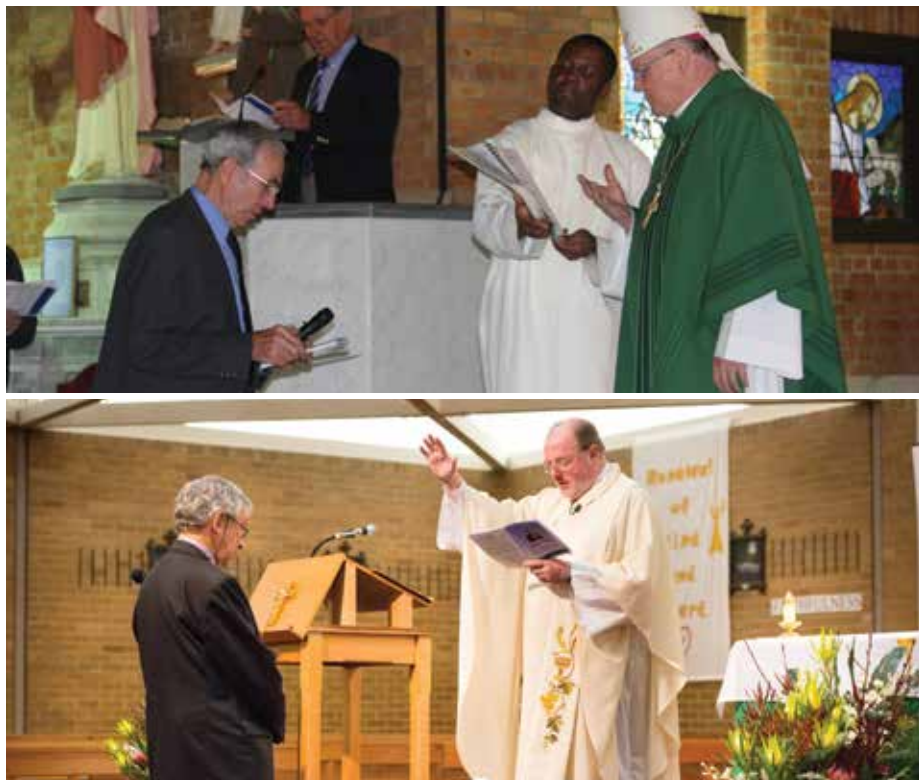
Fax (02) 6285 0159

If you have any enquiries Rik can also be contacted on (02) 6202 1200. ♦

Anthony Thornton is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Commissioning Masses held in two states



Top: Queensland's new St Vincent de Paul Society President John Forrest at his Commissioning Mass at St Brigid's Church, Red Hill, on 12 July 2014. **Bottom:** Victoria's new St Vincent de Paul Society President Michael Liddy at his Commissioning Mass at Ss Peter & Paul Parish, Doncaster East, on 15 July 2014.

In July, two Commissioning Masses were held for the newest state-based members of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia. Both masses were well-attended by family and friends, members from the Society's National Council, State Councils and staff.

On Saturday 12 July 2014, John Forrest was commissioned as the new State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Queensland. Mr Forrest's Commissioning Mass was held at St Brigid's Church, Red Hill. Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge was principal celebrant at the Mass, assisted by the Society's spiritual advisor Fr Ray Kearney and Jubilee Parish assistant priest Fr Stanley Orji. Mr Forrest told the congregation the Commissioning Mass was a celebration of the spirituality and

fraternity that underpins the Society. 'It is a gathering of the Vincentian family which is the Society ... a Society of which I am proud to be a member', Mr Forrest said.

On Tuesday 15 July 2014, Michael Liddy was commissioned as the new State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria. Mr Liddy's Commissioning Mass was held at Ss Peter & Paul Parish, Doncaster East and conducted by the Society's spiritual advisor, Reverend Monsignor Tony Ireland, who was assisted by Reverend Bruce Duncan CSsR and Reverend Bill Gill PP. Mr Liddy extended his appreciation to everyone attending the mass and gave thanks for the love, support and confidence shown in him to lead the St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria over the next four years. ♦

Vincentian Networks to be established in 2014

As a membership-based organisation, it is in the St Vincent de Paul Society's interest to promote participation of its members in the sharing of expertise and perspectives, engagement in specific interests, and communication of news and information.

This is expressed in the National Strategic plan objectives:

- 1.3 Growing a committed, active and skilled membership
- 2.1 Providing ongoing support to members as they serve in hope
- 3.2 Informed by the experience of our members, actively and passionately speaking out on behalf of the people we serve

The world today has been described as a 'network society', where the sharing of information and perspectives is a key element in inclusion and participation.

New technologies greatly facilitate communication between people in different areas and enable more effective and efficient sharing of information and ideas. Such capabilities are widely available and accessible and can be operated at low cost with appropriate levels of access and security.

The National Council has approved the establishment of Vincentian Networks for subjects relevant to the life of the Society, especially, but not exclusively, in the area of advocacy.

These Networks are open to any member of the Society.

The Networks will not have the status of Advisory Committees but they will informally feed information and perspectives to National Council on matters in which members of the Society might have special expertise or interest, or about which members have well formed and articulated views based on their experience of serving the poor.

continued on page 8 ►

The Big Lie

BY DR JOHN FALZON

It's always the big lie that must be tackled first. Otherwise the other lies look like the truth.

Terra nullius is the big lie, for example, that allows all the other lies that justify the invasion and colonisation of Australia.

Similarly, I recently read an apologist for the continued oppression of Palestinians reciting the big lie that 'there's never been a Palestine'.

The big lie that the government's review of welfare is predicated on is that 'welfare' (read 'government' or 'social spending') is the problem and the market is the solution.

It reminds me of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's observation that 'Society itself is responsible for the calamity against which it then offers itself as a remedy'.

Pope Francis also has something to say about this:

Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting.

When you've got a rich country like ours 'unable' to afford to ensure that the more than 100,000 people experiencing homelessness or the more than 200,000 people on the waiting list for social housing have a place to call home, it is not a misfortune or a mistake. It is the sound of the excluded still waiting.



When you've got more than 700,000 people unemployed and around 900,000 underemployed, on top of those who are set to lose their jobs due to company closures, the dismembering of the public service and government cuts to social spending—that is also the sound of the excluded still waiting. Let us not forget the woeful inadequacy of the Newstart payment, at only 40 per cent of the minimum wage. Neither let us forget the single mums who were forced onto the Newstart payment at the beginning of last year, and let us not forget the working poor, for there are some who would like to squeeze them even more by reducing the minimum wage and taking away what little rights they have.

When you've got David Gonski, not generally seen as representing

The long, fruitless wait of the excluded for some of the wealth, some of the resources, some of the hope, to trickle down is one of the most audacious and sadly successful con jobs in modern history.

the vanguard of the working class, working alongside his fellow review panellists to recommend a package of education funding reforms to address the outrageous inequality that besmirches

education funding in Australia, and then the government does a triple back-flip and declares it is not committed to seeing this redistribution of resources through—once again, you loudly hear the sound of the excluded still waiting.

The long, fruitless wait of the excluded for some of the wealth, some of the resources, some of the hope, to trickle down is one of the most audacious and sadly successful con jobs in modern history. It is not misfortune. It is not a mistake. It is certainly not, as perversely asserted by those who put the boot in, the fault of the excluded themselves! Rather, it is an attack, sometimes by omission as well as by commission, against ordinary people who are made to bear the burden of inequality.

As Pope Frances points out:

As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills.

That is why there is absolutely nothing unusual about understanding this as an issue of class. And why Warren Buffett was quite correct when he said: 'There's class warfare all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning.'

If the Budget and subsequent government comments are anything to go by, the government not only refuses to reduce inequality, it actually wants to take from the poor to give to the rich.

We will not help young people into jobs by making them live on fresh air and sunshine for six months of the year. We will not help them into jobs by making them go to charities. We will not help people living with a disability into jobs by reducing their income.

We have moved to a position where we condemn someone for not being able to get up the stairs. Some might feel good about putting the boot in but if we really want to increase employment participation—whether for young people, older unemployed people, people with a disability, single mums or any other group that is locked out of the labour market—then we will honestly start looking at problems in the labour market and set about addressing its incapacities rather than pretending that the incapacity, or unwillingness, lies with the individual.

We will build ramps rather than condemning people for not being able to get up the stairs. And we won't

sanctimoniously go on about the ladder of opportunity while kicking the ladder away!

The simple truth is that behavioural approaches will not solve structural problems.

We do not have a 'welfare spending crisis'. We spend the second lowest amount amongst the industrialised nations. We are not in the throes of a fiscal crisis, but if we venture down the path of US-style austerity we will be staring down the barrel of a social crisis.

As the 1975 Henderson Report on Poverty found: 'If poverty is seen as a result of structural inequality within society, any serious attempt to eliminate poverty must seek to change those conditions which produce it.'

And as the groundbreaking 1996 Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement argued: 'In the main, people are poor not because they are lazy or lacking in ability or because they are unlucky. They are poor because of the way society, including its economic system, is organised.'

If we, as a society, really want to address the causes of poverty and inequality instead of, for example, extending Compulsory Income Management, which is inherently disempowering and humiliating, we would be guaranteeing income adequacy, housing security, education, health and, now here's an idea ... jobs!

It is fascinating that the apologists for inequality love to pretend that, with Margaret Thatcher, 'It is our job to glory in inequality and see that talents and abilities are given vent and expression for the benefit of us all.' Inequality is never something to glory in. The perpetuation of inequality is a national disgrace, a cause of deep shame. The face of inequality is the life-expectancy gap between

We will not help young people into jobs by making them live on fresh air and sunshine for six months of the year.

the colonised and the colonisers. The face of inequality is the severe mental illness that we are systematically subjecting children to in immigration detention. The face of inequality is the family using their stovetop once a fortnight to keep their energy costs down, as one Vincentian shared with me recently. Or the child who cannot go on the school excursion and doesn't even ask her mum because she doesn't want to make it hard for her when she explains that they can't afford it.

Sometimes, it seems that the apologists for inequality, in a neat little version of their own big lie, purposely confuse inequality with *diversity*. They say, for example, that the objective of increasing equality means that we would want everyone to be the same! Or that, for example, the goal of equality is ridiculous because we can't all be Olympic athletes or Nobel Laureates. What they are really alluding to is diversity and diversity is something that we should glory in, celebrate, never be afraid of. Diversity is not something to be 'tolerated', as if someone who is different to me should be grateful because I deign to 'accept' them! Diversity is something that, on the contrary, thrives where there is a shared dream of equality, where each of us is made to feel that we can contribute to society according to our strengths and abilities, in the knowledge that society will care for us and provide us with what we need to be, in the beautiful words of St Iranaeus, 'fully human, fully alive'. ♦

Dr John Falzon is Chief Executive of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council. This is an abridged version of an article first published on www.eurekastreet.com.au

New face on National Council

Name:

Michael Liddy

Position:

Victorian State President

Hometown:

Doncaster East, in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. My wife Helen and I moved from Sydney to Melbourne 28 years ago.

Down time:

I enjoy gardening, photography (I'm an amateur at both) and travel.

How did you first become involved with the Society?

I nominated the Society as one of the things I might like to become involved in when the Donvale Parish conducted a time and talent survey. The Conference was re-formed in 2000, at which time I joined.

Describe your experiences of being a Conference member?

