

# the Record

Winter 2014



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

## THE EQUITY ISSUE

Is the only way to escape the hard times for the poor to get poorer and for the rich to get richer?

PAGES 8-14



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.

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## The Rule 2.1

... and that even now, through their caring,  
the poor may catch a glimpse of God's great love for them.

When you called the toll free number

Asking for some food,

Did you then expect, I wonder,

To catch a glimpse of God?

You know how much He loves the poor;

Why then be surprised,

In His loving servant at your door,

to see the face of Christ?

*Pat Cunneen*

Whitfords Conference, WA



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### FRONT COVER

Image courtesy of the St Vincent de Paul  
Society's Immersion Committee

### NEXT ISSUE

Spring 2014

## Swinging

If  
we don't tell our stories,  
sure as hell  
someone else will tell them for us.

If  
we live as if  
we were alone,  
we might as well surrender.

But if we fall,  
when we fall,  
we will have all the more reason  
to  
rise up  
swinging.

*By Dr John Falzon*

## IN THIS ISSUE

2	<b>POETRY</b> Inspirational poems.	14	<b>EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b> <i>By Stephanie Gotlib</i> The Executive Officer for Children with Disability Australia asks how the 'earn or learn' rhetoric applies to children with a disability given the challenges they face.	26 & 27	<b>INFORMED CHOICES</b> <i>By John Wicks</i> Retired Senior Public Servant, John Wicks, says in a democracy the community should be given sufficient, proven information to make an informed choice.
4	<b>FRONTLINES</b> From the National President Anthony Thornton.	15-18	<b>OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT</b> The annual Assist a Student newsletter publication comprising news from those students the St Vincent de Paul Society assists around the world.	29	<b>BOOK REVIEW</b> <i>By Andrew Hamilton SJ</i> Noel Braun was 77-years-old when he became a pilgrim. His book <i>The Day Was Made for Walking: An Aussie's Search for Meaning on the Camino de Santiago</i> , is reviewed by Andrew Hamilton SJ.
5	<b>NEWS IN BRIEF</b> Order of Australia honours have been awarded to three people with strong ties to the St Vincent de Paul Society.	19	<b>ECONOMIC ANALYSIS</b> <i>By Professor John Quiggan</i> High-profile economist and commentator explains how 'hard Keynesianism' might work and shares his assessment of the current macroeconomic situation.	30 & 31	<b>FROM THE ARCHIVES</b> <i>By Michael Moran</i> In our very early years, the St Vincent de Paul Society had no overheads. Austerity was our middle name.
6	<b>PROFILE</b> The newly elected State President of Queensland, John Forrest, aims to continually promote a culture of caring, sharing and trust at the St Vincent de Paul Society in Queensland.	20 & 21	<b>AUSTERITY PARADOX</b> <i>By Professor David Hayward</i> Our strange experience of fiscal austerity in a time of prosperity is a paradox borne from political choices rather than economic necessity.	31	<b>THE MAIL</b> Letter to the Editor.
7	<b>OUR PEOPLE</b> St Vincent de Paul Society National Council Vice President has been named South Australia's Young Lawyer of the Year.	22 & 23	<b>PUBLIC SECTOR</b> <i>By Nadine Flood</i> The national secretary of the Community and Public Service Sector, Nadine Flood, says it is a myth that you can cut public servants jobs without further affecting the delivery of services.	32 & 33	<b>PERSONAL ACCOUNT</b> <i>By Trevor Brown</i> After reading the St Vincent de Paul Society publication titled <i>Education is Power</i> , a young student was inspired to share his experience at the Ozanam Community Centre in Melbourne.
8 & 9	<b>SOLIDARITY</b> <i>By Dr John Falzon</i> In the face of one of most vicious attacks on ordinary people that we have seen in recent Australian history we have a secret weapon. It is called solidarity.	24	<b>BALANCE SHEET</b> Responses to the Budget from Indigenous leaders, as well as, health and higher education experts.	34	<b>IMMERSION</b> Participants in the 2014 Immersion Program reflect on their visit to the remote community of Nganmarriyanga situated 375km south west of Darwin.
10 & 11	<b>DECISIVE POLICY</b> On May 22, 2014, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) released its new analysis of the 2014-15 Federal Budget titled, <i>A budget that divides a nation</i> .	25	<b>BUDGET SUBMISSIONS</b> <i>By Rik Sutherland</i> Budgets are an excellent opportunity for the St Vincent de Paul Society to make its voice heard on the important issues.	35	<b>REFLECTION</b> <i>By Philip Keogh</i> An exploration of what it means to live the Catholic faith and be an advocate for others.
12 & 13	<b>POLICY DECISIONS</b> <i>By Richard Denniss</i> This year's budget saw the cuts fall heavily on those with the lowest income with the well-off left relatively unscathed. However, more equitable options are available.				

## EDITOR'S NOTE

### A budget that really has divided a nation

In the 2014 winter issue of *The Record* we unpack the implications of the Federal Budget on the not-for-profit sector and the wider community. Economist John Quiggan has kindly contributed an article as has the Director of Children with a Disability Australia, Stephanie Gotlib, among others.

As for the Budget, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia holds grave concerns about many Budget measures, yet the introduction of a GP co-payment and move to deny young people, who are unemployed access to income support for six months in a year, are arguably the most offensive.

The Society in NSW has recently established a petition to oppose the Budget measures. The petition has been endorsed by the Society nationally, and can be viewed online at [www.change.org/vinnies-budget](http://www.change.org/vinnies-budget) ♦



# Charity and social justice

BY ANTHONY THORNTON

*'Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is the role of justice to prevent the attack!'*

Blessed Frederic Ozanam

Imagine someone locked behind four huge walls.

Perhaps they started out wanting to get out of their state of imprisonment but now they just lie there, having given up all hope of escape. Perhaps every time they tried to climb over the walls they discovered that the walls were actually growing taller!

These walls are Poverty, Inequality, Humiliation and Despair.

The people we are here for are trapped behind these walls. Our social and economic structures create these walls. This is especially obvious, for example, when we see people locked out of the labour market and then punished and blamed for being unemployed.

It's sad when charity is taken to mean just bringing food and clothing to the person imprisoned behind these walls, whilst leaving them imprisoned. That, for example, is what the government would like us to do for the young people who are supposed to live on nothing for six months of the year because they committed the crime of being unemployed and being young.

Sadly the word *charity* has been watered down. It comes to us via the Latin *caritas*, from the Greek word *agape*, meaning an *unconditional loving kindness* or *tenderness*. This New Testament concept comes from the Hebrew *hesed*, sometimes translated as *compassion*.



This is why the false idea of 'deserving' versus 'undeserving' poor, so central to much of the current debate on welfare reform, is completely at odds with this biblical principle.

It is also why we would be very much mistaken if we thought that it was enough to just leave people imprisoned by poverty and inequality. And there's certainly nothing compassionate about blaming someone for being stuck behind those walls. How easy it is for society to create the myth that anyone stuck behind the walls of poverty and inequality must have built those walls themselves! Especially when it seems that they have given up hope, as the walls grow bigger, as inequality deepens (which is what we are going to see as a result of this Federal Budget).

Love demands that we help people to scale these walls. Love also demands that we help people to claim the right

to hope and the right to human dignity, despite the fact they are so systematically humiliated and driven to despair by cruel policies and unjust social attitudes.

Social Justice, which is another way of loving, demands that as we help people over the walls, we chip away at the walls, with the eventual goal of tearing them down. In other words, that we work towards changing the way our society is organised so that people are no longer locked out and left to languish. This is what it means to achieve our aspiration of creating a more just and compassionate society. Remember Berlin. Any wall can be knocked down if enough people want it. ♦

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

## Order of Australia honours for Vincentians

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia warmly congratulates those members and volunteers whose efforts were recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours this year. The Society in Victoria was pleased to learn Vincentians Bob Stewart and Dr Allen Moloney had been awarded Order of Australia awards for providing social and community services to their respective communities.

**Bob (Robert Francis Stewart)**, 83, was the President of Greythorn



Conference for some nine years and retired from the Society two years ago due to failing health. Bob, of Bob Stewart's of Kew, is very well known in the local area for his service to the community for well over 50 years.

**Dr Allen Moloney**, 78, was the President of North Western

Central Council for four years, until about three years ago. The retired dentist had served the Ballarat community through his long time involvement with Apex, Rotary and the St Vincent De Paul Society, which he joined in 1996.

The Society in New South Wales was also thrilled to hear **Barbara O'Brien**, who volunteers for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Dubbo, received an Order of Australia for her contributions to the Gulargambone community, where she lived until moving to Dubbo in 2012. The former Coonamble Shire councillor and Director of Nursing for Gulargambone Hospital was instrumental in seeing the completion of many community-minded initiatives. ♦

## Racism is a serious, continuing problem in Australia

On 12 June 2014, the St Vincent de Paul Society was one of 120 organisations to have co-signed a letter urging the Federal Government to abandon racial vilification changes. The letter, addressed to the Attorney-General Senator George Brandis, was drafted by the Australian Human Rights Law Centre and has been signed by organisations as diverse as The Australian Lawyers Alliance and

the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. The following is an edited excerpt from the open letter: 'We write to urge you not to proceed with the proposed changes to the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) (RDA) outlined in the recently released Exposure Draft. Protecting against the serious harm that flows from racial vilification is a legitimate restriction on free speech. The proposed exemption is so broad, and the new protection is so narrow, that the combined changes would almost completely remove the existing

Federal racial vilification protections.' Read the letter in full at <http://j.mp/publicletter>

On 10 June 2014, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Research and Legal Officer, Rik Sutherland, had an article titled 'What can we all agree on in the debate about racially insulting language?' published on the new discussion blog about social policy, [www.powertopersuade.org.au](http://www.powertopersuade.org.au). In his article, Rik presented a legal perspective of the arguments on both sides and suggested a way to move beyond entrenched positions. Read the article in full at <http://j.mp/powertopersuade> ♦

## SOCIAL JUSTICE UPDATE

In its role of advocating for the rights of marginalised groups in the community, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia office regularly produces publications, submissions and reports. The following list, compiled by Research and Legal Officer, Rik Sutherland, outlines the most recent issues of concern.

### Repeal of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission

In a submission made to the Senate Committee, we outlined our support for a single regulator for the not for profit sector, and our belief that the ACNC has made excellent progress in moving towards a national charities framework. Full report available at [www.vinnies.org.au/charitysubmission](http://www.vinnies.org.au/charitysubmission)

### Pre-Budget Submission

The focus of any Budget should be on building up Australians, with particular emphasis on housing and income

support for those doing it toughest. As such, we were very disappointed by the Federal Budget that was handed down in May. Full report at [www.vinnies.org.au/budgetsubmission](http://www.vinnies.org.au/budgetsubmission)

### Inquiry into Children in Detention

In a submission to the national inquiry conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission, we have gathered evidence that suggested very serious harm being inflicted on children by the current detention regime, and continue to oppose this regime. Full report at [www.vinnies.org.au/childdetention](http://www.vinnies.org.au/childdetention)

*To learn more about the advocacy efforts carried out by the national office on behalf of the St Vincent de Paul Society, subscribe to our monthly Social Justice Update by clicking on the 'Subscribe to Updates' link in the footer of the [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au) homepage. Alternatively email [media@svdp.org.au](mailto:media@svdp.org.au)*

# New leader for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Queensland

**Name:**

Mr John Forrest

**Position in the Society:**

Queensland State President

**Day job:**

Now retired after a diverse working life in the electronics, electrical contracting, broadcast production and hospitality industries.

