

# the Record

Winter 2016



St Vincent de Paul Society

*good works*



## THE FORGOTTEN AND THE EXCLUDED

Wealth does not trickle down.



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

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

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

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The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia wishes to acknowledge that we are on Aboriginal land. We pay respects to all traditional custodians.

This publication may contain images of deceased members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They are used with the greatest respect and appreciation.

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

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Front cover: Image by Adam Hollingworth.

## Immersion Program reflection

*Fraser Selby was one of nine people who took part in the 2016 St Vincent de Paul Society's Immersion Program—an annual two week experience that gives volunteers a taste of life in a remote Indigenous community.*

*Fraser shared this reflection with the group during their final evening prayer, while sitting around a billabong and watching the sun set. A full report on the program by fellow participants Ray Akhurst and Claire White follows on pages 28 and 29.*

Two weeks is such a little time,  
In sixty thousand years.  
We all came for learning,  
To distinguish hopes and fears.

We arrived with hearts full of love,  
Nine people into the fold.  
Using Vinnies as our Vessel,  
Nine people of Eastern Gold.

We gave so much of ourselves,  
In that little amount of time.  
But not as much as we received,  
Received in a Country, sublime.

It feels 'little', what we've done,  
But as we all have come to know:  
From little things,  
Big things do grow. ♦

Fraser Selby

## My Testimony – Johnny Belmont

Now the time has come for who  
will hear this story,  
And those who don't.

This is a journey to recovery within  
my heart,  
Mind and soul for I am not a bad  
person,  
For ones that know me,  
Can answer that,  
I am brave, sensitive, emotional  
bloke,  
But sadly misfortune and  
heartbroken,  
Has left me with much burden in  
my life,  
For I have travelled this world and  
seen so many cultures and lands,  
The memories I have is a reflection  
of my whole life,  
For there has been many tears and  
hate,  
But also joy and happiness,  
And ups and downs for I am now  
at the bottom of my life and out of  
hope, faith, will.

That's what I use to think.

God has given me hope, faith, will  
to live again,  
Plus the gift to write,  
To write my own testimony,  
As His words go through me to  
you,



Johnny Belmont

To be delivered,  
My heart is full of His love and  
power,  
For in my hour of need a light was  
seen,  
He was there,  
But really His been with me on this  
journey my whole life,  
It's only now I have realised this as  
He walks beside me.  
Amen Father you saved me.

*To whom it concerns I Johnny  
homeless man (was) but still  
roaming our streets of Perth in  
search for something, I have fought  
with my own mind and now have  
many stories to tell. I thank you for  
reading this short little story. ♦*

## Culture heroes of the Middle Ages

He was not a rock star or financial  
genius,  
he was Dr Seraphicus,  
very learned, mystic and  
churchman,  
a professor, cardinal and Franciscan,  
he wrote a book *The Mind's  
Journey Into God*.  
Shouldn't that be a path well-trod?  
He was appropriately pious,  
as was Dr Angelicus,  
who was a philosopher and  
theologian  
and the most famous Dominican.  
Neither was as fractious

as Dr Mellifluus,  
who silenced Abelard  
and launched a crusade.  
Alas! If only he had known  
the mystic Al Ghazzali, the  
communion  
of saints would have included a  
Muslim,  
delightful cause of heavenly  
celebration! ♦

Reg Naulty

Legend: Dr Seraphicus- St Bonaventure, Dr  
Angelicus- St. Thomas Aquinas, Dr.Mellifluus-  
St Bernard of Clairvaux.

Australia has unacceptably high and growing  
rates of homelessness. Despite this, we have  
no national plan to tackle homelessness,  
and frontline services are struggling to meet  
demand.

Johnny Belmont was one of several  
speakers who took part in a nation-wide  
joint advocacy campaign aimed at halving  
homelessness by 2025. The campaign was  
organised by not-for-profit providers of  
homelessness services, and included The St  
Vincent de Paul Society, Anglicare, Mission  
Australia, the Salvation Army, Uniting Care  
and Wesley Mission. Mr Belmont spoke at a  
forum in Perth on 15 June.