Visitations to people who seek our assistance are at the core of my reason for being in the Society. The visitations are both challenging and rewarding. I'm conscious of the need to listen to what our 'friends in need' say, in order to better understand their needs and their situation, whilst respecting their privacy.

Our Conference isn't asked to do many visitations, so we are active in other ways: helping with Saturday evening meals at Ozanam House in North Melbourne; helping out in the Vinnies Shop at Mitcham on Saturdays (although the Shop closed late last year); and helping with visitations in South Melbourne, as part of a much wider Inner Suburbs visitation program in the Eastern Central Council.

Our Conference organised its second community/school sleepout this year, as one means of raising funds to support our welfare assistance.



effectively to the needs of those who seek our assistance, especially those whose disability or adverse position in society is ongoing.

What have been the highlights of your time as Victorian President so far?

It is very early days, but working with State Council to implement a governance framework and to develop our Strategic Direction and Strategic Plan for the next five years are two of the major tasks. We have made a start, but we have lots more work ahead of us, including the need to communicate widely, wisely and well with all our Victorian members, volunteers and employees.

Where would you like to see the Society in five years?

I would like to see a far more just and caring society, particularly in respect of asylum seekers and our Indigenous peoples. Our Society is not the only advocate for big changes in how Australia treats both groups, but we must continue our advocacy. Concurrently, we need to find more effective ways of getting the ear of governments so that their treatment of the poor, needy and disadvantaged improves from where it is now. ♦

What challenges do members and supporters of the Society face?

Trying to provide a 'hand up' rather than a 'hand out' is a challenge in many visitations. I'm not sure that we advocate effectively enough, or that we have a sufficient understanding of advocacy—the why? How? And to whom?

Another challenge is continuing to have sufficient experienced members, of all ages, to enable the Society to respond

◀ continued from page 5

Call-out for Vincentian networks

Networks might be convened on issues such as:

Economics	Taxation Reform	Infrastructure	Regional Development	Climate Change
Problem Gambling	Substance Abuse	Welfare Reform	Prisoners	Sole Parents
Youth unemployment	Employment Participation	Inequality	Housing and homelessness	Mental Health
Diversity	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island self-determination	Juvenile Justice	Justice Reinvestment	Literacy
Education	Spiritual poverty	Global poverty	Catholic social teaching	Rural Poverty

If you are interested in joining a Vincentian Network to be convened on any of the issues outlined above please write to the National Council's Office Manager at PO Box 243 Deakin West ACT 2600 or admin@sudp.org.au

Breaking the cycle through Justice Reinvestment

BY GRAHAM WEST

When it comes to offending we know that engagement with the justice system is a good indicator that you will return. We also know that young Aboriginal males have a higher risk of coming to the attention of the justice system, particularly in communities that also experience isolation and limited job prospects. A young person's risk is also greater if they have had a parent in custody or they have experienced out of home care.

Sadly, there is no magic bullet to solving this problem, nor is it simple to identify the single cause of offending—indeed it has been described as a ‘wicked problem’—but the concept of justice reinvestment just might help.

Justice Reinvestment is not a single program, nor is it simply a government project. It is a philosophy that seeks to respond to issues in a community that lead to offending, not simply picking up the pieces after. It also seeks to involve the community in the solution, not just the offender.

For example, if a significant problem that is leading to offending is failure to thrive at school, leading to skipping class and missing out on an education, then the answer is not prison but creating tailored schooling options and working with the community to value education. This might include strategies as diverse as providing literacy programs for parents so that children see the importance of learning.



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Similarly, if there is a drug problem leading to crime, tackling the drug problem as a community will lead to longer term results than simple enforcement action.

As part of a justice reinvestment framework, the community identifies the underlying causes of offending, establishes programs and strategies to address these, implements monitoring of results, and, unlike most programs, modifies the program in response to changing needs based on evidence.

The reinvestment part comes from the recognition that it is cheaper in the long term to take a percentage of funds currently spent on enforcement (additional funding) and apply it to solutions leading to lower rates of offending, and therefore lower costs to the community. This also has the effect of making a community safer.

The other essential part of a justice reinvestment framework is that we work with the community for the long haul, not just until the symptoms are gone, but until it is sustainable. The concept has been accepted in the UK and is championed in the USA, where the costs of incarceration were threatening to bankrupt states and take from communities generations of young men and women, leading to a further cycle of offending.

Justice Reinvestment is not a soft on crime approach—there will always be

a need for some offenders to be removed from the community—but is based on the concept of fencing the cliff rather than buying more ambulances for those who fall.

That is why it is particularly exciting that the St Vincent de Paul Society has partnered with the Bourke community, (which has a high per capita rate of youth

incarceration) to explore ways to make such an approach work.

The Justice Reinvestment Project is an initiative of the Bourke Aboriginal Community Working Party and Just Reinvest NSW established in partnership with various Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, government and non-government, community, corporate and philanthropic organisations.

The Society will fund the position of Bourke Reinvestment Officer auspiced by the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), with members of the Bourke Aboriginal community encouraged to apply.

A separate but complementary project on the subject of Justice Reinvestment is being conducted by Ben Schokman from the Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC) and is supported by the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF). This project came about separately, but will work closely with the Bourke initiative. The support of VFFF is matched by Dusseldorp Forum.

These projects will not be easy but it is a hopeful start in the right direction, and is an example that no work of charity is foreign to the St Vincent de Paul Society when it leads people out of poverty. ♦

Graham West is a Vice President on the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

Church leaders provide solutions to 'cruelty'

BY MISHA COLEMAN

As the Australian Catholic Bishops recently stated, our asylum seeker policy 'has about it a cruelty that does no honour to our nation'.

The Australian Council of Churches' Refugee Taskforce agrees.

With senior members from nine Christian churches, the Taskforce released *Protecting the Lonely Children* in July this year, a report which focusses on the plight of unaccompanied children who seek asylum and refuge in Australia.

Unaccompanied children are asylum seekers with no adult to look after them or advocate for their needs. In Australia, this role is currently held by the Minister for Immigration, who is their guardian, judge and jailer—a glaring conflict of interest.

The Taskforce wants an independent Commissioner to be the guardian of these children and make decisions in the 'best interests of the child'.

Sr Brigid Arthur, one of the Taskforce patrons and a regular visitor to the detention centres, told the ABC recently, 'As a nation we are actually condoning the fact that we imprison kids ... for an indefinite length of time. That seems to be abusive and it is state sanctioned.'

The *Protecting the Lonely Children* report makes a strong case that the Australian Government is consistently failing to provide institutional child protection and welfare, thus causing individual and generational damage.

Children who are on their own can't be expected to navigate our complex systems but the Report says they are being thrown into hostile processes, which lead to what can be a life or death decision, with no support.



The Taskforce recommends that publicly funded legal assistance is reinstated for all children and that unaccompanied children are given adequate opportunity to have their claims considered.

As Australia doesn't have a national policy framework and care framework for this cohort, highly traumatised children are subject to a 'care lotto', where a child in rural Victoria might experience isolation and a lack of autonomy or access to services, while one in Brisbane might experience a complex 24/7 care model and excellent support.

The Taskforce reiterates what has been in the media recently regarding the disjuncture between the Immigration Department's policy and procedures and how unaccompanied children are being treated in detention centres.

Doctors on Christmas Island have noted that children are frequently arriving with a history of rape, torture and trauma, and also face high rates of mental illness such as depression,

The Taskforce wants an independent Commissioner to be the guardian of these children and make decisions in the 'best interests of the child'.

anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, yet 'there is minimal preventative care and no regular monitoring of child health'.

The Report recommends that unaccompanied children are immediately removed from closed detention on Christmas Island and on-shore detention centres, and that accountable and transparent reporting is instituted so that we know what is happening there—rather than relying on leaked reports and whistleblowers.

Finally, the Taskforce calls for the Australian Government to immediately end the forcible removal of unaccompanied children to off-shore detention where they are under the responsibility of that host nation's legal system.



Leadership Awards open for nominations

The Australian Centre for Leadership for Women has announced nominations are now open for its annual awards recognising the contribution individuals and businesses have made to creating sustainable initiatives to empower women.

St Vincent de Paul Society is a sponsor of the Sustaining Women's Empowerment in Communities and Organisations (SWECO) 2015 Awards and Vice President Graham West sits on the judging panel for the Awards.

This year the Award categories have broadened to honour male

and female individuals, groups and organisations who have developed a sustainable initiative to:

- i) empower women in a community or organisation in Australia;
- ii) empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in a community or organisation in Australia;
- iii) empower women in a community or organisation abroad.

The St Vincent de Paul Society encourages its members and supporters to nominate people and organisations for the SWECO 2015 Awards before applications close on 29 November, 2014. ♦

For more information go to www.leadershipforwomen.com.au

Dr Peter Catt, the Anglican Dean of Brisbane who chairs the Taskforce, told *The Guardian Australia* he could not understand how Australia could send children overseas 'without knowing who is responsible for them, who is caring for them and who has their interests at heart'.

Pope Francis talks about how we have 'fallen into a globalization of indifference. We are accustomed to the suffering of others, it doesn't concern us, it's none of our business.'

The Churches Refugee Taskforce makes a powerful case for what is terribly wrong with how we are treating unaccompanied children. It provides compassionate and just solutions so that we can 'become the Australia we always thought we were'. ♦

Misha Coleman is Executive Officer of the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce.

For more information about the Taskforce visit www.australianchurchesrefugeetaskforce.com.au (Full report and responses at: www.australianchurchesrefugeetaskforce.com.au/category/campaigns/all-the-lonely-children/)

Domestic violence to remain on the agenda

The reporting date for the Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia has been postponed from 27 October, 2014 until 2 March, 2015. The Society's National Research Officer, Rik Sutherland said the postponement was not necessarily negative if it ensured debate about domestic violence and its damaging impact on individuals and the community at large was kept on the political agenda for longer.

In August 2014 the Society made a submission to the Inquiry which explained why it is a strongly gendered crime. In that submission, Vinnies argued 'we will not see real change until we as a society address the cause of domestic violence, such as, stereotypes and attitudes about gender' and called on the government to commit to a National Plan on Gender Equality.

Since this time shocking incidents of domestic violence have received

great media scrutiny and resulted in important commentary about the topic being aired. For example, the results of the third National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey commissioned by VicHealth and released on September 17, 2014, generated much discussion and outcry. The survey of 17,500 Australians' attitudes found 68 per cent believe that violence results from men being unable to control their anger and that so many in our community (43 per cent) think men rape women because they can't control their sexual urges. The following day VicHealth CEO, Jerril Rechter wrote in an opinion piece in *The Age* where she wrote: 'allow me to make it very clear. Violence is a choice, not an instinct. It's never excusable, under any circumstance'. ♦

Read about the Society's submission to the Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia and how the issue is strongly linked to damaging gender stereotypes on pages 26 and 27 of *The Record*.

Australia, boat people, offshore processing: some alternatives

BY JULIAN BURNSIDE AO QC

At the time of the Tampa episode in 2001, Australia introduced a system of sending boat people to other countries for processing. 'Offshore processing' does not quite capture what this involves. In fact, boat people who arrive in Australia and seek asylum are forcibly evicted from Australia and have their asylum claims processed in that other country, but it is made clear that those who are found to be refugees will not be resettled in Australia.