**Hometown:**

A short drive from the quiet Sunshine Coast hinterland town of Yandina, not far from the 'Ginger Factory' tourist hub.

**How did you first become involved with the Society?**

The influence of family, friends and parish community members reinforced my desire to live out my faith and beliefs not only in following the gospel message with loyalty and commitment to the teachings of Jesus Christ, but also in practical terms by serving Christ in the poor. My home parish in Brisbane in the early 1990s was a very active community and the St Vincent de Paul conference was a standout.

Both my parents were strong traditional Catholics and my father, who was a Vincentian for almost 30 years, exemplified the values of compassion, respect, integrity and empathy, and for that example I am deeply grateful.

My aspirations eventually turned to commitment and I joined the Society in 1991; this commitment to the mission and core values of the Society has not diminished in the 23 years that I have been a member.

**Describe your experiences of being a Conference member:**

Conference work is varied and challenging, but with the special privilege of being allowed into



people's homes and lives comes frustration, sadness and often times joy, when a good outcome has been achieved. The commitment, dedication and spirituality of fellow members is and has been a source of personal enrichment and learning.

**What are your key aims during your time as president in the next four years?**

My key focus will be to encourage members of the Society, particularly conference members, to develop a deeper personal understanding and commitment to the underlying spiritual values of the Society, as laid down and exemplified by Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the founding fathers and epitomised by St Vincent de Paul.

It will also be to broaden and strengthen recognition of the Society in Queensland as a caring Catholic charity offering a genuine hand up in material and personal terms to persons in need, and to maintain a focus on membership growth, particularly through engagement with younger people in general and with parish communities.

Equally, through sound planning and action, to ensure that the Society has the capacity and means to sustain delivery of all current and future services, particularly 'Special Works', that align with our mission and core values.

Another important focus will be to identify and pursue suitable opportunities with governments, the corporate sector and individuals to expand our 'Special Works'.

**What are the challenges members of the Society face in carrying out Good Works?**

The Society is based on person-to-person contact in the delivery of assistance, and the challenge is to appropriately engage with those we seek to help to achieve the best and sustainable outcomes. The Society motto of 'a hand up not a hand out' is not just a mantra, and it sometimes commits members to personal and emotional pain in developing an understanding of needs and responding to these needs in a meaningful way.

In modern society another significant challenge we face is the new types of poverty emerging and we have to constantly strive for renewal so that we can adapt accordingly.

How we interact with governments and the way in which we advocate on behalf of the forgotten or excluded is part of that renewal process.

We cannot hope to deliver on alleviation of deprivation, dysfunction and isolation if members don't have a shared understanding of how we behave towards each other, the communities we serve, our supporters and all those we are in contact with through our 'Good Works'. The challenge will be to continue to provide appropriate spiritual development and skills training of members while promoting a culture of caring, sharing and trust.

*continued on page 11 ►*



# Vincentian named Young Lawyer of the Year in SA

***Claire Victory's achievements in the legal profession as well as her outstanding charity work were recognised when she was named SA's Young Lawyer of the Year.***

The solicitor, who is also vice president of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, accepted the \$2000 award at the Burgess Paluch Young Lawyers Ball, held on 10 April. The 'Roaring 20s' themed ball was held at the Sebel Playford in Adelaide, and the announcement took Claire by surprise.

'I did not know I was receiving the award until Justice Gray started reading out the description and I realised he was talking about me,' Claire said. 'I knew I was nominated but did not think I would win. I thanked my bosses in particular for encouraging my community and Law Society involvement, and encouraged other young lawyers to get involved in things outside work.'

Law Society President Morry Bailes said: 'Claire is an outstanding young lawyer and thoroughly deserving of the award. The number of young lawyers who give so much back to the community is a testament to their keen sense of social justice and their commitment to upholding the principles of the law. The future of the law is in good hands.'

Claire was nominated for the award by her boss William Duddy, of Duddy Shopov Lawyers, located in Adelaide, who described her as having gone above and beyond in both her work and extra-curricular activities. As well as her continuing development as a highly skilled solicitor in matters such as personal injury, insurance, workplace safety and employment law, she has also completed a Vocational Graduate Diploma in Family Dispute Resolution and a



*From left, Law Society President Morry Bailes, Young Lawyers Committee Co-Chair Danielle Arnfield, SA Young Lawyer of the Year Claire Victory, The Hon. Justice Gray and Burgess Paluch director Paul Burgess.*

Graduate Certificate in Loss, Grief and Trauma Counselling.

'I think this enhances my ability to work with people—clients, co-workers, people whom we assist through the Society, as well as friends and acquaintances. These courses are entirely people-focussed, whereas sometimes in the law it is easy to get caught up with the words, the legislation, the technicalities and procedural matters; I think the additional study helps me to maintain a balanced view of things, never forgetting the human element,' Claire said.

In her role as the co-chair of the Young Lawyers Committee, Claire has also been instrumental in establishing initiatives to support young lawyers and students, particularly with regards to mental health initiatives.

'I am fortunate that the partners of my firm are supportive of the work I do with Vinnies and the Law Society; they encourage my community involvement and give me time and

encouragement to remain engaged in the organisations and causes about which I am passionate,' she said.

Claire also mentors young law students and newly admitted practitioners, and has been a mock trial coach for students of St Mary's and Cabra College. Claire said she is not a mentor through official channels but is regularly approached by law students and graduates who want advice on their study or career path or who want some work experience.

'I am always happy to meet with them to give them a bit of guidance, help them with their CV and make suggestions about networking opportunities. I didn't really know any younger lawyers during law school or my first year of practice [until I got involved in the Young Lawyers Committee], so I was lucky to have senior members of the profession willing to offer me guidance and support.'

*continued on page 31 ►*

# Grinding the face of the poor

BY DR JOHN FALZON

*'What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?' Isaiah 3:15*

***The Budget was one of most vicious attacks on ordinary people that we have seen in recent Australian history.***

We are not in the throes of a fiscal crisis but if we embark on this treacherous path of US-style austerity we will be staring down the barrel of a social crisis.

We will be facing a social crisis if the people who bear the burden of inequality, especially the people who are forced into poverty and even homelessness, are made to pay so that the generous tax concessions enjoyed by the wealthy are preserved.

We will be facing a social crisis if the Government seeks to grind down people's lives, humiliating them and hurting them instead of helping them.

But make no mistake. In the face of the social crisis we have a secret weapon. It is called solidarity. And don't worry—it remains a secret weapon even though we name it openly and proudly. It remains a secret weapon because those who do not practise it can never understand it.

Solidarity is growing strong. It is being taught by the experts—by the people who suffer most from the toxic fruits of poverty and inequality, from the First Peoples of Australia to the most recent arrivals who seek asylum in this beautiful country, and everyone in between, all who are attacked, all who are derided and despised.

These are the ordinary people, the great people, who have achieved on the ground the greatest and most progressive social change by analysing and agitating under the guiding stars of struggle and hope. Good social



policy might be formulated and legislated from above but it is always created and fought for from below, by ordinary people who will not allow the purveyors of injustice and inequality and greed to grind them down.

Our struggle is for a society in which no one is oppressed or humiliated by structures of inequality. It will be a long struggle, a hard struggle. But just as our struggle is enormous, so too is our hope.

As Brecht put it: 'The most beautiful of all doubts is when the downtrodden

and despondent stop believing in the strength of their oppressors.'

This Budget will not discomfit the comfortable, but for those who struggle to make ends meet it will cause great suffering. This is not a Budget that repairs a nation. It is a Budget that has broken a nation's heart.

Our problem in Australia is not the 'idleness of the poor', as proposed by those who refuse to let the truth get in the way of ideology. Putting the boot into disadvantaged Australians might be therapeutic for welfare bashers





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but it will not help even one person into employment. Our problem is inequality.

This is a social question, not a question of behaviour. We do irreparable harm when we turn it into a question of individual behaviour, blaming people for their own poverty, as is so often the case with people who are homeless or in jail because of society's failure to provide them with opportunities and to nurture their talents.

We build massive walls around people on the basis of their race, class, gender

or disability. The same people are then condemned for lacking the 'aspiration' to scale these walls.

Our task is to have the humility to listen to the people who can teach us what it is that needs to change. It is about committing ourselves to join in the long-haul project of tearing down the walls that we have built around people, locking them out, or locking them up.

'What counts today,' wrote Franz Fanon back in 1961, 'the question which is looming on the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth.

Humanity must reply to this question, or be shaken to pieces by it.'

Fanon wrote eloquently of the 'systematic negation of the other person and the furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity.'

Sadly, the Federal Budget will result in a further redistribution of resources away from the already-poor towards the already-rich. This attempt at wealth redistribution can only occur on the basis of that 'systematic negation' of humanity typified by attacks on people who are pushed to the margins. Warren Buffett was right when he said: 'There's class warfare alright, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning.'

Unemployment, homelessness, inequality and poverty will not be reduced by reducing social expenditure. As philosopher Slavoj Zizek explains:

*We are told again and again that we live in a critical time of deficit and debts where we all have to share a burden and accept a lower standard of living—all with the exception of the (very) rich. The idea of taxing them more is an absolute taboo: if we do this, so we are told, the rich will lose the incentive to invest and create new jobs, and we will all suffer the consequences. The only way to escape the hard times is for the poor to get poorer and for the rich to get richer.*

But we are not easily deterred from our struggle for a more equitable society. And it would appear that large sections of the community are feeling a growing sense of solidarity and love. Brecht put it so well:

*The compassion of the oppressed for the oppressed is indispensable. It is the world's one hope.* ♦

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Dr John Falzon is Chief Executive of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council. This article was first published in the Eureka Street news website [www.eurekastreet.com.au](http://www.eurekastreet.com.au)

# A budget that divides the nation

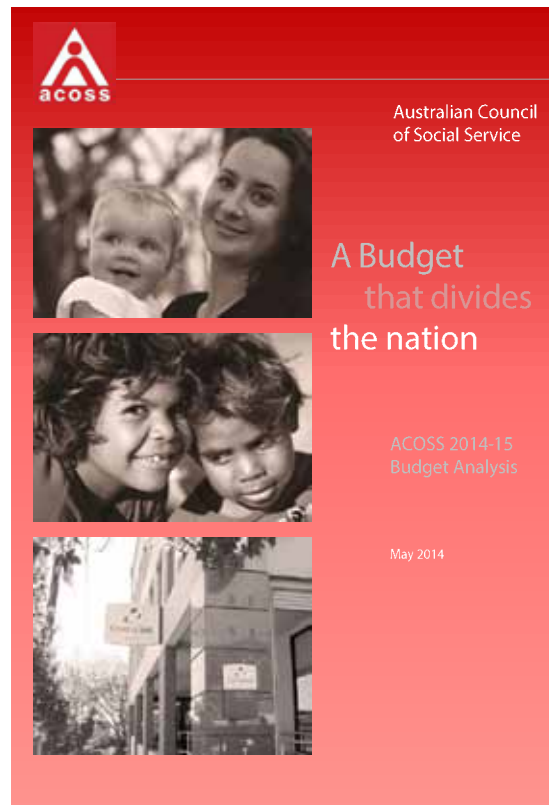
***In the days and weeks that follow the release of a Federal Budget, non-partisan economists and policy experts typically play a public service role by analysing the figures and providing detailed assessments.***

On May 22, 2014, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) released its new analysis of the 2014–15 Federal Budget, titled ‘A budget that divides a nation’. ACOSS Chief Executive, Dr Cassandra Goldie, said the analysis brought home the harsh truth that the heavy focus on spending cuts would be socially harmful and cost the nation more in the long run. The following is an excerpt from the ACOSS 2014–15 Budget Analysis.