# Society appoints new President General

BY GRAHAM WEST

***June was a significant month for the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with the holding of the international assembly in Rome to elect our new President General and to consider the changes to the statutes of the Society.***

These meetings are held every six years and a representative from all countries where the Society has a presence are invited.

At the 2016 assembly Renato Lima de Oliveira, from Brazil, was elected President General.

Renato has a deep and long connection to the Society and is keen for it to thrive worldwide through drawing on success stories from members.

He has expressed a desire for Australia to play a leading role during a reshaping process—a role I assured him our members would be happy to be a part of.

Of course, in electing Renato it also sees us saying farewell to Michael Thio, who has guided the Society for the last six years and steps down formally in September.

During Michael's stewardship the Society grew internationally to operate in almost 140 countries. Michael has a great love for the Society, and we wish him well as he transitions to a new role.

Aside from Renato's appointment, the meeting provided a real opportunity to learn from the many countries that make up our Society, including the different ways different cultures engage with their own members and those they assist, through congresses, gatherings and other communications.

It was humbling to see the high regard held by our brothers and sisters internationally for the Society's work in Australia. In particular, generous support of disaster relief, twinning and Assist a Student programs are appreciated.

Of course, the meeting also included a vigorous discussion on the future status of the Society under Canon Law. A proposal to join The Pontifical Council Cor Unum was not supported by the assembly, partly as a result of questions raised by Australia. A desire by all to ensure that a long and detailed discussion of the proposal was held at all levels of the Society throughout the world was paramount.

As a result, our incoming president will convene a commission to examine the proposals and report back to the Society in two years' time.

This debate highlighted not only the interconnectedness of the Society, but also the importance of Australia being active and engaged with our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

This engagement should not be restricted to assemblies every six years, or our disaster support—it should also see a reinvigoration of twinning arrangements. We have much to learn from the experience of other countries, while sharing resources and offering financial support.

Beyond these formal links, Society members who are travelling are always welcome to extend the hand of friendship with our brothers and sisters on their journeys, especially in areas where twinning arrangements are in place.

We are also increasing efforts to reconnect with Papua New Guinea, and have reached out to bishops and Society members there, to find new ways to support them.

I wish to thank the many Society members here who have lent their

expertise to this reengagement, and continue to do so. They have also been incredibly patient while working through our legal requirements, the Rule and our statutes.

In recent years we have embraced the concept of One Society in Australia, but we truly are One Society throughout the world, and are richer for it. ♦

Graham West is National President, St Vincent de Paul Society.



## Renato Lima de Oliveira

At 45 years of age, Brazilian born Renato Lima de Oliveira was elected as the President General of the St Vincent de Paul Society on 5 June 2016 at the General Meeting held in Rome.

Renato is married to Andréa and they have 2 children, Gustavo and Bianca.

Renato joined the Society as a Conference member in 1986 and has held several positions including Conference President and Secretary, Coordinator of the Youth Commission for Nossa Senhora das Graças Particular Council and Coordinator of the Antônio Frederico Ozanam Supported Learning Centre.

<http://bit.ly/29TYLOQ>

# First Nations launch historic Redfern Statement

## ***Australia's peak Indigenous organisations released their long-awaited Redfern Statement on 9 June.***

The statement by National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders calls on the Federal Government to completely overhaul Indigenous strategy, engagement and funding.

The declaration is backed by key bodies responsible for services including health, education, disabilities, justice and legal services, child protection, domestic violence and human rights.

In summary, it recommends the Federal Government:

- restore \$534 million cut from the Indigenous Affairs Portfolio by the 2014 Budget
- commit to better and ongoing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples through their representative national peaks
- re-commit to Closing the Gap by setting targets to reduce rates of family violence, incarceration and out-of-home care. Access to disability support services is also recommended
- commit to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to establish a Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in the future
- commit to addressing the unfinished business of Reconciliation.