It is significant that the two places which have been chosen for this role are Nauru and Manus Island. Nauru is a Pacific Island republic. Its land area is a total of 21 square kilometres. It has a population of 10,000 people. It does not have an adequate supply of food or water for its own people. Manus Island is part of Papua New Guinea. It is a small island north of Port Moresby. The area of Manus Island is about 2,100 square kilometres; its population is about 55,000 people. It is mountainous and covered in jungle.

So that the size of these places makes sense, you could fit two instances of Manus Island into the Greater Melbourne area. Nauru would fit into the Greater Melbourne area about 260 times over. Conditions in Manus and Nauru are harsh. Their use was heralded as part of a policy of deterrence, so the harshness is intentional. The idea of deterrence is that, faced with the choice of facing persecution at home, or the risk of



I do not advocate an open borders policy. Initial detention for people who arrive without papers is reasonable. But it should be limited to one month, for preliminary health and security checks.

drowning followed by the harshness of Manus or Nauru, would-be asylum seekers will prefer to face the Taliban or the genocidal regime in Sri Lanka rather than head to Australia. It may not be our vision of ourselves that we look nastier than the Taliban, but that is the logic of deterrence.

The Pacific Solution costs us about \$5 billion a year.

There is an easy alternative.

I do not advocate an open borders policy. Initial detention for people who arrive without papers is reasonable. But it should be limited to one month, for preliminary health and security checks. After that, release them on interim visas with four crucial conditions:

- they must stay in touch with the Department until their refugee status has been determined;
- they are allowed to work or study;
- they are allowed access to Centrelink and Medicare benefits; and



LEFT: ©ISTOCK.COM/STEVE DEBENPORT RIGHT: ©ISTOCK.COM/KOKKAI NG

It may not be our vision of ourselves that we look nastier than the Taliban, but that is the logic of deterrence. The Pacific Solution costs us about \$5 billion a year. There is an easy alternative.

- they are required to live in regional towns until their refugee status has been determined.

There are plenty of country towns which are slowly shrinking as people leave. The National Farmers Federation estimates that there are 96,000 unfilled jobs in country

areas. It is highly likely that many asylum seekers would get jobs.

How this would work can be tested by making some assumptions:

First: numbers. The arrival rate of boat people tracks parallel to the global movement of refugees: we aren't a magnet; we just get a tiny percentage of refugees who are on the move. The biggest arrival rate of boat people was in the 2012 [financial year], when 25,000 boat people arrived. (For comparison, the annual migration intake—people who are not refugees but move to Australia—is about 200,000 people per year).

Let us assume that 25,000 boat people arrive in Australia *every* year, and let us assume that *all* of them stay on full Centrelink benefits.

These are both highly unlikely assumptions.

It would cost us about \$500 million a year. All that money would be spent in the economies of regional towns. It is not difficult to see the benefits to the economy of regional towns and cities which are slowly losing population to the capitals. We would save about \$4.5 billion a year. And we would be doing good, instead of intentionally harming innocent people. ♦

Julian Burnside AO QC is a barrister, human rights and refugee advocate and author.

Malaysia, Manus, Nauru and offshore processing

BY JOHN MENADUE AO

I have not always held the view that asylum seekers who come to Australia could be transferred and processed in another country. I changed my mind on that partly because of the rapid increase in boat arrivals after the Agreement with Malaysia fell over in 2011. The large number of boat arrivals was reducing public support for a generous and humane refugee program.

I came to the view that what was important was that the process is fair and efficient and that where the processing occurs is a secondary issue.

For the present we have comprehensively lost the argument of opposition to offshore processing of boat arrivals. Both the Coalition and the ALP are broadly agreed on the means to stop boat arrivals.

I also supported the proposed Malaysian Agreement because I saw it as part of an important building block in regional cooperation. Further, the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) was prepared to work with us in the proposed arrangement with Malaysia. The UNHCR does not support the transfers to Manus (PNG) and Nauru and the processing in those countries.

Unfortunately, the agreement with Malaysia was made impossible by the combined support of the Greens and the Coalition in the Senate. The action of the Coalition and the Greens in the Senate was supported by refugee advocates across Australia.

The collapse of the Malaysian Agreement was the turning point.



We have been on a slippery slope ever since. Boat arrivals quadrupled as a result of the High Court decision and the collapse of the Malaysian Agreement. In the second half of 2013, asylum seekers arriving by boat were running at a rate of over 40,000 per annum. We may wish it otherwise, but with our history of White Australia it is my view that no Australian Government can keep intact a generous humanitarian refugee program with boat arrivals at over 40,000 pa [Editor's Note: this rate is extrapolated from monthly arrivals in this time – actual arrivals in Australia in the 2013 calendar year was 20,500]. At the peak of the Indo-China outflow, the largest number of people arriving in Australia by boat was 1,423 people in 1977/78.

My own view is also that the Fraser Government could not have sustained our generous acceptance of Indo-

The failure of the Malaysian Agreement triggered Manus and Nauru.

Chinese refugees if boat arrivals had been anywhere near the rate the Rudd government faced in mid-2013. To think otherwise is kidding ourselves. I was Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs for some of the time involved.

The failure of the Malaysian Agreement triggered Manus and Nauru.

We need a system of 'effective protection' that should govern any transfers of asylum seekers in our region. That would include:

- the principle of non-refoulement (a principle of international law which forbids the return of a refugee to persecution or danger);



LEFT: ©ISTOCK.COM/ALPAMYOPHOTO

- providing asylum seekers with a legal status and access to work and education;
- working to help not only displaced people but also host communities;
- working with partners in the region in association with UNHCR to create an atmosphere of safety and trust.

Clearly, few of the conditions have been met in the arrangements with PNG and Nauru. Importantly, the UNHCR will not cooperate in our arrangements with either country; or with Cambodia in resettlement.

We need to think again about total opposition to transfers and regional processing. That opposition has led us into a tragic cul de sac.

In the current political situation a way forward would include:

We need to think again about total opposition to transfers and regional processing. That opposition has led us into a tragic cul de sac.

- increasing the annual 'orderly' refugee intake to 25,000 from its present 13,750. We should immediately agree to a substantial increase from Iraq and Syria.
- negotiating Orderly Departure Agreements (ODA) with Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. The governments in those countries are likely to welcome the departure of some of their opponents. In 1983 we negotiated an ODA with Vietnam under which 100,000 Vietnamese came to Australia without risky journeys.

- winding back mandatory detention which is cruel and expensive. It punishes but does not deter. Boat arrivals have stopped because of the government policy that no boat arrivals will ever be settled in Australia. That is the deterrent, not mandatory detention.
- allowing asylum seekers in the community to work.

We may wring our hands about what has happened, but we need to apply ourselves to where improvement is possible. It will require political pragmatism and compromise. A lot can be done.

Let's start with an additional 4,000 refugees from Iraq and Syria. ♦

John Menadue AO is a businessman and public commentator, and formerly a senior public servant and diplomat. He is a Patron of the Asylum Seekers' Centre in Sydney.

Humanitarian policy—it matters to us!

Respecting shared humanity and dignity is central to the mission of the St Vincent de Paul Society. When we see our neighbours suffering, we will always try to assist, no matter who they are or how they arrived on our doorstep. In this collection of articles, members, volunteers and employees of the Society from around the country have shared some of their stories and thoughts on the complex issue of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. We invite you to read the words of your fellow Vincentians with an open heart. If you would like to know more or to engage further, there is a range of options at the end of this collection. We begin by sharing the personal stories of some of the people that we assist around the country.



June Chandler,
Queensland.

A young female doctor, let's call her Leyla, was practising in an American hospital in Iraq. She received a text on her phone one Monday morning.

The text said 'we are coming to get you and your mother and your doctor colleagues on Friday and we will destroy you!' They came, they killed and dismembered her mother, and they killed her colleagues. But Leyla escaped and fled to Kuwait.

Leyla was fortunate enough to eventually arrive in Australia as a refugee. She had no money, no possessions, just the clothes she wore. She came to the attention of St Vincent de Paul Society through an introduction from another refugee lady we had previously helped. Without this 'good Samaritan', Leyla's life may have taken a different path.

After this initial introduction, one of the local Conferences took Leyla under its wing and provided her with rent until she obtained her visa and Centrelink payments. This Conference didn't just consider her immediate needs, they listened to her story. It was then that



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the Vincentians realised there was an opportunity to do much more.

Leyla needed financial assistance to upgrade her skills as a doctor to meet Australian requirements. As this type of assistance is beyond the normal scope of emergency relief, the Conference looked further. Both Vincentians and staff helped her improve her English, to make it possible for her to study. Then they arranged for her to take out a No Interest Training Loan through our Migrants and Refugees Committee, and this paid for her tuition to become a registered doctor in Australia.

THE BIG PICTURE

There are over 50 million displaced people in the world. They have had to flee their homes due to a range of circumstances, including war, persecution, famine, disease and climate change. Of these people, nearly 17 million are refugees—outside their own countries, and unable to return home due to a real fear of persecution based on their race, culture or religion. The largest number of refugees have fled from conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria, and the main host countries of refugees are Pakistan (which hosts 1.6 million) and Iran (nearly 900,000). Developing countries currently host around 86 per cent of the world's refugees. The number of asylum seekers who make claims to Australia has varied between 0 and 20,500 per calendar year over the last 15 years. The change in numbers is reflective of worldwide trends in applications, which in turn are reflective of the development of armed conflicts—spiking after wars break out, and declining as peace returns. ♦

Leyla was mentored by a local doctor practicing in Brisbane. She completed her studies, which allowed her to practise as a medical practitioner fully compliant with Australian standards. Now she is able to work in her chosen field in her new home, Australia. Leyla is practicing as a GP in country Queensland; she is married, and does great work for her community. ♦

Provided by June Chandler from the Society in Queensland.

A young man's solo journey



Nathalie Howell,
Tasmania.

Aamir is from Afghanistan, and he is an illegal immigrant to Australia. Aamir's mother died when he was 14, and his father died when he was 15. His memories

of his homeland are of war and fighting—the only fond memory he has of Afghanistan is the weather.

Aamir came to Australia via plane, then bus, then boat. He first travelled to India by plane, then Malaysia, then to Indonesia by bus and on foot, and eventually stepped on a boat to get to Christmas Island.

His journey from Indonesia to Christmas Island was fraught with danger, and he was caught twice before he was successful. The first time he was caught he was held for two days, the second for five days. Both times, when being held by Indonesian police in a nondescript building, he was given food only once in 24 hours. When he escaped the building where he was being held and hid in a forest overnight, the noises of the forest scared him. He is still frightened at night-time.

Aamir eventually reached a safe place in Indonesia and contacted a people

smuggler, who agreed to take him to Christmas Island. On the first attempt, the sea was too rough and so he did not make the journey. He eventually made the journey from Indonesia to Christmas Island. It was raining the entire

time and the trip took more than 30 hours in a small fishing boat.

Once he arrived at Christmas Island, the fishing boat was inspected by the Australian Navy. Aamir stayed one night on the Navy boat under harsh conditions: when he asked for a blanket he was told that 'this is not a five-star hotel'.

Aamir was in detention for one month on Christmas Island, after which time he came to Tasmania to stay at the Pontville Alternative Place of Detention, where he felt he had more freedom. However, he was still followed when leaving the centre, which made him 'feel like a criminal'.

After arriving in Pontville, Aamir became involved with St Vincent de Paul Society's youth programs for immigrants, including fishing trips, bowling, surfing and a disco. He found them to be a lot of fun, even though some of the activities were foreign to him. He enjoyed being introduced to new things and meeting new people. The activities also allowed him to practise his English and connect with people of his own age.