*The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) recognises that Australia faces a budget challenge in meeting the growing gap between the community’s reasonable expectations of government and available resources to meet those expectations. That is why we support a comprehensive review of revenue and expenditure to set the budget on a sustainable path for the future.*

However, we believe the priority should be to reign in wasteful expenditure, ensure spending is targeted to those who need assistance most and begin necessary reforms to create a sustainable and equitable tax system.

The 2014–15 Budget is a blueprint for a very different Australia, departing from our historical commitments to a strong social safety net and universal health and education. While a number of measures will impact households on high incomes, these are largely short term or marginal in impact. By contrast, the budget ushers in changes to social supports for those living on low income which will have long-term and severe impacts.



*The front cover of the budget analysis released by the Australian Council of Social Service.*

***The removal of any income support for a group of unemployed people fundamentally changes the Australian income support safety net.***

An Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report published this month shows that over the last 15 years, Australia has become a less equal society, with the income share of those at the bottom and in the middle falling while the share of those at the top is rising. This budget will accelerate that trend.

Lowering indexation for pensions and the freezing of family payments for two years will impact families living on low incomes. We estimate that,

over a decade, changes to indexation will mean that people relying on pensions will be \$80 a week worse off. Changes to the Disability Support Pension (DSP) scheme will result in more young people currently receiving this pension being moved to the much lower Newstart or Youth Allowance, a loss of up to \$214 a week.

New rules will deny income support to young people aged up to 29 for six months of every year, unless exempted, and then force them into ‘work for the dole’. The removal of any income support for a group of unemployed people fundamentally changes the Australian income support safety net. Traditionally, Australia has a safety net for all who need it, and requires participation in return. The budget turns this around by

excluding an entire group of people from basic assistance, with exemptions only for select categories of people.

The budget sees changes to the funding of employment assistance providers and removes crucial programs—such as Youth Connections and wage subsidies—that have been successful at making young people ‘job ready’ and providing real job opportunities.

There is some welcome action in the budget to remove or tighten access to a number of poorly-targeted entitlements: abolishing the Seniors Supplement, limiting access to the Seniors Card for older couples with substantial financial assets or superannuation benefits, and capping the Family Tax Benefit Part B payment at \$100,000. The introduction of a temporary levy for people earning over \$180,000, the move to take superannuation payments into account

in assessing eligibility for the Seniors Health Card, and the reduction in corporate welfare are all directed at those with more capacity to pay. However, most of the measures affecting those on higher incomes will have minimal effect or will be felt for only a short time.

The new deficit levy is a much fairer way to pay for essential services such as health care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) as the population ages than the hard 'user pays' approach. However, it lacks a clear purpose: it is to be introduced when needed least, and withdrawn just when needed most. The levy will be withdrawn in 2017, exactly when more revenue is needed for essential programs like the NDIS. The levy should be made permanent and tied to necessary social investments like the NDIS. More importantly, it should be complemented by necessary structural reforms to our tax system to enable us to meet the needs and reasonable expectations of an ageing community sustainably over the long term.

The 2014–15 Budget also signals a Federal Government retreat from its role in the provision of universal health and education services. The \$7 co-payments for visits to the doctor and for other services will adversely impact low-income patients, particularly those with complex health conditions, and possibly deter them from seeking necessary health services, making poorer long-term health outcomes likely.

It is disappointing that, given Australia's worsening health affordability crisis, the budget offers no long-term strategy for investment and reform, and instead offers reduced investment in existing initiatives. The budget reduces funding to incentives for investment in low cost housing and provides no guarantee of future funding for homelessness services beyond 2015.

*The 2014-15 Budget also sees a widespread reduction in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, with 150 programmes being consolidated into just five under the Government's new 'Indigenous Advancement Strategy'.*

The 2014–15 Budget also sees a widespread reduction in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, with 150 programmes being consolidated into just five under the Government's new 'Indigenous Advancement Strategy'. This will result in \$493.7 million in savings over four years, including a \$169.2 million reduction in expenditure on health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While ACOSS supports the reduction of red tape in order to ensure funds are most effectively invested in communities, we are deeply concerned by the lack of detail around these measures and the potential 'one size fits all' approach. The 2014–15 Budget also includes a discontinuation of \$15 million which had been set aside to provide funding for the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, along with significant funding reductions to other Aboriginal organisations, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) and the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS).

Overall this budget both hits the wrong targets and misses real opportunities, focusing too much on spending and too little on

where the bigger problem lies—falling revenue. To be fair and equitable this budget should have addressed our underlying revenue problem and begun the required process of major structural reform. Sadly, it has instead left generous tax concessions that mainly benefit people on higher incomes in the too-hard basket: superannuation, the treatment of private trusts and companies, and negative gearing. This missed opportunity will cost us all, with many billions of dollars in foregone revenue and a reduction in support and services to those already in a precarious financial position. ♦

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This summary was taken from the Australian Council of Social Service's Budget Analysis 2014–15. The full analysis is available at <http://www.acoss.org.au/>

◀ continued from page 6

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

At the forefront of lay Catholic organisations, widely recognised and well regarded as a caring, spiritually driven organisation aspiring to live the gospel message through charitable works.

That our 'Special Works' will encompass a wide and diverse range of human and health services, including support services for the homeless, youth and those with mental health issues, through to aged care living, assisted home living and respite care.

I would like to see the Vinnies brand remaining strong, with the Vinnies Retail Centres as the number one choice in the charity shopping sector.

I would hope that the considerable progress we have made in the last few years will have strengthened and broadened in the medium term our engagement with youth and younger members and that the median age of members will have reduced considerably. ♦



# There is an alternative

BY RICHARD DENNISS

***In the lead up to the Budget we were told that Australia was facing a 'crisis' and a 'budget emergency'. In his Budget speech Treasurer Joe Hockey claimed that the main Budget programs, such as health and education, were suddenly unsustainable.***

However, the Budget papers make it clear that Australia has low levels of tax, low levels of public spending and low levels of public sector debt. The deceit in this Budget is the unwillingness of the Government to say that the services that Australians have come to expect from their government can be sustainably provided—but not if we continue to cut taxes.

The Budget makes quite clear who wins and who loses and just who will do Mr Hockey's 'heavy lifting'. Measures such as forcing young unemployed people to wait six months before receiving Newstart, making it more difficult to see a doctor, forcing the elderly to continue working, and limiting protections on the environment, amongst a raft of other decisions, will entrench poverty and make Australia more inequitable than it has ever been.

One of the strangest and most concerning parts of the Budget is that hospital and school funding will soon be linked to the consumer price index (CPI). This will see funding cut by one per cent per year and place our health services and world class education system in danger. When these systems inevitably begin to fail the Government will likely come back and insist on collecting money from users to prop them up, a measure we are seeing already with the proposed



*One of the strangest and most concerning parts of the Budget is that hospital and school funding will soon be linked to the consumer price index (CPI).'*

deregulation of university fees and a GP co-payment.

This Budget will change the way income is redistributed amongst the rich and poor and change the way we view those living in poverty. Where once we considered ourselves a generous nation, and prided ourselves on assisting the vulnerable, we have

embraced the idea of the 'unworthy poor' and are happy to use them to assist the very wealthy to stay that way. Despite all the rhetoric about this Budget spreading the pain, business got their tax cut, the miners kept their fuel subsidies and wealthy superannuants hung on to their tax-free income. The very wealthy will be laughing all the way to the bank while the poor will be the punch line.

## **The alternative**

This year's Budget saw the cuts fall heavily on those with the lowest income, with the well-off left relatively unscathed. However, more equitable options are available. Australia spends



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*Australia is one of the richest nations in the world at the richest point in history.*

billions every year subsidising wealthy corporations and well-off individuals. For instance, the mining industry receives \$4.5 billion in government subsidies while superannuation tax concessions to the top five per cent of income earners cost \$9 billion every year (and will soon reach \$40 billion in total). Modelling by The Australia Institute has found that high income earners overwhelmingly benefited

from income tax cuts introduced by the Howard government that have cost the Budget \$170 billion since 2006.

The Government has the opportunity to improve the Budget in a more equitable manner by targeting the benefits that flow to the rich. While the deficit levy was a move in the right direction it did not go far enough, nor is it permanent.

Australia is one of the richest nations in the world at the richest point in history. We can afford to do anything we want but we cannot afford to do everything we want. We need to think about what is important to us as a

nation. Do we want a health system based on insurance or an education system based on the size of your bank account? There are plenty of countries around the world where this is the case. Australia is rather unique, but we certainly don't have to remain like this.

The idea that everything in the Budget has suddenly become unsustainable and can only be fixed by gutting our safety net, our health care and education systems is clearly wrong. This Budget is the first step down a path to a very different Australia. ♦

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Dr Richard Denniss is Executive Director of The Australia Institute, a Canberra-based think tank, [www.tai.org.au](http://www.tai.org.au)

# Advocate says Budget 2014 fails students with disability

***Despite bi-partisan support for needs-based disability loading to be introduced in the 2015 school year, the Federal Budget failed to deliver new money for its implementation. This has left Stephanie Gotlib, the executive officer at Children with Disability Australia, wondering how the 'earn or learn' rhetoric applies to children with a disability, many of whom aspire to do both, yet face challenges at every turn.***

BY STEPHANIE GOTLIB

The day before the Federal Budget was handed down, Children with Disability Australia (CDA) co-hosted a summit with the Australian Education Union, at Parliament House in Canberra, on the critical need for adequate funding for students with disability. Ken Boston, Gonski school funding review panel member, educators and families spoke strongly about the growing crisis in education for students with disability. The forum delivered a clear and united message that the need for adequate funding for students with disability is critical and urgent.

There had been a clear bipartisan commitment to increase funding for students with disability in the 2015 school year through the establishment of a needs-based disability loading. A previous report obtained by the Australian Government identified that there were a minimum of 100,000 students with disability who were not receiving funding. But, despite the evidence of a clear funding gap and previous public commitments, there was no new money for students with disability in the 2014 Budget. Students and families face continuing despair



as to whether the much needed education reform will ever happen.