The statement was launched in Redfern, the same location where former Prime Minister Paul Keating delivered his December 1992 Redfern Park Speech, which incorporated the challenges faced by Indigenous Australians. That same year the High Court handed down its Mabo decision on native title, putting Reconciliation on Australia's political agenda.



NAIDOC week celebrated the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples this year from 3 to 10 July. Artist Lani Balzon's painting (left), won the 2016 NAIDOC week poster competition.

But many injustices remain.

'In the past 25 years—a generation in fact—we have had the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, the *Bringing Them Home Report* and *Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge: the final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation*,' the 2016 Redfern Statement says.

'These reports, and numerous other Coroner and Social Justice Reports, have made over 400 recommendations, most of which have either been partially implemented for short-term periods or ignored altogether.

'In the last 25 years we have seen eight Federal election cycles come and go, with seven Prime Ministers, seven Ministers for Indigenous Affairs, countless policies, policy changes, funding promises and funding cuts—all for the most marginalised people in Australia.

'For the last quarter century, then, we've seen seminal reports which have repeatedly emphasised that our people need to have a genuine say in our own lives and

decisions that affect our peoples and communities. This, known as self-determination, is the key to closing the gap in outcomes for the First Peoples of these lands and waters.'

The statement called on the incoming government to right the nation's past injustices.

'The next Government of Australia will take power with our First Peoples facing the same struggles as they were in 1992,' it said.

'But this next Federal Government also has an unprecedented nation-building opportunity to meaningfully address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. They have the mandate to act.'

The St Vincent de Paul Society is proud to stand in respectful solidarity with Australia's peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in their historic proclamation of the Redfern Statement. ♦



# Waiting for the wealth to trickle down

BY DR JOHN FALZON

***Wealth does not trickle down. It's the job of the tax system to make sure it gets shared around. That is why we need governments to do what markets cannot, namely to ensure a fair go for all rather than a sumptuous banquet for some.***

Tax cuts to large corporations do not help the wealth to trickle down. Current policy settings for negative gearing, capital gains tax discounts and superannuation tax concessions do not help the wealth to trickle down. They help keep it at the top by rewarding people and corporations who have already benefited from the prosperity generated by economic growth. Australia, which is the sixth lowest taxing country in the OECD, goes without more revenue through tax expenditure than all other advanced economies.

A progressive society would tax those who have much rather than taking away from those who have little.

But today we have a society and an economy more closely aligned to the principle that to those who have much, more will be given and from those who have little, even the little they have will be taken away. As things stand people who need services and income supports are being punished in the name of deficit reduction.

Taxation is an important means of redistributing wealth and opportunities. We should be using it to make Australia more equal; something we should actually strive for rather than fear. Treasury's own



modelling shows that the trickle-down economics used to justify corporate tax cuts are illusory.

Tax cuts for larger companies might be good for profits but, at the cost of \$48 billion over the next 10 years, they will do nothing to create jobs or to secure the revenue for social housing, education, health or social security.

Superannuation tax breaks are estimated by Treasury to cost \$32 billion annually; by comparison, \$20.3 billion a year is spent on Medicare. Negative gearing and the discount on capital gains tax cost over \$11 billion each year, and the benefits are overwhelmingly skewed towards higher income earners.

Housing is a human right. But negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts have turned it into a speculative sport. We're subsidising the wealthy while leaving people homeless. Maintaining these tax concessions and giving big business a company tax cut ultimately comes at the expense of the education, health and social services that ordinary people rely on.