Aamir is currently studying at school and undertaking a pathways course. His dream job would involve IT, and he would also enjoy working as a car mechanic. He is on a bridging visa at

the moment and is uncertain about his future, but he remains positive that things will work out for him. ♦

Provided by Nathalie Howell from the Society in Tasmania.

FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT

Exactly one year ago at this time, when I saw the Navy boat in the middle of the ocean, I felt that just one wave was between me and freedom. I wasn't imagining the future; I was just looking for hope. When I jumped to the Navy ship I couldn't stand on my knees; [I was] very tired and very afraid. I liked to close my eyes and forget all the bad luck. Suddenly I heard a gunshot and one of the Navy crew members said not to worry, it was just fire on my grey boat. While I was thinking about the image of grey and watching it burn, I noticed that the colour of the Navy ship was grey! I said to myself, 'what a bad comparison'.

Now after one year I am looking for hope, yet still one wave is between me and freedom. I am like a bird in a beautiful cage. I feel like I am a flightless eagle here—I found a futile [idea of] freedom and I put it, like other stuff, in the corner of my cage. I teach myself how to live with limitations; how to forget my great wishes, when a simple English lesson and even work are unattainable. My 'grey salvation' is the limitation of words and work, here. Yes, the lifeboat was grey. ♦

Provided by a young Iranian woman the St Vincent de Paul Society assists in Adelaide.

What is happening offshore?

Australia's detention and processing policies place refugees in a physically and mentally destructive limbo. Fergal Fleming, from the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Northern Territory, explains.



Fergal Fleming,
Northern Territory

Among the several disincentives to 'people smuggling' put in place by the Australian government, and ostensibly flowing from the *Report of*

the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers, August 2012 ('The Houston Report'), was the 'No Advantage' principle. The No Advantage rule is designed to persuade people there is no point in seeking asylum with Australia by boat, as the rule would circumvent 'queue jumping'. The reasoning is that it can take from five to 20 years (estimated) to gain resolution in a refugee camp elsewhere, so it will take five to 20 years for asylum seekers arriving here by sea to get a resolution. Although they will never actually arrive 'here'—only places like Manus and Nauru. They are permanently banned from living in Australia. The lack of certainty about timelines is deliberately cruel; a nasty disincentive. Asylum seekers have also been put in the position of no family reunion ever being possible unless they return home or go to a third country.

There were many other recommendations to the Houston Report, which together formed a package to address the increasing complexity of asylum seeker arrivals and tragedies at sea. Most recommendations, however, were not implemented, so there can be no package and no totality of the solution.

THE NUMBERS

Australia is responsible for over two thousand people held in detention offshore in other countries: on Nauru, 1170 (including 208 children); on Manus Island, PNG, 1225 people. We also hold 1237 people, including 196 children, on our territory of Christmas Island. Then, there are the onshore detention centres, which hold 2779 people (including 579 children). In community detention

there are 2955 people (including 1507 children). Additionally, in the community on bridging visas, there are 24,486 people (including 1841 children). These people may receive a small allowance from Centrelink (less than Newstart), but are not permitted to work. This is 33,852 people's lives 'on hold' while they wait to find out what the government will do with them. ♦

Provided by Brenda Hubber from the Society in Victoria.

Instead, as events have shown, there was a corruption of justice and our obligations to the international community. These recommendations cherry-picked from the Houston Report are, *prima facie*, a form of abuse and torture, cruel disincentives to seeking asylum from Australia: 'You are not wanted here, go away.'

The Australian position appears to be:

- Detain asylum seekers for an indefinite period in third-world camps and in hot, mentally and physically unhealthy conditions, with continuing uncertainty about the future.
- Apply a No Advantage principle based on the convenient and incorrect belief that all asylum seekers can join a queue, where they will be safe and can wait comfortably for 5 to 20 years with the usually vain hope of resettlement.
- Apply a veil of secrecy and a war footing through Operation Sovereign Borders. Is there no concern that the ADF and Customs are now being used against civilians who have broken no laws, are not at war with us and are merely seeking asylum? Have the ADF and

Customs been involved in the *prima facie* illegal refoulement of Tamils and others seeking our protection? Refoulement is the returning of a persecuted person to their persecutor. Under international law, it is forbidden.

- Give asylum seekers no hope of resettlement in Australia. Again, you are not wanted here. And if you are here because of a quirk of fates around dates, there is no possibility of a family reunion—unless you go away.

By excising the islands and mainland of Australia from the migration zone, Australia believes it can implement Operation Sovereign Borders, and circumvent its international obligations. Legally, perhaps, but certainly not morally. (When the Howard government excluded Australian offshore islands from the migration zone, many people living in the Tiwi Islands were puzzled to realise they were no longer part of Australia, though still subject to Australian laws.)

When returning 'home' is not an option

Sadly, the indefinite wait, along with the deliberately applied lack of certainty and the no family reunion principle, is a blatant form of coercion.

Onshore policies constantly shifting

It represents a forced choice, to encourage asylum seekers living in intolerable conditions and terrible uncertainty to return 'home'. 'Home' is where the prospect and fear of torture and imprisonment become less painful than the sense of loss and grief at the prospect of never seeing family again, or indefinite incarceration in intolerable conditions. The veil of secrecy has and is being used by the Australian government to cover situations of *prima facie* human rights abuses, illegal refoulement, and the fate of asylum seekers returned to countries like Sri Lanka.

The reaction of the Australian Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration to the killing of Reza Barati on Manus earlier this year, and to the desperate threats of suicide from mothers on Christmas Island, is illustrative of the harshness and cruelty of the Australian response to the new diaspora. That no one has been brought to justice for the killing of Mr Barati and that the Prime Minister strongly defied the 'moral blackmail' of these desperate mothers, gives a lie to the claim of the Australian government that Operation Sovereign Borders is reflective of Australian common decency, as the Prime Minister claimed in an ABC interview in late 2013. There is a new diaspora, but this time it is not the Europeans, Irish and English of the 18th and 19th centuries. Australia has lost the intellectual and moral will to develop an appropriate and just response to a worldwide movement of people. ♦

Provided by Fergal Fleming from the Society in the Northern Territory.

Some people seeking asylum are not held in mandatory detention offshore, but are granted visas to live short-term in the Australian community while their application is processed (onshore). Kareenna Alexander, from the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales, puts the uncertainty surrounding immigration policy in perspective.



Kareenna Alexander,
New South Wales

To discuss the current onshore policy we must firstly acknowledge that it is a complicated and constantly changing process. In particular,

since the current federal government came in to power in September 2013, the policy has been changing at a remarkable rate. The constant shifting of government policy regarding asylum seekers in Australia has been referred to as a 'race to the bottom'.

For the past 20 years we have witnessed both sides of politics introduce increasingly harsh policies. The former Labor Government determined that all people who arrived by boat after August 2012, and who had since been released into the community on bridging visas, were not eligible for work rights nor for permanent residency. Instead, they now receive only a temporary visa and minimal financial support, as described by the academics Lisa Hartley and Caroline Fleay in their book *Policy as Punishment*, published in February 2014. Since September 2013, the government has capped



A young Vincentian and a young asylum seeker – race and nationality are no barrier to friendship.

the number of protection visas issued, removed that cap, and reinstated the cap. We have had Temporary Protection Visas reintroduced, then blocked by the Senate, and then a variation reintroduced under titles such as Temporary Visas of Concern. More recent boat arrivals are no longer eligible for any settlement in Australia, and are instead redirected to immigration detention centres located in Nauru and Manus Island.

Sadly, we seem to have lost sight of human need. The word 'illegal' is now embedded in all documentation and literature on the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) website. People who arrived by boat and who are currently living in the community have recently experienced a loss of legal status, while the government put on hold the renewing and issuing of bridging visas until a newly devised 'Code of Behaviour' was created and issued by the Department. The Code must be signed before people can receive a new visa. Breaches of the Code may result in loss of visa and re-detention. The breaches are open to interpretation and can be as vague as disturbing the peace, irritating or annoying a person. To date, there are some people still waiting to receive a copy of the Code to sign. ♦

continued on page 20 ►



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administration of payment has become the responsibility of the Department of Social Services, although the DIBP approves applications. Charities have noted an increase in processing time of applications, a lower success rate and a higher expectation of paperwork demonstrating need and destitution.

There are approximately 30,000 people living in the community awaiting claims to be determined. This is no fault of the people seeking asylum, but rather the fault of a complex and backlogged system. As such, there is increasing pressure on the charities and services trying their best to fill the gap and support people who are awaiting resolution of status. Sadly, the changing policies have also had a detrimental effect on the people seeking asylum. Our service and other charities have observed the profound impact on people's mental health, self-esteem and capacity to engage meaningfully and participate in the community.

Mode of arrival has a particular impact on the processing and rights of asylum seekers; whether one arrives by plane or by boat determines a person's rights to support, access to visa class and final determination of status. This is despite the commonality of shared experiences of persecution, fear and the need to flee one's home country. Though the 'push factor'—the reasons why people are forced to flee their home countries in search of safety and freedom—is a shared experience, the reception within Australia and the impact on a person's outcome regarding resolution of immigration status is not. One cannot help but feel that until this issue is taken out of politics, and humanity is reinstated into the discussion, things are only going to get a whole lot worse. As stated by the Refugee Council of Australia, 'the situation for people seeking refugee protection has never been as dire as it is now'. ♦

◀ continued from page 19

This has resulted in loss of jobs due to cancellation of visas, and a lot of confusion and fear about legal status and right to medical assistance. There has been much discussion about the legal implications for people signing the Code of Behaviour, and as one person commented to his case worker, 'what choice do I have?'

Government funding for legal services has also been withdrawn. People arriving by boat are not eligible for any funded legal support, and those who arrive by plane are only eligible for support in their initial application, but no longer eligible for funded support at the crucial review process before the Refugee Review Tribunal. The migration law and refugee application system is a complicated and confusing process for anyone to navigate without

legal support. With reduced funding, services such as the Refugee Advice and Casework Service have been forced to consider who and how they can assist. With this loss of support and expert advice, already vulnerable people are challenged to apply for protection and self-represent at a time they need legal representation and guidance.

The Federal Government provides some financial and case work support to asylum seekers living in the community. This includes a payment of an amount equivalent to 89 per cent of Newstart allowance, for people deemed vulnerable and in need of support during their application for protection. This migration program, referred to as the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme, is provided by organisations such as Australian Red Cross and Settlement Services International in NSW. Recently, the

Case study from Tasmania

BY VIN HINDMARSH

Here in Tasmania, we're hanging on a case that's currently being lodged with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Let me explain more....