Nine per cent of children aged five to 14 have a disability. Just over 90 per cent of students with disability attend mainstream schools. In Australia it is typical to have one or two students with disability in a classroom. It is therefore highly important for the education system to reflect best practice with regard to education provision for students with disability and future lifetime opportunities. However, a typical school experience for students with disability involves discrimination, bullying, limited or no funding for support and resources, inadequately trained staff and having to contend with a culture of low expectations.

Statistics show that there is a significant difference in education outcomes for students with disability compared with their peers without disability. Currently 26 per cent of student with disability do not go past Year 10, and only 36 per cent complete Year 12 compared to a completion rate of 60 per cent for people without disability.

Further to this, the workforce participation rate of people with disability is 53 per cent in full time employment compared to 83 per cent of the rest of the population.

45 per cent of people with a disability in Australia live in or near poverty, more than double the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 22 per cent.

A good education is fundamental for young people to be able to become contributing adults in society. These statistics paint a picture of systemic failure to prepare young people with disability for adult life compared to their peers.

There has been much discussion by our parliamentarians about the need for young people to either earn or learn. Many young people with disability aspire to do both, but this current Budget offers them little opportunity to achieve this, now or in the foreseeable future. Whilst we continue to fail to address the gross disadvantage confronting students with disability in our education system, the future for too many will be a fast track to the Disability Support Pension. ♦

Children with Disability Australia (CDA) is the national peak organisation representing children and young people with disability. Stephanie Gotlib is the executive officer at Children with Disability Australia. CDA welcomes members from across the country and membership is free for young people with disability and their families. For more information go to [www.cda.org.au](http://www.cda.org.au)



# Assist a Student

## SUPPORTER NEWSLETTER – 2014



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

An education sponsorship program  
aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty

Hello, my name is Celina Lai and in June 2013 I was invited to join the National Overseas Development Committee (NODC) as the National Assist A Student (AAS) Co-ordinator. This position was previously filled by Br Doug Walsh, who had seen the Assist a Student Program from its conception right up to its present form and who held this program very close to his heart.

Since joining the NODC, I have learned a lot about the support the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia provides to Vincentians in the Asia/Oceania region. The Assist a Student Program is only one of many projects that have been financially and spiritually supported by Australian members and volunteers.



My history with the St Vincent de Paul Society has been a relatively brief one compared with my fellow Vincentians on NODC. In mid-2007, I was taken along to a Friday night with the Vinnies soup van by a new friend. It was here that I was reminded about meeting Christ in the people who live on the fringes of our communities. I joined the Mary MacKillop (youth) Conference where our main work was providing a monthly fun day out for children whose families have needed Vinnies services. We also assisted senior Conferences at Christmas time, wrapping presents and delivering hampers. I have now graduated from the youth Conference and joined my local parish Conference, Holy Spirit, in Casuarina in the Northern Territory. My fellow Vincentians are inspiring in their tireless efforts in reaching a hand towards those in need.

Alongside volunteering with Vinnies, I have a full time position as a Speech Pathologist at the Royal Darwin Hospital and work with children and adults with feeding and communication difficulties. In my own time, I have had the opportunity to visit and volunteer in developing countries in the Asia Pacific region. It is very easy to see in these countries where a program like Assist a Student can change the lives of children and their families. Education can give so much to an individual and subsequently their family. We all know the opportunities created from having access to education. It is amazing to think that a relatively small amount of money (AUS\$70) can make such a difference.

This year my aim is to gain a better understanding of how the Assist a Student Program is run in each Australian state and territory and to provide support and information as needed. Letters to previous donors and appeals to parishes and schools have already occurred in some states. Thank you to each state Assist a Student Co-ordinator and their teams who have been working hard for many years to highlight this program within parishes and to the wider community around Australia.

I invite you to contact me at any time via email: [celinalai@gmail.com](mailto:celinalai@gmail.com), if you have any questions regarding any part of the Assist a Student program.

**Celina Lai**

## A message from the students

### SHORT PROSE, WRITTEN BY A SPONSORED STUDENT

<i>"Everyday we face our problems, We smile because we have to. We laugh because we need to- Even in hardship and poverty We find enough reason to laugh and smile But now, your support makes us smile</i>	<i>Not because we have to But because we mean it We laugh not because we need to But because we know someone really cares and loves us And we thank you for being that reason and our inspiration</i>
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## AAS Statistics Q1-Q4 2013

### 2013 STUDENTS SPONSORED BY STATE

STATE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS SPONSORED
CG	30
NSW	864
NT	124
QLD	537
SA	290
WA	223
TAS	397
VIC	1,209
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,674</b>

### 2013 STUDENTS SPONSORED BY COUNTRY

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
India	400
Indonesia	651
Philippines	295
PNG	314
Fiji	560
Vanuatu	327
Cambodia	374
Sri Lanka	501
Kiribati	252
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,674</b>

# Focus on Indonesia



In 2013 the National Council of Indonesia sent through the names of 651 students to be educated through the Assist a Student Program. Two hundred and twelve of these were Elementary School Students, 187 were Junior High Students and 252 were Senior High Students.



<b>Population:</b>	221,932,000
<b>Capital:</b>	Jakarta; 13,194,000
<b>Area:</b>	1,922,570 square kilometers (742,308 square miles)
<b>Language:</b>	Bahasa Indonesia, English, Dutch, Javanese, and other local dialects
<b>Religion:</b>	Muslim, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist
<b>Currency:</b>	Indonesian rupiah
<b>Life: Expectancy:</b>	68

**GDP per Capita:** U.S. \$3,100

**Literacy Percent:** 89

Indonesia is a vast equatorial archipelago of 17,000 islands extending 5,150 kilometers (3,200 miles) east to west, between the Indian and Pacific Oceans in Southeast Asia. The largest islands are Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), Sulawesi, and the Indonesian part of New Guinea (known as Papua or Irian Jaya). Islands are mountainous with dense rain forests, and some have active volcanoes. Most of the smaller islands belong to larger groups, like the Moluccas (Spice Islands).



# Assist a Student

An education scholarship program aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty.



Where we assist...

Assist a Student is a program of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

Donations from Australia are used to provide education funds for students across partner countries in Asia and the Pacific.

Throughout partner countries, local St Vincent de Paul Society members select students from families in need to be supported by the program. They receive education funds for one year and the money donated contributes to their education needs.

The program includes students at all levels – from primary, secondary and post-secondary. Education funds are allocated across the countries to ensure fair distribution. One of the program's strongest and most attractive features is that administration costs, funded by the Society, are kept at an absolute minimum.

No administration cost is deducted from your donation. 100% goes towards the students' education needs (including course fees, uniforms, books etc) for one year.

Only \$70 per student and 100% of your donation goes to the students' education needs for one year.

It is a common belief that education improves a young person's opportunity of gaining useful employment, thereby increasing their ability to support themselves and their families in the future. It is a means empowering an individual to break out of the cycle of poverty.

One of the most positive ways of helping families in need throughout Asia and the Pacific to become self sufficient is through education. The Assist a Student program gives you the opportunity to support the education of students in Asia and the Pacific. The students supported by this program may not be able to attend school without these education funds.

In choosing to donate money to the Assist a Student program, you are taking the opportunity to provide education funds to overseas students in need of support throughout their education.

As well as this you will receive:

- A supporter certificate with the student name, country and course of study for each \$70 donation.
- A complimentary copy of the Record with an Assist a Student insert will be sent annually.

NB: To protect the privacy and dignity of the student, and in accordance with The Rule of the St Vincent de Paul Society, photographs and addresses of the students are not provided.

Yes, I want to Assist a Student today!

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

NAME (group or individual): \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT NAME (for group): \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBURB: \_\_\_\_\_

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ POSTCODE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to donate:

☐ \$70    ☐ \$140    ☐ \$210    OR ☐ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Payment method:

- ☐ My cheque is enclosed, payable to  
'St Vincent de Paul Society' OR  
☐ Debit my credit card (details below)

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☐ Mastercard    ☐ Visa    Card Expiry: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

NAME ON CARD: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please post coupon to: St Vincent de Paul Society National Council Office, PO Box 243, Deakin West, ACT 2600

# 'The boom, not the slump, is the time for austerity at the Treasury': Keynes

BY JOHN QUIGGAN

***This remark of Keynes (1937) is the foundation for what Henry Farrell and I have called 'hard Keynesianism'.***

The central point is that a policy of expansionary fiscal stimulus to jump-start the economy out of recession must be matched by fiscal consolidation when the economy is strong. Much the same idea was expressed by former Treasurer Wayne Swan when he said, 'if you are going to be Keynesian on the way down, you need to be Keynesian on the way up'.

There are two main reasons for this. First, there is the problem of 'fiscal space'. If the budget is always in deficit (more precisely, in 'primary' deficit, that is, excluding interest on existing debt), then the ratio of net debt to GDP will grow steadily. If this ratio is large enough, interest rates will rise, offsetting the benefits of fiscal policy. Under present conditions in Australia, with the debt/GDP ratio around 15 per cent, this is not a pressing concern.

Second, and more importantly, economic activity reacts to changes in the government's fiscal balance rather than to the absolute level of the budget deficit. So, a switch from surpluses equal to three per cent of GDP to deficits of three per cent will have the same stimulatory effect as a switch from deficits of three per cent to deficits of nine per cent.

Unfortunately, the Labor government turned this sound general principle into a fetishistic pursuit of surplus at any costs. Unfair and socially damaging cuts in expenditure were imposed in the hope of achieving this goal by the arbitrary target date of 2012–13.

It appears likely that the incoming LNP government will follow the same path, focusing on misleading measures of debt and deficits rather



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than using fiscal policy as a tool of macroeconomic management. The cuts in expenditure associated with this policy will fall on the most needy, while the wealthy are protected.

The government's priorities are illustrated by two decisions implemented soon after taking office. The first was a massive cut in foreign aid (the most substantial cut implemented so far). This was combined with the abandonment of the longstanding focus on poverty reduction, and a switch back to aid aimed at promoting Australian strategic and economic interests. This retrograde step is, unfortunately, typical of the new government's approach.

Even more egregious was the restoration of concessional FBT treatment for company cars, which had been wound back by the (final) Rudd Labor government. This measure was taken at the behest of the salary packaging industry, which exists to

reduce the tax payments of those in a position to take advantage of such loopholes, while increasing the burden on ordinary wage earners. The original motivation of assisting the motor vehicle industry, long obsolete, was rendered utterly irrelevant by the decision of the remaining manufacturers to shut down.

Our current macroeconomic situation is one of uncertainty. Although most measures of economic activity remain strong, the end of the mining boom and the collapse of manufacturing suggests the risk of a sudden downturn. In these circumstances, a policy of austerity needs to be pursued with caution, and with a readiness to switch back to stimulus if circumstances warrant it. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the government understands any of this. ♦

John Quiggin is professor of economics at the University of Queensland in Australia and author of *Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk among Us*.