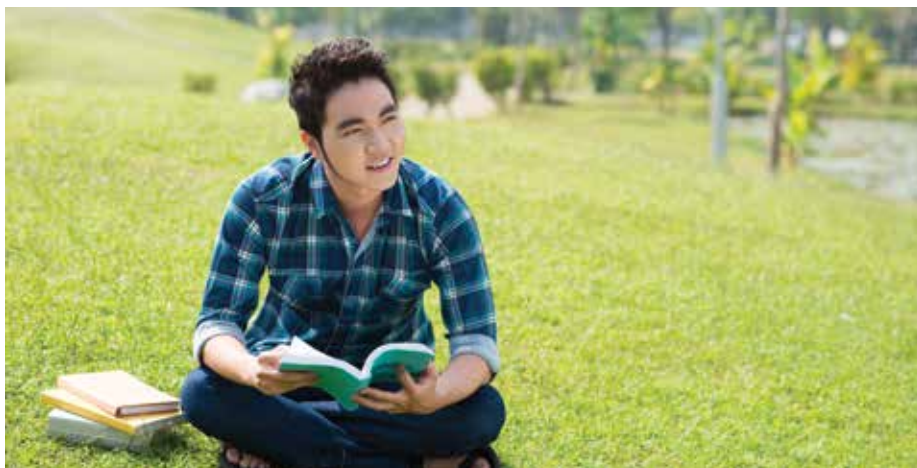


Vin Hindmarsh,
Tasmania

In February this year, Immigration Minister Scott Morrison confirmed a privacy breach on his departmental website. There for the world to

see were details of identity, country of origin and arrival information of ten thousand asylum seekers in Australia. Among them were a group of 10 [Vietnamese] (Catholic and Buddhist) young men aged 16-18 who had arrived in Australia by boat early in 2013. They have been living in the Hobart community, awaiting onshore processing, since their release from the Pontville Detention Centre in Tasmania late last year.

That disclosure and breach of privacy has changed everything – especially with the website comment that these young men ‘will in all probability be deported.’ Add to this the legislation introduced by Scott Morrison’s government that people seeking protection within our borders must show they have a minimum 51 per cent chance of being significantly harmed if they returned home. “Significant harm” is defined as death, torture, or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. In humanitarian terms, that is outrageous. Torture and persecution are now decided on a coin toss. And what about the conventions Australia



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has signed, which explicitly state that returning people to a dangerous place is prohibited?

These ten young men were beaten by police before departure. They know the reception they will receive if they are deported back to their country. Hobart lawyer and Labor State MP Madeleine Ogilvie is now co-ordinating a campaign to stop the young men’s deportation. ‘These young men have been subjected to a fundamental breach of privacy,’ she says. ‘It is no longer possible, if it was ever the case, to argue they are not refugees.’ Ms Ogilvie said letters from the Immigration Department, confirming that they had been subject to the privacy breach had provided a strong legal base for their refugee claim.

A recent report from the United Nations reveals that there are now more displaced people than at any time since World War II. More than 85 per cent of refugees are hosted in some of the poorest places on earth, such as Jordan, Pakistan, and other developing countries. For all its rhetoric about lifters, not leaners, even under the UN Refugee Agency, Australia should be shouldering more of the burden. Instead we find ways to retreat from the high moral ground. Australia will be tested on this case of Vietnamese asylum seekers. One hopes that our benchmarks of fairness will prevail. ♦

Vin Hindmarsh is State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society of Tasmania.

What does this say about us as Australians?

These discussions highlight the effect of government policy and practice on people who come to Australia seeking our help. While this is crucial, and tragic, it is also important to consider how these policies affect us as citizens of Australia, what they say about us as individuals and as a nation, and how we are regarded by the rest of the world. Paul Coghlan, from the St Vincent de Paul Society Territory Council of Canberra-Goulburn, reflects.

Living in a liberal state, we are naturally brought up to believe our national policies are liberal, our government speaks truth, and we follow human rights principles (and even criticise other countries for their crimes against humanity). Some of us might now be surprised that we hear that sort of criticism of us from our friends overseas. For example, on 11 July this year, an article in the US publication *The Global Post* urged that it was the responsibility of Australia's allies—including the United States and the United Kingdom—to quietly condemn via diplomatic channels Australia's 'clear violation of the minimum standards of human rights we expect of a civilized country'. That same article maintained that we have a lot to learn from Uganda about how to handle refugees. How far we've come!

Those of us who take a trip overseas might now not only be asked about our kangaroos and the Sydney Harbour Bridge or Uluru, but might also be challenged on our mistreatment of asylum seekers. How would we answer?



Members of the Society in Western Australia take a group of people seeking asylum on an excursion.

We could try some of the government one-liners. We might say that asylum seekers are 'illegals', but we'd be quietly informed that seeking asylum, whether coming by boat or by air, is legal. Moreover, we would be advised that Australia signed the United Nations High Commission on Refugees Convention, which expressly permits asylum seekers to arrive in our country and seek our protection. Or we might say that we can't handle such a large number of arrivals and we need to deter them from coming. But as far as numbers go, that would at best produce a smile—ours are miniscule compared to those faced by other countries. As for deterrence—proving to asylum seekers that the conditions they will face under our system are worse than those from which they fled in the first place—how do we justify that? Those conditions—war and persecution, rape and torture—led them to accept the risk of a sea voyage in a small boat, and we seek to impose yet worse conditions to act as a deterrent. These conditions include the camp invasion on Manus Island that led to one death and many seriously wounded. Or we might use the argument that it's just a way of saving lives at sea, but our hosts might know that Australia successfully achieved that objective in the 1970s by processing asylum seekers overseas before they started their sea journey to

Australia. In any case, that argument is rather like boarding up the windows of a burning building to stop people inside jumping and perhaps falling to their death. And how would we answer the criticism about imprisoning (people overseas might not know that our government uses the more delicate word, 'detaining') children for indeterminate periods?

Perhaps, and this would be the most alarming impact of our asylum seeker practice, we have actually come to accept that we have to act as we now do. Sure, we may have been disturbed when we first heard of kids in detention, but we got used to that. We got a jolt when we heard of people self-harming out of desperation, but then we got used to that. And our apathy was assuaged by government speak on the need to deter the illegal boat arrivals. The militaristic jargon of border protection and on-sea operations has even perhaps made us a little fearful of the alternatives.

As Desmond Tutu has famously been quoted, 'if an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.' In other words, if we do not oppose our current asylum seeker policies, then we support them. ♦

Provided by Paul Coghlan from the Society's Territory Council of Canberra-Goulburn.

Alternatives to detention

The glaring injustice of the refugee situation calls for action. Researchers at the Society's National Council office outline alternatives to detention and explain how the Society works to address this issue at all levels; from the systemic level through constant advocacy, to the grass-roots level of its individual members' ongoing work.



Daniel Weston

A substantial body of research tells us that alternatives to offshore detention are not only possible, but achieve greater outcomes—for

the refugees themselves, and also for the broader community. Even from an economic rationalist perspective, the measurable financial costs point away from offshore processing as a solution. A Commission of Audit titled 'Illegal Maritime Arrival Costs: Towards Responsible Government', conducted in February 2014, revealed that the costs of issuing bridging visas are around 13 times less than the costs of offshore processing. Bridging visas are a more affordable approach, freeing up money that could be spent more efficiently in our communities. The extra money could also be spent on overseas aid, improving health, homelessness and a range of other humanitarian needs.

For the community, asylum seekers and refugees offer a huge positive benefit by bringing valuable skills and knowledge. Our ageing population

calls for large numbers of young people, and even their children, to provide support and care. Numerous people have entered Australia as refugees and gone on to make a significant mark on Australian society: Anh Do, now a popular author, actor and comedian, entered as a refugee from Vietnam in 1980. Governor-designate of South Australia, Hieu Van Le, arrived by boat as a refugee in 1977. Well-known author and science presenter 'Dr Karl' Kruszelnicki fled Sweden with his family to live in an Australian refugee camp in 1950. The evidence shows that, due to their resilience, strong community engagement, fostering trade links, and high levels of entrepreneurship, in the medium and longer term refugee-humanitarian migrants are a net economic gain to Australia. ♦

Provided by Daniel Weston from the Society's National Council office.

WHAT VINNIES DOES

Catholic social teaching places a special onus on the St Vincent de Paul Society to help those who seek asylum, having fled war, persecution, injustice or intolerance, and the Society has a long and proud history of providing this much-needed hand up. We assisted large numbers of immigrants after the World Wars and, more recently, were instrumental in the resettlement of refugees coming out of the Indochina refugee crisis in the 1970s.

We continue this proud tradition today. At the national level, we often speak out on the terrible suffering of refugees who are locked in detention, and those without work rights or adequate support in

our communities. There is a national network of Vincentians and employees who share resources and coordinate advocacy and policy. There is now also a national policy position on refugees, which outlines our vision for a new way forward on Australia's treatment of asylum seekers.

At the state and territory level, the Society is involved in a wonderful range of programs all around the country. From Special Works, which focus on settling newly arrived refugees into their new houses, to services which assist refugees in our community who are at risk of homelessness; from visiting refugees in detention to the SPARK program in NSW, which engages refugee children in their local schools; from the Migration Advice Service in Queensland, which

provides migration advice to needy people including asylum seekers, to VoRTCS (Volunteer Refugee Tutoring and Community Support), which provides free in-home tutoring for refugee families in Greater Brisbane, other tutoring programs for refugee children and adults around the country, and English language classes.

The assistance that the Society provides is as diverse as the needs that we see. We will continue to provide material and emotional support to anyone we see who needs it, no matter who they are, why they need help or how they came to Australia. ♦

Provided by Rik Sutherland, National Research Officer at the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

What can we do?

There is a range of practical ways you can participate in this work and help bring about a more welcoming and supportive Australian society. Cyril O'Connor, from the Society in New South Wales, has compiled a step-by-step action plan.

BY CYRIL O'CONNOR

Stay informed: Stay informed by signing up for the Refugee Council of Australia or Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) mailing list; Make sure to 'Like' various Facebook pages of refugee support groups to stay informed of events, rallies and updates.

Online campaigns: Follow campaigns run by Get Up!, CCJPoz.org, ASRC, Amnesty International and the Sum of Us. Visit Change.org and PetitionOnline.com. Tweet an MP, many have public profiles. See www.chilout.org for more guidance.

Engage your MP: One powerful way you can be part of this change and raise your voice is to contact your local MPs, share your concerns, and tell them what you would like them to do. You could write a letter, make a phone call, email or set up a meeting. Why not invite the MP to an event, to join you in an activity you conduct with asylum seekers, or to attend a local Conference meeting. There are tips on how to write to your local MP available at julianburnside.com.au/letters.htm, www.oxfam.org.au/act/diy-campaigning/make-your-mp-work-for-you/ and The Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace at ccjpoz.org.

Chat and fundraise: Engage friends and family in discussion—the more people engaged in discussion, the more understanding will develop. Support Vinnies refugee support

services as well as other asylum seeker and refugee organisations in your area. Many refugee support organisations seek donations of household items, clothing and food. Look for organisations in your area and see what they might need.

Host: The Community Placement Network (CPN) offers interested people the opportunity to host an eligible asylum seeker in their home for a six-week period. It is an initiative of the Australian Homestay Network (AHN).

Volunteer and tutor: The Society has many volunteering opportunities, both directly and indirectly, assisting asylum seeker and refugee children and families through its refugee support services, but also with youth programs and Conference work. The Society runs several programs including SPARK in Sydney, Volunteer Refugee Tutoring & Community Support (VoRTCS) in Brisbane, and a homework program in Dandenong, Victoria. Additionally, the Refugee Council of Australia's website lists many organisations throughout Australia who seek volunteers to help their refugee support programs: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/g/vol.php>.