# The paradox of austerity amidst plenty

BY DAVID HAYWARD

***For the last five years Australia's economic growth has been strong by western world standards. Our growth rate has exceeded that of the OECD as a whole and we are one of the few western countries to have avoided a GFC-induced recession. Despite this, public finances are tight at federal and state levels, and retrenchment has become the order of the day. The federal budget is in deficit, and some of the states are in terrible financial shape. We face the paradox of austerity amidst plenty.***

Part of the answer to this conundrum lies with budget settings put in place by the former Labor federal government. It increasingly delivered budgets not with a view to the next financial year—the traditional purpose of budgets—but over a four year period. As finances grew ever tighter, it pushed spending promises into the outyears, without necessarily identifying the funding sources to pay for them. The National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Gonski education reforms are two examples.

To its credit, the Labor government tried to find new sources of revenue by announcing three additional tax measures: the carbon tax, the mining tax and an increase in the medicare levy.

The trouble was that the first two measures were more than matched by spending promises designed to be the sweeteners to get the tax hikes across the line, while the third is only temporary and is to be used solely



People marched in London in October 2012 following public sector cuts made by the British government.

to help fund the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The increased tax revenues were and continue to be necessary because the financial problems facing the combined federal, state and territory governments is largely caused by sagging income rather than ballooning expenditure.

What has made the last five years unusual is that reasonably strong economic growth has not delivered strong revenues as has traditionally been the case. Consumption based taxes, like the GST and stamp duties, have until now been flat, while business taxes have been soft because





the most profitable parts of the economy have been mining related, and they have been able to claim substantial tax deductions associated with massive capital investments.

The incoming Abbott government has not helped matters by promising to abolish two of Labor's much needed

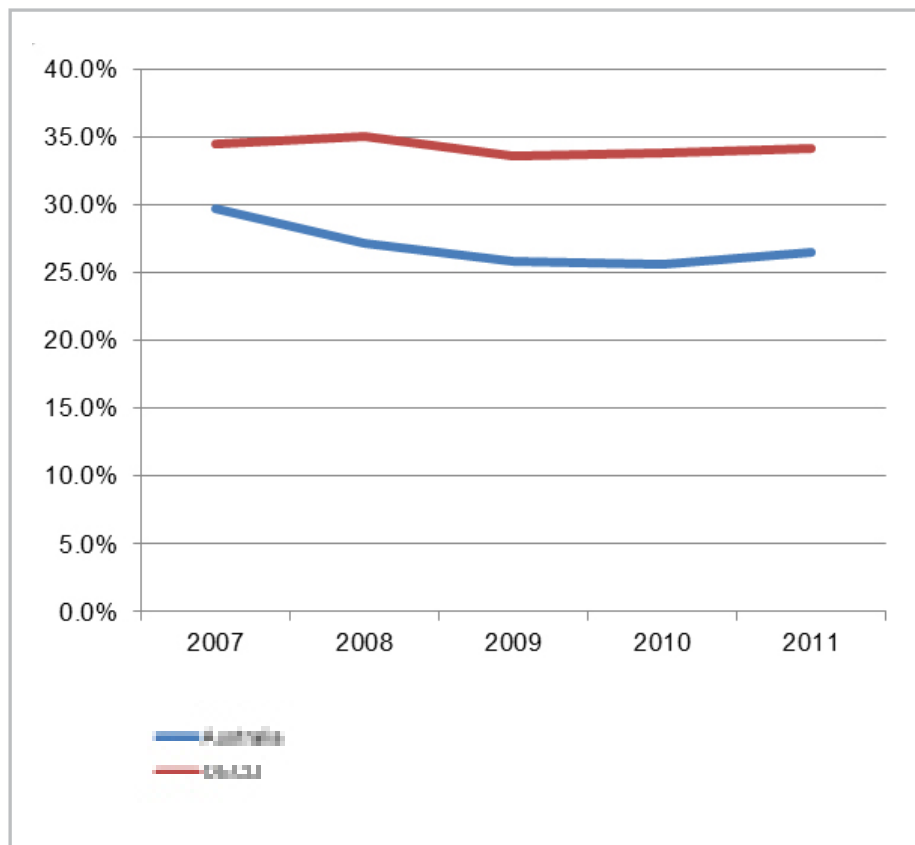


Figure 1: Tax as % of GDP, Australia and OECD average, 2007–2011 (source: OECD)

taxes while retaining most of the spending measures introduced with them. To make it worse, it is set to introduce a generous Paid Paternity Leave scheme to be funded by a tax on big business, with the latter in turn to be given a tax cut that will cost pretty much the equivalent of what is raised.

Australia's post-GFC tax woes figured prominently in a recent OECD assessment. As *The Australian's* economic correspondent, David Uren, commented back in September last year, 'the OECD research shows that Australia's tax revenue has fallen by four percentage points of GDP following the onset of the global financial crisis, against an average fall across the advanced world of only 1.2 percentage points' (see Figure 1).

Ultimately, the solution to the paradox of austerity amidst plenty is to find new, sustainable and progressive sources of public revenue.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of our tax-induced fiscal woes is that the federal Commission of Audit has managed to reach the opposite conclusion, preferring spending cuts to tax increases, confirming suspicions its main task was to shrink the state rather than fix the budget.

Our strange experience of fiscal austerity in a time of prosperity is a paradox borne from political choices rather than economic necessity. ♦

Professor David Hayward is Dean of the RMIT School of Global, Urban and Social Studies. He is also a life member of the Victorian Council of Social Service, in recognition of three decades of policy advice, education and training for the Victorian not-for-profit sector.

# Channelling Lincoln's view on equality

***In early April 2014 the findings of the Commission of Audit were announced and less than two weeks later the Federal Budget was handed down. The national secretary of the Community and Public Sector Union, Nadine Flood, reflects on the events of the past two months and what they mean for public servants and the future of government service delivery.***

BY NADINE FLOOD

In his election victory speech, Tony Abbott said that 'a good government is one with a duty to help everyone to maximise his or her potential, indigenous people, people with disabilities, and our forgotten families, as well as those whom Menzies described as "lifters, not leaners".' To this end, he established a Commission of Audit, with a guiding principle that 'government should do for people what they cannot do, or cannot do efficiently, for themselves, but no more', paraphrasing the words of Abraham Lincoln written in 1854.

With such a conservative orthodoxy at its heart and headed by the President of the Business Council of Australia, the Commission of Audit findings were never going to be anodyne. It was little surprise that the Audit report recommended slashing government support, deep cuts to public services and the extensive outsourcing of services such as Centrelink to the private sector. Having massive, profit-driven multinationals in charge of government services appeals to free-market ideologues, but it's a frightening prospect for ordinary Australians.



*For our members, the combination of cutting the services they proudly provide and the prospect of losing their own jobs creates an incredibly tough situation for workers.*

Less than two weeks later, the Federal Budget picked up many of the Commission's recommendations, including cutting 16,500 jobs out of the public sector over the next three years. The real number could be 25,000 or more, with further job losses from the massive program of cuts, privatisation and outsourcing yet to come.

Alongside these massive job cuts, the Budget slashed government support to young and vulnerable people, attacked universal healthcare and hit ordinary working people hard. For our members, the combination of cutting the services they proudly provide and the prospect of losing their own jobs creates an incredibly tough situation for workers.

Compounding the impact is the simple fact that Australia's efficient public service is already groaning after previous cuts. A recent survey of nearly 6,000 staff from 50 Commonwealth agencies highlighted the pressures. Seventy per cent said that there had already been job cuts in their workplace and a staggering 87 per cent reported unfilled positions.





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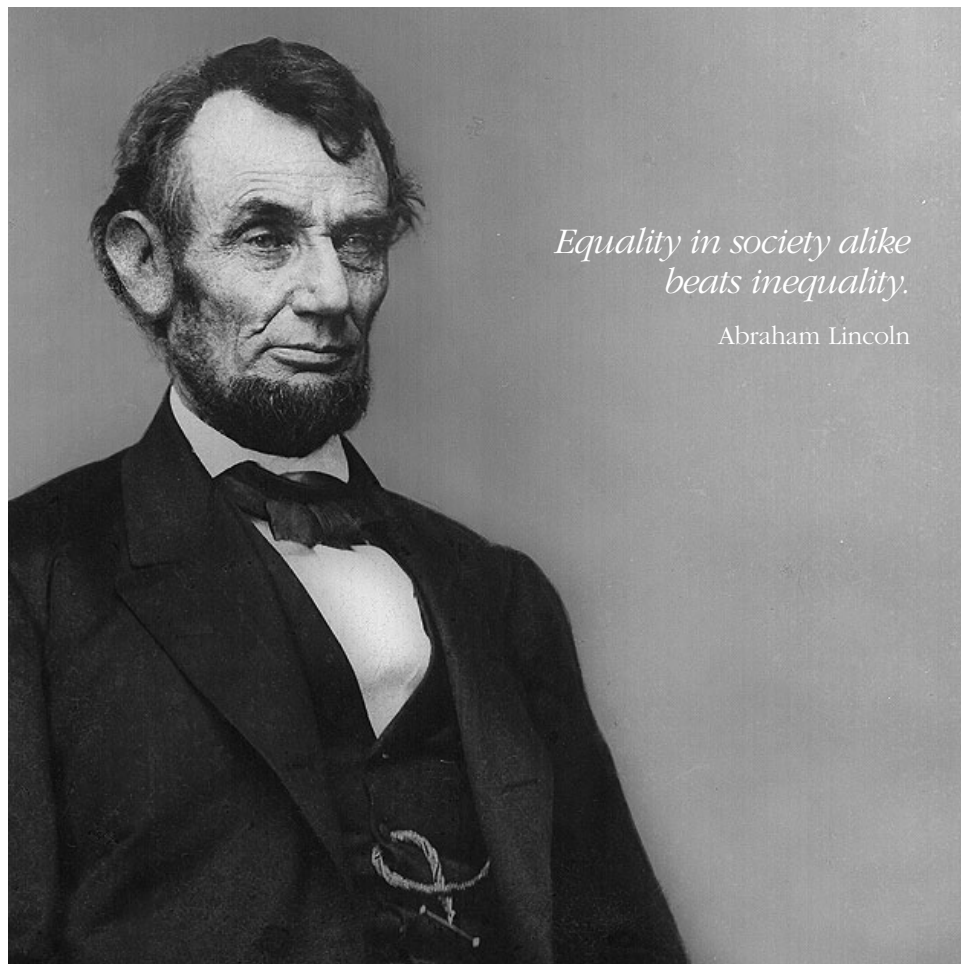


PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

*Equality in society alike  
beats inequality.*

Abraham Lincoln

Many reported increased customer waiting times, including 80 percent of Centrelink and Medicare staff.

Losing 16,500 jobs on top of these pressures will do untold damage. It is simply a myth that you can cut this many jobs and not further hurt services. Cutting 500 CSIRO staff will not help come up with the world-class innovations Australia needs for jobs, industry and our environment. Cutting 2,300 Tax Office workers, including those who ensure high earners pay their way, is not going to help collect the revenue Australia needs for essential services. Hollowing out Centrelink and Medicare won't help our most vulnerable get support.

The Budget changes are just the beginning for the Abbott government. The Minister of Finance and the Treasurer have committed to 'methodically consider and review the issues raised in the National Commission of Audit report that are not addressed in the 2014–15 Budget'.

The list is long—scoping privatisations, contestability of government services, changes to the role of the states, reviews of tax, health, childcare, the minimum wage and more. The Government has flagged that more changes will be revealed in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook later this year.

It is clear we face a Government seeking to radically reshape Australia.

*Hollowing out Centrelink  
and Medicare won't help  
our most vulnerable get  
support.*

We must have a serious conversation as a community about what we want from government and how we pay for it. For all of us who believe in a different vision of Australia, as a fair and decent society, it's a fight worth having. We might start by suggesting Prime Minister Abbott read the rest of Lincoln's statement including the timely reminder that '*Equality in society alike beats inequality*'. ♦

Nadine Flood is the national secretary of the Community and Public Sector Union.



# A mix of responses to the Budget

***The introduction of co-payments to visit the doctor, changes to how federally-funded programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People are delivered and moves to deregulate the higher education system were outlined in the recent Budget to the consternation of some and delight of others. The following quotes and excerpts provide a broad snapshot of where public sentiment lay in the days and weeks that followed the release of the Budget.***

‘One of my greatest concerns is not only that the most vulnerable will bear the brunt of a poorly conceived co-payment initiative, but that the health care system will not cope. The policy makers need to think very carefully about whether to go ahead with the co-payment and if they do, who will pay and who will have exemptions.’

Deputy chair of the Government's Indigenous Advisory Council, Dr Ngaire Brown, in a statement released by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) on 23 May 2014.

.....

‘If you are taking a business approach, which is what we are doing, you can save money and then reinvest it into the areas that you need to reinvest it into. The problem we have is we are caught up in a political process. I predict that this \$500 million cut that has been made, people won't even miss it because it is coming from the back room.’

Chair of the Indigenous Advisory Council, Warren Mundine, in comments published in The Australian on 4 June, 2014.

.....

‘The concept of Medicare as public health insurance for all is in mortal danger. The intention is to replace it with private health insurance for those who can afford it, and an underfunded public system safety net called Medicare, although more appropriately retitled MedicareLess.’

Dr Tim Woodruff, from the Doctors Reform Society, speaking at the ACOSS conference in Brisbane on 13 June 2014.

.....

‘It is important to stress that this is a world first and no-one is able to say with any authority what, exactly, will happen in respect of fees and student access. It is, however, a safe bet that all institutions will increase their charges because not to do so would cost them money. The changes are good for private providers who will have access to HECS-HELP without too many constraints. Critically, the

government has maintained the essence of HECS and that is a very good thing. This will hopefully mean that access for all students and particularly disadvantaged students should not be too much affected.’

Bruce Chapman, Director, Policy Impact, Crawford School of Economics and Government at ANU; comments published on The Conversation website on 13 May 2014.

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‘I think there are people from low socioeconomic backgrounds that could be dissuaded from entering university through higher debts. It is therefore crucial that the measures they have said [scholarships] assist students in those situations.’

Ed Byrne, Vice-Chancellor of Monash University

.....

‘Even though the Abbott government was at pains prior to the budget to argue that “fixing the budget”, one of those dot points that they took to the election, would be done by sharing the burden of adjustment, the electoral backlash was driven by the obvious inequity of many of the budget measures that were proposed.’

Former Liberal leader John Hewson addressing the launch of a report, ‘Advance Australia Fair? What to do about growing inequality’, by Australia21 and the Australia Institute at Parliament House on 11 June 2014.

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‘At the moment I've only got my dad and my brother, neither of whom I'm able to go and live with, so I'm probably going to end up on the streets. Twenty-five per cent of my welfare cheque goes into housing and if I lose my income I'll lose my home.’

Rosie Lawrie, 25, has been unemployed for four months and lives in supported accommodation in Brisbane. She took part in an interview with ABC on 9 June 2014, which can be read in full at <http://j.mp/youthsinterviewed>

# Making our voices heard at Budget time

BY RIK SUTHERLAND

***As in previous years, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council put in a submission to federal government on how we believe the Budget this year should be framed. The Budget is the most important means government has of planning its policies and programs for the coming year—it is therefore an excellent opportunity for us to make our voices heard on the issues that we believe are the most important.***

This year, we argued that the Budget must, fundamentally, be based on values. One such value is pragmatism: how much can Australia afford to spend, and how can we make sure revenue and expenditure are sustainable? However, we must also recognise the universal human rights that all people share in Australia, and the equality with which we are deserving of love and respect. We also support the belief that government has a responsibility to help people develop their strengths and their potential. Democratic governments exist, first and foremost, to improve the lives of the voters who put them into power—the economy, business, and electioneering must come second to this. The Society is also committed to long-term, sustainable solutions for Australians, and we believe the Budget should reflect this. Linked to this, we believe that all programs should be driven by evidence and argument, rather than by mere ideology.



*Democratic governments exist, first and foremost, to improve the lives of the voters who put them into power — the economy, business and electioneering must come second to this.*

Based on these values, the Society has identified several key areas that the Budget must address. First, revenue needs to be increased. This can easily be effected by closing several of the tax loopholes that wealthy Australians are currently able to access. Secondly,

the Budget must address the urgent issue of housing in Australia. This includes homelessness, high rents, and totally inadequate housing in detention centres of asylum seekers under Australia's jurisdiction. Thirdly, the government's provision of income support must be better targeted so that it goes where it is needed. This relates to better means-testing of pensions (as recommended by the Henry Tax Review), as well as increasing support to those currently trying to get back into the workforce, and those who are banned from working (asylum seekers). It also means stopping, rather than increasing, the harmful policy of compulsory income management. ♦

# Current austerity proposals are not the only way for Australia to progress

BY JOHN WICKS

***Severe austerity measures are officially presented as having no alternative to ensure a viable future for Australia. Substantial cuts in essential public services, the downgrading of basic benefits for average Australians, and cuts in crucial activities such as research and development (vital in replacing a sharply declining manufacturing sector) are all aimed at achieving a budget surplus that will supposedly solve all problems.***

This debateable approach is helped along by the richest sector of Australian society which, despite its increasing wealth, responds with protestations of shock and horror if subjected to tax increases to expand Government Revenues. In our democracy that's their right. But do Australia's rich have the right to deny alternatives for which there is proven evidence of major success in some developed countries?

There are in fact billions upon billions of dollars that any government can raise to more than adequately address real, not mythical, budget deficits and growing needs for essential Government services. These increased revenues will essentially derive from taxation of wealthy, not ordinary, Australian households.

The wealthy claim that it is their investment that generates economic progress, with benefits for all. However, in the wake of the exponential growth in wealth of a limited sector in Australia in recent years, where are all the benefits?



In reality, there is a wide variety of ways to increase taxation and other revenues to meet current and future expenditure needs without dire impacts on the bulk of Australians. A range of possibilities, which is certainly not an exhaustive list, includes the following:

## **Increase marginal taxation of wealthy incomes**

Low taxation of very high executive earnings and profits, reduced even further by a range of exemptions and concessions, has not prevented the demise of the vehicle industry and the bulk of steel, oil refining, textile and many other industries. This, despite

claims that investment by the wealthy generates production and jobs.

In fact billions of dollars accumulated annually by the wealthy add little or nothing to jobs or productivity. Substantial amounts of their investment are directed at activities with few, if any, community benefits, such as short trading, derivatives and multi-second trading in shares, with significant profits regardless of whether prices are rising or falling.

If new investment by the wealthy can be proven under the 'Public Benefit' test to establish new Australian businesses, jobs and productivity, they should receive worthwhile tax benefits.





## Capital Gains Tax

Substantial incomes are derived from buying and selling a wide variety of things, including property, art, renowned jewellery and a wide range of artefacts. Ordinary Australians have little chance to participate, but the capital gains tax does not achieve the revenue it could and should, and arrangements need to be implemented to remedy this.

## Trusts

Originally, trusts were designed to protect family-owned or other businesses that could collapse if a part was sold off or broken up, and

this remains a valid reason. However, in recent decades trusts have grown exponentially, used mainly by the wealthy and linked to a range of complex and complicated legal and other practices that result in tax minimisation or even avoidance. In this case a Public Benefit test also needs to be applied to substantially reduce the use of trusts whilst increasing revenues.

## Negative Gearing

Australia is facing an unacceptable homelessness problem and yet negative gearing, which gives substantial tax concessions for the development of housing, tends to be focussed on expensive real estate. A Public Benefit test could ensure that total expenditure is focussed on affordable apartments and housing, with tax savings on the one hand and benefits for the homeless on the other.

## The GST

The GST can easily be raised, with huge revenue gains, but need not be across the board and impacting on ordinary Australians. It could be achieved by significant increases in the GST on luxury items (most of which are produced and imported from overseas). Consideration could also be given to increasing the GST on non-essentials, particularly goods and services that do not assist wellbeing and could in fact endanger it e.g. drinks containing excessive amounts of sugar and caffeine.

## Superannuation tax provisions

Current provisions give massive gains to the wealthy, and increase as their wealth does. As a result, huge annual retirement incomes not available to ordinary Australians are enjoyed by a few. The whole system is in need of reform and fundamental changes

that do not endanger the lifestyles of the wealthy but significantly increase revenues to improve living standards in the community as a whole.

## Other possibilities

Among a myriad of other possibilities to improve Australia's financial position are the following:

- Arrangements to prevent massive profits made in Australia by multinational corporations, who send them to low tax jurisdictions.
- Examine in detail possible savings from millions of levies, not included in or scrutinised by annual budgets.
- Major taxation concessions, paid to sham contracting, that has accelerated in recent years.
- A 'tax exemption' for low paid Australians rather than a low or no taxation rate, which passes on to the wealthy.
- A detailed examination of all subsidies, tax concessions and other allowances given to companies.

Those who argue that actions such as these will force Australia into a debilitating future need to be forced to recognise that some developed countries have for years initiated high levels of taxation that has produced more prosperous and happy societies.

The Nordics have substantially higher taxation than Australia, involving a much higher level of GDP, but have lower poverty, better education, superior health, child and aged care and, as measured by international research criteria, a higher degree of happiness. Are we to assume Australians do not want that? At least in our democracy the community should be given sufficient, substantiated information to make an informed choice. ♦

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John Wicks is a retired Senior Commonwealth Public Servant and a long time member of the Society in the ACT.



# 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.

**Tastex Knitwear and Uniforms**  
**12 Mill Lane, Glenorchy, Tasmania, 7010**  
**Telephone: 03 6272 8877 Fax: 03 6272 8887**  
**Email: [sales@tastex.com.au](mailto:sales@tastex.com.au)**



# An Aussie's search for meaning

BY FR ANDREW HAMILTON

Noel Braun, *The Day Was Made for Walking: Searching for Meaning on the Camino de Santiago*. Sid Harta Publishers, 2013.