Participate: If you are a student, ask your teacher to discuss the issues in class; organise to speak at a school's social justice event; speak at a Mini Vinnies event. All ages can join in and enjoy Refugee Week and Harmony Day events in your area. Visit <http://refugeeweek.org.au/> and <http://www.harmony.gov.au/>. Adults can connect with newly arrived people over dinner conversations: <https://www.facebook.com/TheWelcomeDinnerProject>. Visit a detention centre or see if a Vinnies group runs a visiting program in your area, such as the one which visits Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney. If not, set up one! Ask your Conference to visit a newly arrived refugee family to welcome them and see if they need support. For example, the Darwin Asylum Seekers Advocacy Network,

DASSAN, arranges visits to the centres, gives information sessions etc, plus a lot of advocacy, including bringing in the big guns from law firms. Their web address is www.dassan.org. ♦

Provided by Cyril O'Connor from the Society in New South Wales

A FAIR GO

As Vincentians we are called to alleviate the lot of those asylum seekers released into the community, but we also must challenge the Government's harsh policies and suggest viable alternatives. Werner Padarin, from the Society's Territory Council of Canberra Goulburn, writes:

'In the past, as Australians, we have been proud of our honourable traditions of "a fair go", and sticking up for the underdog. Where has all that gone? As citizens and voters we have allowed successive governments to impose increasingly harsh conditions on asylum seekers.

'The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (8 May 2014) has accurately described the situation: "The current policy has about it a cruelty that does no honour to our nation." Further, the bishops asserted that, "the White Australia policy was thought to be dead and buried, but perhaps it has mutated and is still alive." ♦



Werner Padarin,
Australian Capital Territory

Vive la différence!

BY MICHAEL MORAN

Diversity? Let me tell you about it. Diversity is what the 'de' in St Vincent de Paul stands for. For starters, we're a French Society transplanted to Irish Australia.

Before the Society came to Australia, it sprouted in such diverse places as Turkey, Mexico and Jerusalem, all in Frederic Ozanam's lifetime. It arrived in Uruguay just after Melbourne (1854), Beirut and Hong Kong just before Perth (1865), and Shanghai at the same time as Sydney (1881). San Salvador and Singapore soon followed (1883).

Did I say 'French Society'? Let's break that down. In Chinese Hong Kong we settled at first among the colony's Portuguese community. In Shanghai in the 1880s we had a European Conference and a Chinese Youth Conference. In Turkey's Constantinople (now Istanbul) at much the same time we had a German Conference named after the patron saint of England, St George (who was actually Greek). Vive la différence!

Did I say 'Irish Australia'? That didn't last. Our members, the Cardinal told a Society meeting in 1890, were 'composed of natives of the old country'. He meant Ireland. Our first national president, who was of English Protestant background, would have preferred him to mean England. As Australia grew and changed, so did we. Our membership diversified. In the postwar years we even established Dutch and Italian Conferences.

Not content with one gender, we established a women's Society too and put its headquarters in a different country (Italy) to the men's (France). In Australia the St Vincent de Paul women were particularly strong in



South Australia and Western Australia. They had their headquarters in Adelaide from 1910, well clear of the men's national council in Sydney. At one stage, in the 1930s, there were more women members of the Society in Perth than men. When the men's and women's Societies combined in 1968, diversity was brought under one roof.

If 'no work is foreign to the Society', no other organisation approaches the diversity of its activities. At various times in our history, as our annual reports show, we seem to have done just about everything.

Our first, central and most enduring work, bringing material and personal support to people through home visitation, soon expanded. We began visiting prisons, hospitals, ships and, later, migrant hostels and refugee detention centres.

The Society has provided hospitality to strangers, shelter for the homeless, and food for weary track travellers. Our Conferences have chopped firewood for people, helped them find jobs and accommodation, paid for passages, arranged medical treatment, taken the sick to hospital and helped children into school. We've come to the aid of victims of floods, bushfires and government policies.

We've paid for the funerals of strangers to be 'splendid affairs' so that a poor person would have a better send-off than a pauper's funeral and be honoured as Christ among us.

We've run libraries, distributed literature, served as probation officers at the children's

courts, and founded and funded homes - for the aged, for orphans, for single mothers and their babies, for children with disabilities, and for young men from the country who came to the city for work.

We've sent aid overseas, recycled waste products and run a national chain of stores. We've carried 'comfort and consolation' to shipwrecked crews and met immigrants in harbour when their liners arrived.

We helped Portuguese refugees from Timor after the Japanese invasion of 1942, and Timorese refugees after the Indonesian invasion of 1975.

We've provided annual picnics and entertainment for orphans, run Boy Scout troops and operated a Braille translation service and library. In our early years we ran small community banks. We've raised money through entertainments, concerts and tea-parties. We've even staged euchre tournaments to raise funds and provided stewards to race meetings (at Deloraine, Tasmania, in 1912).

Diversity? I've told you about it. The writer of the Epistle tells us that God 'at diverse times and in diverse ways spoke in time past to our ancestors' (Hebrews 1:1). If diversity is God's language, the St Vincent de Paul Society is certainly a fluent speaker. ♦

Michael Moran is the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Archivist

Why is the crime of domestic violence so strongly gendered?

On July 29, 2014, the St Vincent de Paul Society made a submission to the Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia being conducted by the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee. The Society consulted nationally and welcomed the opportunity to make this contribution prepared by National Research Officer, Rik Sutherland.

In 2006, nearly 100,000 Australians, from all backgrounds and walks of life, experienced domestic violence in some form. This included assault and homicide, and also sexual, psychological, and social abuse from an intimate partner.

The St Vincent de Paul Society abhors violence against anyone, in any situation, and sees any violence in the home, against an intimate partner, as a crime. However, it is notable that violence against an intimate partner does not affect everyone equally. Instead, the crime of domestic violence is strongly gendered. While 15 per cent of women have experienced intimate partner violence, only 4.9 per cent of men have. Moreover, when the details of the crimes are broken down by gender, other patterns emerge. For example, women are far more likely to have been using violence in self-defence: 75 per cent of women who have used violence against intimate male partners say they only ever did so in self-defence, and more than half of their partners agreed with this. This compares to only eight per cent of males who used violence against their female partners claiming it was in self-defence.



While 15 per cent of women have experienced intimate partner violence, only 4.9 per cent of men have.

Men are also far more likely to use sexual and economic violence against women than women are against men: research suggests that women are six times more likely to experience sexual violence from an opposite-sex partner than men are, and more than three times more likely to experience economic violence. While it seems that

women are more likely to use weapons when they use violence against their male intimate partners, men's acts of violence against their female partners are nevertheless more serious or severe, as judged by the perpetrators and survivors themselves, and by others. Also on the severity of violence, of all murders committed by an intimate partner, 78 per cent were perpetrated against women. Men are also more likely to use domestic violence against women repeatedly, over a long period, than women are to use violence repeatedly against male partners.



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When females perpetrate the crime of domestic violence, it is more often in self-defence, a one-off incident, and is less severe in the impact it has.

The trauma of domestic violence also show a gendered pattern: while very few men fear their female partner or feel controlled by their partners after an instance of domestic violence, most women do feel ongoing fear after having violence used against

However, we believe that we will not see real change until we as a society address the cause of domestic violence: stereotypes and attitudes about gender; which value women differently and as subordinate to men, and which deeply permeate our society.

them, and a sense of being controlled. Shockingly, 96 per cent of those who end up homeless as a result of domestic violence are women.

The causes of domestic violence

There are marked gender differences in the way that violence is used. When females perpetrate the crime of domestic violence, it is more often in self-defence, a one-off incident, and is less severe in the impact it has. On the other hand, when males commit domestic violence, it is more likely to be systemic, more severe, and lead to fear, coercion, and homelessness for the survivors.

Given these broad and pervasive patterns of men's violence against their female intimate partners, it is clear that the causes of domestic violence are not a 'few bad apples'. Instead, the causes lie in deep, entrenched, and pervasive beliefs and stereotypes about gender and the acceptability of violence.

For example, men are more likely to engage in domestic violence against their female partners if they hold negative attitudes towards women, hold traditional gender role attitudes that legitimise violence as a method of resolving conflict or as a private matter, or have low levels of support for gender equality. Domestic violence

committed by men against women is also greater in communities with more traditional ('macho') ideals of masculinity, and strictly defined gender roles around paid work (for men) and unpaid work (for women). Negative attitudes to women are stronger in particularly masculine contexts, such as sporting subcultures, and are influenced by the media we consume, including pornography, television, music and film.

What can we do?

The Society supports strong investment in addressing the symptoms of domestic violence, which include support for women leaving violence, such as women's refuges and shelters; education for men and boys about violence against women; and helping women identify when they have been subjected to the crime of domestic violence. The Society runs a range of services for women escaping domestic violence around the country, but we believe much more investment must be made in this area. The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children is a step in this direction, as is the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme.

However, we believe that we will not see real change until we as a society address the cause of domestic violence: stereotypes and attitudes about gender, which value women differently and as subordinate to men, and which deeply permeate our society. We call on government to commit to a national plan on gender equality, building on the weight of evidence, and previous work by various government and non-government bodies. It is high time that we, as a nation, developed concrete steps to achieve true equality between women and men. ♦

Find the full submission including references in the Publications section of www.vinnies.org.au

History of diverse homelessness services

Increasingly, community sector organisations are tailoring their services to meet the needs of specific groups of people in our community who are at risk of or who are experiencing homelessness. An innovative program in Victoria is seeking to address sector-wide gaps in the provision of safe and suitable housing responses for young people.

BY SUE CARLILE &
REBECCA GRANATA

Family Access Network (FAN) has been delivering services to young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness since 1981. During that time the services have evolved in response to emerging needs, and as a result our programs are now tailored broadly to young people, young families, accompanying children and Same Sex Attracted Transgender Intersex young people (SSATI).

FAN has a strong commitment to diversity and has been working towards ensuring our services are inclusive and supportive to all young people that may need them. FAN was approached by the ALSO Foundation in 2005 to partner with them in the development of a response for SSATI young people. The year following was a particularly active one, with the development of interagency agreements, awareness training for all staff, Board and volunteers, and an organisation audit of resources, language and assessment processes, supported through consultation with Twenty10 in Sydney and Daniel Whitthaus of 'Pride and Prejudice'.

The project 'alsorts' was launched in June 2006 and is seen as a necessary



direction in addressing sector-wide gaps in the provision of safe and suitable housing responses for SSATI young people. It is also notable that Youth Homelessness Action Plan (May 2004) identified this as a sector-wide gap. In 2006, Associate Professor Dr Lynne Hillier, researcher and lecturer at Latrobe University and author of *Writing Themselves In and Writing Themselves In Again* (both seminal works in identifying gaps and presenting the needs of SSATI young people), joined the FAN Board, a role she held for six years.

The principal responsibility of Housing Establishment Fund providers is to assist this group to secure crisis accommodation, longer term accommodation or maintain current housing.

Since 2005 FAN has maintained a commitment to the SSATI response, which has been guided by the ongoing SSATI portfolio. An early activity of this group was the oversight



Participants join in planned activities each week while building peer networks and discussing issues of diversity in their lives.

Housing Establishment Fund

The Housing Establishment Fund is one-off funding which can be provided to young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The principal responsibility of Housing Establishment Fund providers is to assist this group to secure crisis accommodation, longer term accommodation or maintain current housing. The SSATI Housing Establishment Fund was established to complement FAN's existing 'alsorts' response, which provides homelessness support services specifically for SSATI young people.

The Eastern Diversity Group

The Eastern Diversity Group is a social support group for 15–25 year old SSATI young people across Victoria. The Eastern Diversity Group provides a safe space for young people to meet and get involved in various activities.

Participants join in planned activities each week while building peer networks and discussing issues of diversity in their lives. When asked what the best thing about group was, one young person responded, 'it's a place I can be me, a place to go with good, friendly faces and fun socialisation'.