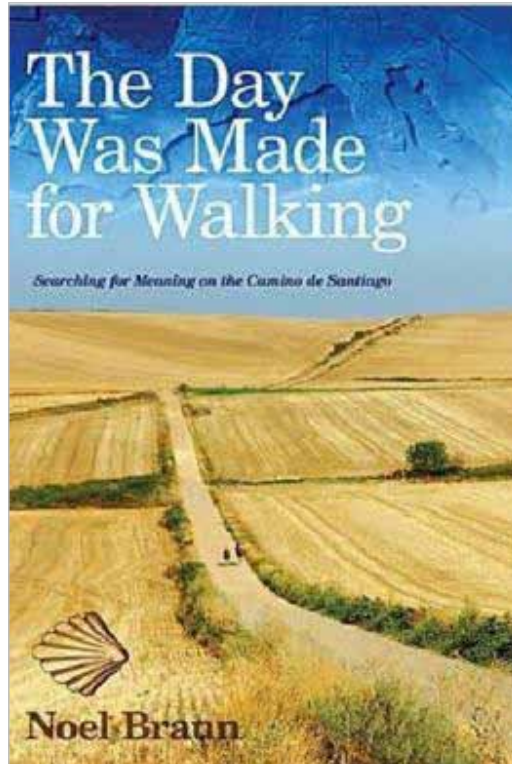
***The Camino, the pilgrimage to Santiago in Spain, has become almost a rite of passage. It draws huge numbers of people, young and old, Christians and non-Christians, gregarious and solitary, all with their own personal reasons, deep and superficial, for making the walk.***

Noel Braun's diary of his pilgrimage tells a story that is very distinctive. And if you think of it as a rite of passage from one of life's stages to another, it is challenging. Noel was 77 years old when he became a pilgrim. His route took him 1521 kilometres through France, over the Pyrenees and across Spain. He made the walk in memory of his wife, who had taken her own life six years before after many years of depression.

For all the extraordinary features of his pilgrimage, his experience was like that of other pilgrims. As in any Camino story, the huge questions and intimations of meaning were crystallised in the smallest of bodily meetings, needs and rhythms.

But Noel's book will challenge those of us who enjoy hearing of the Camino, envious of those whose relative youth enables them to go on adventures denied to us because of our age. The book strips us of our cover. Noel conceived a dream in his late sixties and was able to go for it ten years later.

Apart from a probable heart attack years earlier, he was blessed with



good health. But he did what he needed to do in order to prepare for it. He walked and cycled regularly. In the break between the French and the Spanish sections of his walk he worked in the gym to strengthen his back muscles. They had understandably begun to complain around the seven hundred kilometre mark.

He also began his first stage by enrolling for a month in a French language school, and did the same to pick up some Spanish before the second stage. And he learned from experience to pace himself during the walk, to ask advice and to accept help.

At the heart of his book are the small blessings along the way which a pilgrimage leaves space for you to attend to. Your pace is leisurely; your needs are simple; you have space for conversation and reflection; the oddity of what you are doing creates

an instant bond with other pilgrims. Very ordinary and sometimes troubled people appear and reappear in Braun's account, and remain fixed in the reader's as well as in the writer's memory.

The spirit of pilgrimage is that of attentiveness and thankfulness for whatever life brings in the moment in which we are living. It is not about planning but about trusting that the grace given for the day will be sufficient and can be accepted even if it comes in hard forms. The path makes gifts of the people met along it and the people remembered.

Braun's hospitality in welcoming others into his company along the way is as genial as that of the local hostel keepers who offered hospitality to the pilgrims.

He enjoys the simple, good things of each day: the walking, the exhilaration of the view across valleys and rivers after a demanding climb, the simple food in hostels and good food in restaurants, the red wine of each region, the conversations with so many people, and the novelty of being of such unexpected interest to the young simply because he is old and is walking with them.

I was struck by the echoes between the pilgrimage spirit and the Vinnies spirit. Both hear God's word and see God's presence in the people met along the way. Whoever they are and whatever their gifts or status, they are a gift simply because they are human. And at their best, at the heart of both is the gift of compassion received surprisingly from Christ and given freely to others. And both are about encouraging impossible dreams, as impossible as that of a 77 year old man walking 1500 kilometres through foreign countries. ♦



# Critics have long crossed the sectarian divide

BY MICHAEL MORAN

***In our very early years, no one in the St Vincent de Paul Society was paid a salary, no expenses were claimed and no premises were owned or rented. Austerity was our middle name.***

'All that the Society can gather, goes in charity', we wrote in 1892. 'This is the result of its admirable constitution, which enables it to do itself what other societies have to pay a considerable proportion of their income to do.' Everything was done by volunteers; we had no overheads at all.

Life was simpler then, yet this simplicity and purity of purpose did not commend the Society to everybody. It did not stop 'Jawbone' Neild, for example, from rising in the Sydney Town Hall in 1893 to condemn us.

John Cash Neild (1846-1911) or John *Cassius* Neild as the Catholic press unkindly named him, was a NSW politician and fervent Protestant. He acquired the nickname 'Jawbone' after once speaking for nine hours in the Parliament. An insurance agent by profession, he was Grand Master of the Orange Lodge. On 12 July, the day which commemorates the victory of William of Orange over the Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne (1690), Neild rose to his feet before 5,000 fervently patriotic Protestants and denounced the St Vincent de Paul Society.

'Let me say a word or two respecting the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the supposed charitable institution', he said. 'Do Protestants know that in subscribing to the Society of St Vincent de Paul they are not supporting a charity but subsidising a company of Jesuits?' And further, 'It was a matter



*John Cash Neild was a NSW Politician in the late 1890s, who spoke openly of his disdain for the St Vincent de Paul Society.*

for regret that the Governor gave his patronage and presence to the Society of St Vincent de Paul "which tramples on every law, and abuses every privilege of human intercourse".

There was some tit for tat in all this. The Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Moran, had attacked Neild in a speech at a St Vincent de Paul Society breakfast the year before: 'Perhaps some day they would find the Orange Society rivalling the Society of St Vincent de Paul in works of Christian charity', said Moran, sarcastically. 'If they chanced to come across some poor Orangeman he would ask them to be particularly kind to him, even if he made wild speeches.'

Moreover, Neild was a leader of attempts to extend divorce provisions

in the law, to protect women whose homes 'had merely become scenes of domestic affliction and suffering'. These attempts had been strongly opposed by two prominent members of the Society who also sat in Parliament. In this respect, Neild's Christianity seems stronger to us today than his analysis of contemporary Church politics.

The Society responded swiftly and eloquently. In 'Mr Neild's usual 12th of July statements', wrote our President, 'the product, all the world understands, of the need he finds in himself for saying something spicy and fresh every time, the Catholic Church and the Jesuits are the usual game, and they are used to abuse and they can stand it as making them the more like their Divine

# THE MAIL

## Feedback on homelessness issue of *The Record*

To the Editor,

The autumn copy of *The Record* arrived as “a breath of fresh air”.

For the first time (in a long while), I found the key issues of homelessness, low cost housing and public education of such to be seriously and capably addressed.

All articles were very relevant, well written and readable. Stories from people have experienced homelessness themselves were also a welcome inclusion.

Congratulations on setting a new standard and I look forward to reading future publications.

*Peter Tierney  
Deepdene, Victoria*



◀ continued from page 7

## Vincentian named Young Lawyer of the Year in SA

‘Both of my bosses—Will Duddy and Chris Shopov—have been very good mentors. I have also been informally mentored by Richard Mellows [barrister and former Law Society president], who offers me lots of advice and encouragement in relation to both my work and my Law Society involvement.’

When asked what advice she would give to others seeking to have a fulfilling work and life balance, Claire recommended having a strong set of values and to be motivated by something other than a job or salary.

‘Make plenty of time for your loved ones; that is what is most important, and will help put other things into perspective. If the nature of your job/profession means that you are missing out on life, then make a change. It’s not necessarily the case that all these things will be waiting for you upon retirement,’ Claire said.

National President, Anthony Thornton, said he was encouraged by the enthusiasm and thoughtfulness that young people like Claire brought to the St Vincent de Paul Society, and thanked her for the effortless way she promotes the work that Vinnies does to prospective members and volunteers through her words and actions.

‘We are very proud of Claire and the professional and personal journey she has made from the time she joined a Young Vinnies group helping with kids’ camps up until she joined the National Council three years ago, and we congratulate her on this most recent achievement. I greatly admire Claire’s “no fuss” attitude to any situations or challenges that may arise and her dedication to the Vincentian cause,’ Mr Thornton said. ♦

Master. But when, in his dearth of materials, he strikes a blow at the poor, at the widow and the orphan, and recklessly says words which may lessen the relief flowing to them... he has not struck us, he has struck the poor.’

Neild was wounded. ‘I never doubted, and certainly did not wish to convey the impression that the Vincent de Paul Society did not distribute alms’, he replied. ‘I believed and desired to convey the impression that the Society exists primarily for advancing Jesuit enterprise, and think and say so still...it is most undesirable that Protestants should contribute to secret sectarian institutions, and above all to those in the hands of the unscrupulous Order of the Jesuits.’ He did not attack the Church as a Church

but ‘its character of a dark political conspiracy against human freedom ... its unceasing attack upon every form of civil and religious liberty’.

Today the Society’s critics have long crossed the sectarian divide. Instead they see in Our Lord’s injunction to care for others (Matthew 25:31-46) an invitation to Marxism. It was better in the old days. If you want to uncover something sinister, Marxism has nothing on a Jesuit conspiracy. Indeed, like the Jesuits, the St Vincent de Paul Society was actually suppressed once, in France in the 1860s by a hostile government. Let’s hope this worrying precedent escapes the Neilds of today. ♦

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

# Education really is power

***A copy of the St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia's annual overview, titled Education is Power, recently caught the eye of a young man visiting the Ozanam Community Centre in North Melbourne. Trevor Brown contacted the national office and offered to share his story of how the centre helped him through a difficult time. The freelance writer and artist lives in share accommodation and has gone on to study and build upon the friendships he first formed through the Ozanam Community Centre.***

BY TREVOR BROWN

For a range of reasons, some my fault, most out of my hands, I ended up homeless from early 2008 to the middle of 2013, living inside my small van on the streets, most of the time around Melbourne. I came down to the city for only four days, then waited for money so I could go back into the remote bush area in North East Victoria from where I came. I know that if I had gone back I wouldn't still be here—luckily I decided to stay.

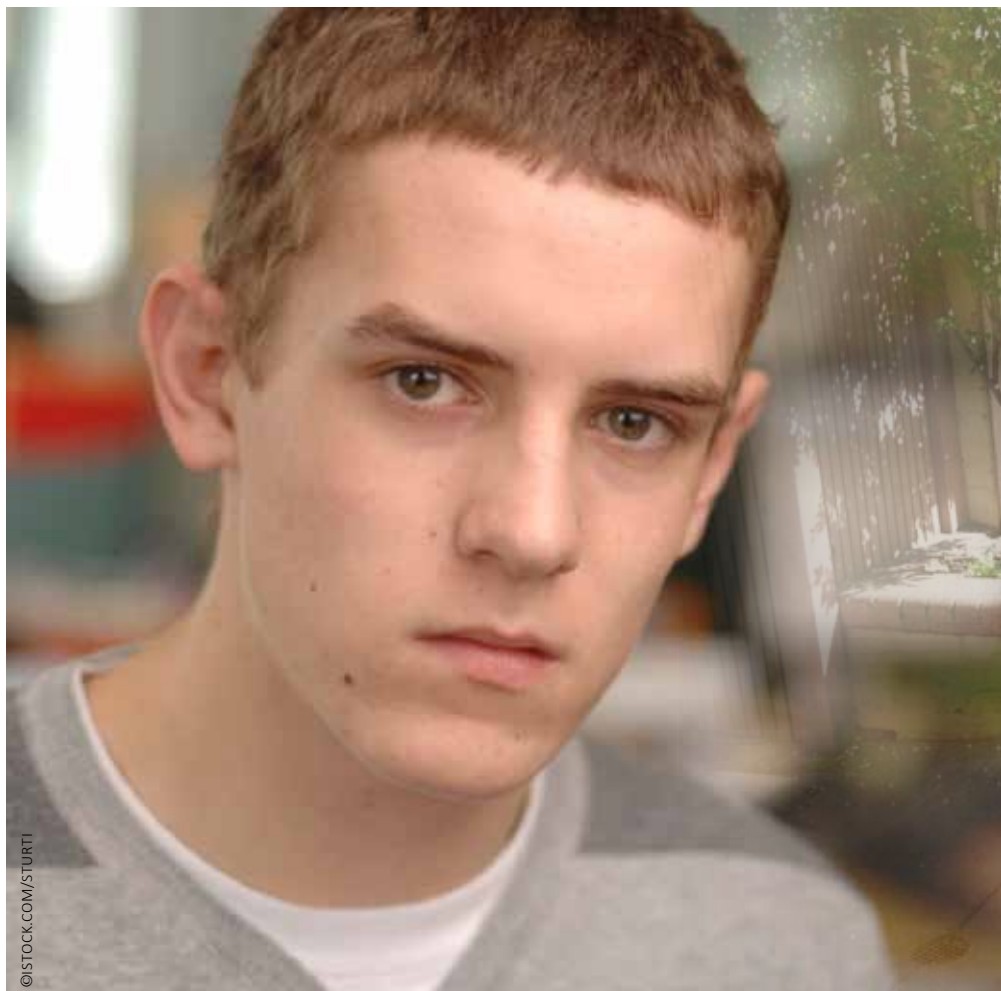
The first month was tough—nowhere to have showers and I didn't know anyone in Melbourne—and during this time I was forced to do this and that to survive. Then an employment company's representative handed me what she said was the 'Holy Grail', showing where I could get support across the city. On the first page I found Ozanam Community Centre, and a few days later called them to

find out how to get to where they were. The next day, as I walked off the tram towards the centre, I wondered just what I would find. I told myself that if it was out of control I could simply turn around and walk away.

From day one I was surprised to find professional staff providing support and compassion, and immediately my life started to improve; just having someone to listen is sometimes all you really need. I remember thinking, as I headed back to my van after that first day, just how lucky I had been to find a place where I could relax, have a shower and do some laundry, and over the following weeks and months I started to make new friends.

I also quickly noticed that the Ozanam Community Centre was far more than just somewhere to go, and it quickly became the closest thing I had to a home. With a wide range of services, it stamps itself as a 'one-stop shop' for those doing it the toughest and living on the streets. I benefited greatly from many of these services, allowing me step forward as a person; when it's all said and done, 'self-development' is all we really have.

Staff and management have worked hard to create a relaxed and safe atmosphere while the wide range of services on offer allow people to obtain the support they need to battle whatever demons may haunt them. This atmosphere was further enhanced by the 'Evening Meal







Program', where both staff and clients relaxed even further, fuelling a unique vibe for the centre during these hours. Unfortunately the Evening Meal Program has been shut down.

Luckily, as a result of one of the friendships I was able to find, I was slotted into a house in June last year, and finally my time on the streets came to an end. While I no longer need the centre for showers and laundry, it is still close to my heart.

I have enjoyed being part of the music program but it is the Art program that truly ignited my creativeness, allowing me to find who and what I really am. I have also done what I can to give back to the centre, especially

*Luckily, as a result of one of the friendships I was able to find, I was slotted into a house in June last year, and finally my time on the streets came to an end. While I no longer need the centre for showers and laundry, it is still close to my heart.*

over the last couple years, and have put forward a range of ideas and comments during the 'Have Your Say' meetings. Recently I have been involved in getting a team together to play in the RecLink Pool Competition

for 2014 and was voted in as Captain, our team winning our first couple of matches.

Ozanam Community Centre is somewhat unique in the landscape of Melbourne in regard to the wide range of services and the way in which the staff perform their tasks, always treating people with respect, compassion and understanding. When I look back on my life in the future, I know that the day I walked through the door of the Ozanam Community Centre will be viewed as an important turning point—my life was going one way and it immediately started heading in a far better direction. ♦

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Trevor Brown is a freelance writer and artist from Melbourne.

# Reconciliation at work in remote Australia

*'They say of experiencing other cultures: when you stay for a day, you could write a book; when you stay for a week, you could write an article; and when you stay for a year, you would struggle to write a sentence.'*

– Unknown

**For the past 10 years, the St Vincent de Paul Society has been running an immersion program in the remote community of Nganmarriyanga in the Northern Territory.**

Nganmarriyanga is home to around 500 people and is situated on Palumpa Station, a working Aboriginal cattle station 375km south west of Darwin. Nine Vincentians from across Australia journeyed with the program's spiritual adviser, Fr Peter Hendriks MSC, to build a relationship with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, and to seek a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture and spirituality and the challenges of remote community living.

The program also continues to receive great support from the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Northern Territory, for which the Immersion Committee is most grateful.

## Moments of joy for the 2014 Immersion participants

'One of the best moments was at Mango Farm with the kids. It was so good to see them jumping off the trees, splashing in the clear water and just having genuine fun. They were free and had no worries, which is far from the negative stories you hear and all the doubts about their future. In that moment nature was pristine, we were in harmony and feeling good. It was just one of those experiences that I will look back on with a sense of hope.'

Luke Brouwer, VIC



'During the Stations of the Cross we walked through the community and more and more people joined us. It felt very much like a pilgrimage. At the end everyone sat down on the grass and I had a strong feeling of acceptance between us as Vincentians and the Nganmarriyanga community. It was so peaceful.'

Filomena Marcal, NSW

'During our stay we travelled a number of times on the road to Darwin, past the site of a car accident. Half the road was blocked, with wreaths marking the spot where two people had died. This became very personal when we met three sisters of one of the deceased. As a mark of respect, the driver of the vehicle tooted the horn several times and the sisters waved and called out greetings to their brother. Remembering the dead in any culture is important, but this simple act of waving and calling out to their brother was particularly moving.'

Patricia McLoughlin, VIC

'Seeing Sam and Lee serve drinks to the ladies at the seniors' lunch—it

wasn't what they served, but how they went about it, showing great respect and care.'

Peter Ryan, SA

'One day we went out with some elderly members of the community to a beautiful fishing spot. It was very special to be with them in their country, going with them into their bush, watching them fish, and listening to how they make the natural dyes for the dilly bags.'

Ruth Simpson, ACT

'Stations of the Cross was for me the first time I felt like the whole town was together. It concluded with everyone sitting down in quiet reflection. I felt really blessed to be part of that moment.'

Eliza Leverett, VIC

## The 2014 Vinnies Indigenous Immersion program group:

Luke Brouwer, VIC / Filomena Marcal, NSW / Peter Ryan, SA / Patricia McLoughlin, VIC / Ruth Simpson, ACT / Brian Crowley, VIC / Eliza Leverett, VIC / Alicia Webster – *Group Leader* / Angela Versteegh – *Assistant Leader* / Fr Peter Hendriks MSC – *Spiritual Adviser*



# Seeking God's will in our everyday lives calls us from faith to action

BY PHILIP KEOGH

***As Catholic Christians, we are all called to seek the Lord's will in our daily lives, since this is the heart of a truly committed baptised Catholic. Following the ways of Christianity means orienting our lives towards God at all times, and in all circumstances, as opposed to just 'going with the flow' and doing as we want. Such a lifestyle is not what the Church calls us to.***

As Catholics, our lives revolve around the celebration of Mass, reading the Holy Bible, and doing daily devotions. The rosary is one of the most important devotions we centre our lives around, as the Blessed Mother is our spiritual mother, and a link to her son, Jesus.

Yet for our faith to be truly dynamic, it must move us from prayer to take action in our daily lives, since this is what we are asked to do by Sacred Scripture. The gospels are mission oriented and do not simply allow for a life of prayer removed from the pain of life.

And while as individuals the actions we take to live the gospel in our lives may differ, there are nevertheless core principles that we must follow. For example, silence in the face of adversity and tyranny is never an option. Our Lord, his disciples and Christians down through the centuries have frequently stood up to forces that sought to oppress people, especially the poor and marginalised. This is by now a truism.

But how many people who today call themselves 'Catholics' actually do this? The following is a case in point: An article in the March, 2014 edition of "The Catholic Leader", reported that



a recent survey found 'at least 50 per cent of Catholics... didn't have an opinion on the issue of asylum seekers and refugees,' which has led to the publication of a pamphlet on the Church's teaching on the issue.

Seeing the problem of disinterest or ignorance among Catholics on the issues, the Church took action – it did not remain silent.

Silence and complacency are never an option for those who claim to live the Christian faith. Our faith is mission oriented, and this always demands we take action for others.

Our Catholic faith demands we act for all, not just asylum seekers, who are one of many groups in need of advocacy and support. I have come across 'postmodern' views from some Catholics who believe, 'now NGO's stop for the stranger the laity no longer need to'. I was horrified to hear this!

Such a view limits the role of the laity, presumably, to 'financial supporter', while organisations alone 'take action'. This view is out of touch with the truly radical call of Jesus. We are all called to act wherever we can; it might be for our local community on a small, or even a large issue; it might be spending time with someone who is lonely; it may be being part of social justice campaigns on any number of issues; or it might be speaking out against inimical government policies that are tearing up Australian communities now.

Every Catholic has been given a Biblical directive to take action and speak out as part of a life grounded in a deep and living faith. Nothing is more certain. And nothing is more necessary now. ♦

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Philip Keogh is a Melbourne-based writer, whose work has previously been published in The Record and Kairos Catholic Journal.



**YOU ARE THE  
REASON THEY  
HAVE A CHANCE  
AT A BETTER  
FUTURE.**



**THE REASONS TO DONATE  
ARE ALL AROUND US.**

**DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

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[vinnies.org.au/dosomething](http://vinnies.org.au/dosomething)

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*good works*