The Eastern Diversity Group meets every Thursday in Box Hill from 3pm to 5pm. To find out more call Rebecca Granata at Family Access Network (FAN) on 9890 2673. ♦

of the development of a sector best practice resource on the development of SSATI responses. This resource has been broadly shared within the sector, cited in government and peak body websites, referenced in other guides (for example, *Well Proud*), and was also provided to the steering committee in the development of the Rainbow Tick standards, in which the FAN CEO participated in her role at the time with Quality Improvement & Community Services Accreditation.

So how does the 'alsorts' program directly impact the lives of young

people? Below is an in-depth look at the services we offer through this program:

Housing and Case Management

The 'alsorts' housing response offers case managed transitional support for SSATI young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It is and continues to be the first customised model for the provision of housing and support to SSATI young people in Victoria.

LEFT: ©ISTOCK.COM/STEVE DEBENPORT RIGHT: ©ISTOCK.COM/ANDRESR

Sue Carlile is the Chief Executive Officer of Family Access Network (FAN) and Rebecca Granata is FAN's Living Skills Worker. For more information about FAN services visit www.fan.org.au

A Vincentian Encounter to the Philippines

Four members of the St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia took part in the most recent Encounter Program held at Easter this year. Two participants have taken the time to share their experience of life in the Philippines.

BY MIKE REYNOLDS

Disasters happen.

In Australia we are well aware of the damage caused by cyclones, bushfires and floods.

We can take precautions but ...

I thought about this as I sat with a group of Australian Vincentians on an Encounter visit to the Philippines.

Mass was being celebrated and afterwards a group of newly constructed houses were to be blessed and formally handed over to their new owners.

The recipients' houses had been destroyed by one of the most destructive typhoons ever to hit the Philippines. A path of destruction had been cut across the country wherever it made landfall, resulting in great losses of property and lives. The people who surrounded me now had been relocated to an area away from the beachfront and into housing donated by the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and other NGOs.

As part of the ceremony, relocated families spoke and thanked those who had been responsible for providing the houses, land and other necessities as they sought to rebuild their lives.

Some spoke with great emotion, some were reserved and stoic, others were self-deprecating and funny. They spoke of their fears, relived the disaster, cried, and expressed gratitude. As they spoke they



Volunteering for a feeding program for children in the Philippines.

connected, especially with others who shared their experience.

The depth of emotion on display was genuine, and almost painful to witness. They were extremely grateful that someone had seen their great need and responded. Someone was there to assist them at a time when their lives had been shattered and families destroyed. The task of rebuilding must have seemed overwhelming, with little chance of immediate assistance from a government struggling to come to terms with the scale of the disaster. In this situation the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul was able to raise funds internationally and use local contacts to build and support those in need.

The needs the Society seeks to address are the same today as they were in the time of St Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam. The Society continues in the role of the Good Samaritan who responded to the victim, one foreigner helping another.

But it is important to remember that the work of the Society is not limited to disasters. Australian Conferences have twins in 13 other countries. They offer ongoing support to these conferences in their work with the poor. Assistance with education, shelter, food and medical care are all aspects of the work being regularly performed by our overseas twins.

What is Encounter?

Encounter Programs were initiated by the National Council in the lead up to World Youth Day 2008 as an opportunity for reciprocal exchange between Australian Vincentians and the twinned communities they supported to attend WYD08. Since then, a number of states have engaged with further Encounter Programs with the Society's twins, and the National Youth Team initiated a national Encounter Program to the Philippines over Easter in 2014. Encounter Programs are cross-cultural and cross-generational Vincentian experiences which are jointly hosted by the Australian Council involved and their twin counterpart. For more information please email encounter@svdp.org.au

As part of the Encounter I was on we visited Edgar, whose family has been adopted by one conference in Manila. He lives in Baseco, a slum area near the Manila docks. About 3,000 families squat there and build wherever they find space.

Edgar, his wife and six children live in a one-room house with some curtains for privacy. When we met them, they were gathered on a raised wooden platform that had been built to help them stay dry during the frequent flooding that occurred in the area. A covered space had also been built on the roof as a place to gather when the floodwaters were higher than usual.

Edgar is unemployed due to a long-term illness. He had worked as a truck driver and a security guard. Both jobs provided only a minimal wage, and there is no social security. The Society is helping with medical expenses, food vouchers and some household

Encounter reignites commitment to service

needs, and assisting the children with school expenses through the Assist a Student program. Education was recognised by all we met as the best solution to long-term poverty.

In another area, conferences took us to visit the feeding programs they run. The San Isidro conference took us to a feeding program for children they hold once a month, at a cost of 2000 pesos (\$50) to feed about one hundred children.

We also had the opportunity to visit a free clinic run by one conference. Doctors volunteer at the clinic two days a week and medicine is available free or at an affordable rate.

By far the biggest request was for a continuation and expansion of the Assist a Student program.

Wherever we went, we were introduced to students who were recipients of the program. They expressed their thanks for the help they had been given and happily spoke of their plans for the future. Most wished to be nurses or teachers and to assist others when they graduated. They were the children whose parents were unemployed or had low paying jobs. Without the assistance provided, their prospects of breaking free of the cycle of poverty would have been very limited.

The Encounter was a great opportunity to see the assistance being offered by the Society in times of great need. It allowed me to meet and put a face to the Society in another country and those it serves. It was their joy and friendliness that I will long remember, and their generosity in the face of large-scale poverty that I found most overwhelming. These were members of the Society who continue to help communities to be reborn and to find new strength as they reflect the love of God to those they meet ... The love of God in action. ♦

BY TYRONNE
ANDERSON

In late April/early May I participated in the St Vincent de Paul Society's Philippine Encounter Program. I, together with four other Australians, travelled to and through the Philippines.

As ambassadors for the Society in Australia, we visited Manila and the Provinces. We met people, discovered places and experienced things that no conventional tourist ever would. There were many sights and sounds that do not occur in Australia.

This encounter was an outreach of the Society's Twinning program—a conference-to-conference commitment of friendship, financial and prayerful support. The group observed the destruction of Typhoon Yolanda, the reconstruction enabled by the St Vincent de Paul Society, and the sufferings and the joys of the people. We were witness to people who were so immensely grateful that they now had a home—a simple dwelling consisting of a concrete slab, corrugated iron roof and bamboo mesh walls. Throughout our travels we were engaged by individuals and communities tremendously thankful for the hand up the Society provides. Along our journey we met students aided by the Society's Assist a Student program. We had some home stays in which we were welcomed by our individual host families.

Our journey and immersion allowed us to gain an in depth look at and feel for the beautiful Philippines and its people. Our



Top: The Australian Encounter Program participants met Edgar, who lives in Baseco, a slum area near the Manila docks with his family.

Bottom: Students who belong to the Society's Assist a Student Program.

group was exposed to the disparity between classes, and the differences and commonalities between the urban and rural poor and subsistence living. Visiting the slums and orphanages in Manila and relocated typhoon victims provoked reflection on my own lifestyle, stability and ease of access to information, services and goods.

During this adventure I was made aware of the global nature of the Society and the Vincentian family. The hospitality of the Philippines National Council and the Vincentians along the way were a big blessing. This Encounter has reignited my own commitment to service.

My grateful thanks to our facilitators, administrators, the National Council of Australia, the National Council of the Philippines and the people of the Philippines. ♦

When peace breaks out it is not always a sign of life

BY ANDREW HAMILTON SJ

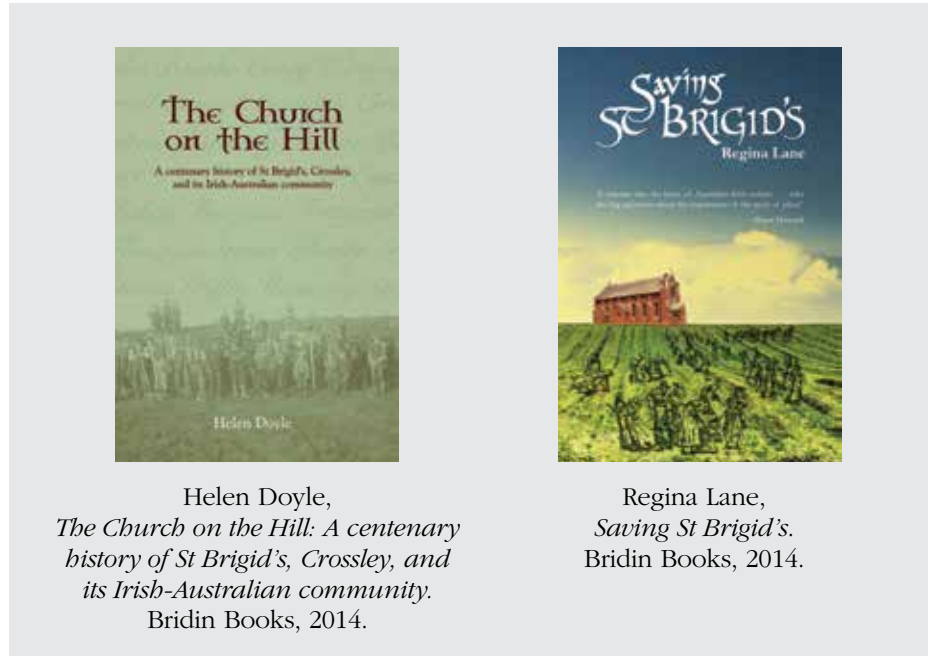
When they work well, grass-roots organisations such as Vinnies, are happily quarrelsome. The local branches will always grumble about head office and sometimes about the Parish Priest, and those at Central Office will scratch their heads over the behaviour of the branches.

Some members of the branches, too, will hold the history of strong and quirky people who shaped the spirit of the organisation and will defend that heritage against all comers, while others will be looking for new ways of meeting new problems. When peace breaks out it is not always a sign of life. Reconciliation is always a work in messy progress.

It is the same in churches, where members of outlying congregations complain about the central parish, and members of parishes resist the exactions of the Cathedral. Sometimes conflicts can become very heated and divide congregations, but they can also bring out energy and initiative that would otherwise have been hidden.

In *Saving St Brigid's* (<http://savingstbrigids.com.au>), Regina Lane tells the story of the struggle to save a Victorian Western District church from decommissioning and alienation. She writes as a representative of those who fought to save St Brigid's in Crossley for the local community. The members of the group are descendants of the Irish immigrants who, over generations, built and supported the church. It has been the heart of their community.

The conflict began with falling church attendances and a decision by the Koroit parish priest to



rationalise resources. This involved the decommissioning and sale of the Crossley church, a decision that was taken without proper consultation of the Crossley community. This led to representations and abrupt rebuff, appeals to the Bishop, promises not kept, the formation of a Save St Brigid's group, local and national publicity, the placing of the church on the market and, almost miraculously, the purchase at market value by the group as a community centre.

Although the book describes in detail the battles to save the church, it is far more than a protest song against the power of the Catholic Church. It is really a passionate celebration of the community built by Irish potato farmers who fled famine in Ireland and of the church at its centre. Standing on red volcanic soil and looking over towards the pines of distant Port Fairy, the church evokes a richly peopled land, its ties with Indigenous Australia and with Ireland, and the precious gift that is its power to connect people to a more individually focussed age. This larger story of an extraordinary community

of immigrants is told by historian Helen Doyle in her wonderful evocation of Irish Catholicism, *The Church on the Hill: A centenary history of St Brigid's, Crossley, and its Irish-Australian community.*

But above all, Regina Lane invites the reader into her own journey. It takes her from a country life lived in the shadow of St Brigid's to the city where she seeks to find her place in a broader world, working in social organisations in Australia and overseas. When she committed herself to save St Brigid's, she found herself building personal and community identity out of apparently inadequate materials. At the book's end she is able to own in her own way the values of family and community she had earlier found constricting. She gives herself so generously in her writing that her book becomes a love story, touching all the moments of self-doubt, of ecstasy, of despair, of friendship, of the transfiguration of faces and places, and of exacting ordinariness that are the grammar of love.

THE MAIL

For a Catholic reader, the charm and sadness of the book lie in the fact that Regina could enter imaginatively the heart of Catholic life only by rejecting the values she saw in the Catholic Church she had to deal with. So why did it have to come to this?

Simply, the protagonists on each side of the dispute, many of whom I know and respect deeply, had different understandings of church buildings. These views of church buildings are complementary, but in conflict were seen as incompatible. One side saw them as church property for which the local priest is responsible, under the bishop, to administer for the good of the present church community. The other side saw them as a living centre of the relationships between families and their ancestors whose faith built and sustained the local church. These relationships are fundamental to understanding the Church. Their importance is implied in the belief in the communion of saints, a much neglected phrase in the Creed.

In the communion of saints, which links Christians who have lived with those still living, bodily connections are important. The people who have built their local church, prayed in it all their lives and cared for it, matter. Their associations with place and community—through the church hall that was the centre of social life, the stained glass windows which coloured their childhood—matter. The larger stories embodied in the church—the immigrant groups that formed the first congregation and their relationship to the first Australians—have a continuing importance.

Because these concrete relationships to church buildings matter, Catholics in a parish composed of a central church and outlying congregations are not simply individuals in a homogeneous group. When they meet they carry their local connections with them.

Had the importance of place and history been given their proper religious value, the community would have been consulted in depth and the fight would not have become so personal. Perhaps the parish may then have seen the outcome of the struggle—the development of church property as a community centre—as central to its own outreach to the wider community.

But in that case the energies that inspired a community to fight for the church and led to so much self-discovery might not have been released. Ultimately, like the bite Adam took out of the apple, the actions that precipitated the saving of the church may have been a happy fault.

This story may also be illuminating for Vinnies. But with us, it is not fixed places that are to be treasured, but the people whom we serve, the histories of their families, the boarding houses where they live, and the network of relationships that are built as we visit them regularly, both our own relationships and those which have gone before us. We need to keep treasuring these, particularly as we learn to work more efficiently.

Once each year, place and people are duly held together at Ozanam House in West Melbourne. In the yearly memorial service, each person who has died during the year is spoken about and remembered for their quiriness and hidden goodness. It concludes by blessing the list of new names joining the old on the wall outside the prayer space. ♦

Andrew Hamilton SJ is a consulting editor of the Eureka Street news website.



JEFFREY BRUNO/ALETEIA

Pope Francis' exhortations

To the Editor,

I was pleased to see the emphasis on the effects of the budget in *The Record*. The common sense of the alternative proposals is evident.

I was mystified why, when the majority of the proponents of the budget profess their Catholicism, the injunctions of Pope Francis in his encyclical did not warrant a mention? I have noticed this aversion previously in *The Record*, with a preference for references to Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King.

Eloquent prose from Brecht, Fanon, Zizek and even Blessed Frederic can never do political damage to Australian politicians, and so for the purposes of achieving better budget outcomes is ineffective.

Pope Francis' exhortations—'Growth in justice ... requires decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income' and 'Inequality is the root of social ills'—should be used to confront Catholics who promote such an uncaring, non-inclusive budget.

Do we want to be advocates who try to achieve a better outcome for those in need, or merely social commentators? ♦

Leo Holt

Lower Templestowe, Victoria

We are here to affirm the rights of our fellow human beings

'So Joseph got up and taking the child and his mother with him escaped that night into Egypt.' (Mt 2:15)

BY BISHOP VINCENT
LONG OFMCONV

My friends,

With these words, the Gospel makes it clear that the Holy Family identified themselves with the most vulnerable people. They did what millions of refugees and asylum seekers do today; that is, seeking refuge and protection in another country because of persecution, hardships and conflicts that they experienced in their own. Like Egypt that hosted the Holy Family, Australia today also has an opportunity to welcome many asylum seekers and refugees. Unfortunately, our country is not being as welcoming and generous a host as it could. In fact, Australia's policies towards asylum seekers and refugees are cruel and inhumane. Instead of giving them safe and reasonable asylum in accordance with our legal and moral obligations, we have added to their pain and despair. In so doing, we betray our own history and tradition of being a beacon of hope for the hopeless and an oasis for the oppressed. This is why we concerned citizens are here today.

We are here to affirm the rights of our fellow human beings. It is not illegal. It is not a crime for them to seek asylum in Australia.

We are here to give voice to their cry, their cry to be treated with dignity, justice and compassion. It is unjust and inhuman to deny them of their rights.

We are here to appeal to the conscience of our fellow citizens and especially those in power. It is high time for us as a responsible, wealthy and resourceful nation to develop the asylum policies that enshrine the best rather than the worst of our natures.



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Many of us here are in fact beneficiaries of the Australia that dared to welcome the unwelcomed. As a former refugee, I remember with pride and gratitude the Australia that rose to the challenge in the wake of the boat people crisis in the 70s and 80s. It accepted an unprecedented number of Asian refugees for the first time in its history. Even though there have been challenges in their resettlement and integration, however, the Australia that embraced them exemplified the best of the Australian spirit. It dared to afford the privilege of opportunity to the underprivileged and a fair go to the underdog. It lived up to its call and destiny as a civilised, free, diverse and richly blessed migrant nation.

Migrants and refugees are beneficiaries of Australia. But they in turn also enrich this nation. Australia is what it is today because of their love

of freedom and fundamental human values. Australia is what it is today because of their determination and drive for a better future. We honour the legacy of this great nation not by excessive protectionism, isolation and defence of our privilege at all costs. Rather, we make it greater by our concern and care for asylum seekers in the spirit of 'a fair go', compassion and solidarity that has marked the history of our country from its humble beginnings.

Friends, as we gather on this sombre day, we are reminded that the drama of the Passion did not begin and end with Jesus 2000 years ago. It continues to play out in the theatre of human societies and relationships. Christ who is identified with the most marginalised and vulnerable continues to suffer, die and rise again. As Christians we are called to recognise the face of Christ in the least of his brothers and sisters; for

their suffering is Christ's; their dying is Christ's; and we have a sacred task of enabling them to experience the fullness of life in Christ.

Palm Sunday also gives us a glimpse of the triumph of love over hatred and life over death. It was not evil that had the upper hand. It was not betrayal, injustice, cruelty, violence and death that had the last word. It was God's unflinching fidelity, his unconditional love in Jesus that brought about this triumph. We are therefore encouraged to work and turn the tide in favour of the least of our brothers and sisters, confident that the Kingdom of God will prevail. So we are not here filled with resignation and a sense of defeat. The triumph of love, the joy of the Gospel spurs us on.

We stand united with one another, with men and women of good will in working for the coming of the Kingdom. We stand united with Pope Francis who has given us a strong leadership on the care of asylum seekers and refugees. His words and gestures at Lampedusa in particular inspire us to speak and act in favour of God's poor for whose cause we will be judged. Pope Francis challenged us to replace indifference with compassion, ignorance with respect and suspicion with love.

Brothers and sisters, we have been given much and much is expected of us, individually and as a society in terms of our compassion, generosity and commitment to share with others. May our endeavour to replace the culture of fear and indifference with that of encounter and acceptance be brought to fruition in accordance with God's vision of the fullness of life for all humanity. ♦

Homily delivered by Bishop Vincent Long OFMConv, Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne, at a prayer service during the Refugee March on Palm Sunday, 13 April 2014.



Duty

This link (<http://www.donghaeng.net/english/duty/duty.swf>) will take you to an online Flash animation which John Lee (Vice President for International Structure) shared at an international gathering of the Vincentian Family in Lisbon in June 2014. It's quite a simple but sweet illustration of what we go through in carrying the cross Jesus has given to each of us to bear. ♦

Reflections provided by St Vincent de Paul Society National Council Vice President, Claire Victory.

Housing is a human right

For the gifts of home, of shelter, of places where we can freely pray and play, for the right to think and speak, we thank you, Lord.

For our brothers and sisters whose homes are torched, whose children are scattered, who must turn down their eyes and fence their mouths, Lord we pray.

For the hands that have touched us in love, the hearts that have wept and laughed with us, for the kindly word, the space given us to fall and rise again, we thank you, Lord.

That our hearts may be open, our hands ready, and our words welcoming to those who have lost their home and need to start again, Lord we pray.

Lord, you came from a far country to join us and to share our life. We pray for those who, like you, have been driven out of their city and left to die. May we tend their wounds and find them a place in our world. ♦

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Tastex Knitwear Inc.

a Special Work of the St Vincent de Paul Society

Our Mission is:

"To enable people with intellectual disabilities to experience meaningful employment in a supportive environment"

Tastex Knitwear & Uniforms is a fully operational knitting mill. We have been producing knitwear in Tasmania, with a reputation for unsurpassed quality and workmanship since 1946.

In October 1970, the St Vincent de Paul Society, purchased Tastex as a going concern to start a "Special Work" to employ people with intellectual disabilities.

The business now maintains ISO 9001:2008 Quality Assurance certification for the manufacture of it's knitted product.

Tastex presently markets under two trading names, Glen Mill Softwear for school wear, and Tastex Knitwear for the corporate and work wear market.

Tastex is an Australian Disability Enterprise, as well as a Special Work of the St Vincent de Paul Society. We receive some funding from the Dept of Social Services to assist us to provide our supported employees with ongoing training and support in the workplace. Maintaining this social objective, whilst continuing to operate successfully within a highly competitive market place is an ongoing challenge.

Factory Outlet

Tastex Knitwear & Uniforms
home of Tastex & Glen Mill Quality Tasmanian Knitwear



We Supply our knitwear to around 150 schools across Tasmania and mainland Australia. Our customers range from small primary schools to large corporations and government departments.

Our knitted school range includes, jumpers, vests, cardigans and rugby tops.

The need to diversify to remain viable prompted our recent transition from Tastex Knitwear to Tastex Knitwear & Uniforms.

We now offer an extensive range of additional garments to our customers including: Suits, shirts, polos, windcheaters, trousers, shorts, jackets, and hats, whilst continuing to manufacture our Glen Mill Softwear School Knitwear and Tastex Corporate & Work Wear range.

We also offer our customers a quality embroidery service. We embroider school and corporate logos on to all garments. Our prices are competitive and the embroidery area is expanding rapidly.

Our most recent innovations are the "Enviro Bear" and the "Envirowoolly". Manufactured from recycled wool products, these unique soft toys are being marketed as "Made in Tasmania By People Who Care!". These Teddy Bears and Australian Native Animals are purchased by both schools and tourism ventures.

At Tastex all employees are given the opportunity to undertake industry recognised traineeships in textile production. Each year, individual program plans are prepared for all supported employees following a detailed assessment of their skills, needs or preferences. Each person is provided with the on the job training and support that they need to carry out the requirements of their particular job and to encourage and support their personal development.

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