Those who are left out are usually blamed and punished for their own exclusion. The message they receive is that if only they tried a little harder all would be well, whether it's breaking into the housing market or into the labour market. But when we talk about the unfairness of cuts to social expenditure, we're not just talking about the effects on people who currently experience poverty or homelessness; we're talking about the majority. And we're talking about a continuum where financial stress and housing stress are only a few steps away from homelessness; where underemployment and insecure employment are only a few steps away from unemployment.

It is deeply offensive to suggest that it's only the recalcitrant few who can't look after themselves and that if we taxed less and spent less, then most of us would be able to just purchase the goods and services we need, as we need them, putting the premium, of course, on choice rather than equal access.

# What does winter mean to me?

The truth is that it is only a few who benefit from this formulation; those who have no need, and perhaps even no desire, for universal healthcare or public education; those who believe they will never need income support as a carer, or due to a disability, or age, or unemployment; those who feel there is little, if any, value in anything being held in common for the common enjoyment of all, perhaps with the exception of the odd public park or beach.

Universal healthcare is a precious thing—we need to protect and extend it. We need to make sure that nobody says they cannot take care of their health because they need to put food on the table. If you want to build a strong economy, it doesn't make sense to deny your population access to high quality healthcare.

Likewise, investing in Gonski, in TAFE, in apprenticeships, in universities and in social and community services should not be seen as charity or welfare; they should be seen as a common good that belongs to everybody, from Australia's First Peoples through to our most recent arrivals. None of these goods should be dependent on the depth of your pockets. And none of these goods should be denied to ordinary people on the basis of the fervent but misguided dogma that if they are patient, the day will come when the wealth will trickle down. ♦

Dr John Falzon is Chief Executive of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council. This opinion piece first appeared in Fairfax Media.



## The best things about winter

Cold mornings, crisp sunny afternoons  
 Warm soup and woolly socks  
 Chilly nights, a mug of hot chocolate and a cosy fireplace  
 Sleeping in on a rainy Sunday morning  
 Warm jackets, chilly mornings under the duvet  
 Playing in the park on a clear sunny day  
 Lazy afternoons with a good book  
 Cuddled up on the couch underneath a blanket  
 Chilly toes, a runny nose and warm puppy cuddles  
 Chopping wood for the stove  
 Being mesmerised by flames coming from burning wood  
 Sitting by an open fire under the stars. Pure bliss!  
 Blue skies, layers and a glass of red  
 Cosying up in the night time  
 A chance to recharge my batteries. ♦  
*Vinnies staff*

## The worst things about winter

Not having a place to go to  
 It's not just about shelter, it's about being warm  
 The worst indignity is that police constantly move you on, the minute you find some warmth ♦  
*Homeless people, Sydney*

*I love winter, but every night when I get into my rather lovely bed, I think about my brothers and sisters who can't get warm.*

Graham Long,  
 Pastor, The Wayside Chapel,  
 Kings Cross, Sydney

# Households in the dark:

Mapping electricity disconnections in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and South East Queensland

***A first-time study on households most at risk of electricity disconnections explores when, where and why power is cut off.***

The St Vincent de Paul Society's *Households in the dark* report is an analysis of approximately 200,000 electricity disconnections over a three year period, from July 2012 to July 2015.

It ranks the top 50 postcodes with the highest number of disconnections, state by state.

Results found marked differences between the states, with those in regional and metropolitan Victoria being most at risk of being cut off multiple times.

'In Victoria, the roll out of smart meters, which enables disconnection to be done remotely instead of during a site visit, results in an increase in the disconnection completion rate,' the Society's energy spokesperson Gavin Duffy said.

Households across the state with both low incomes and high costs associated with running a household were particularly vulnerable.

In the outer western Melbourne suburb of Werribee, for example, an estimated 570 customers were disconnected twice during a three year period. 100 were cut off three times.

Mr Duffy believes many people living in the area are first home buyers struggling with big mortgages and raising young families. In such circumstances, it can be devastating if an income earner loses their job.

'When several households in a community are disconnected from electricity more than once over a three year period, we are arguably looking at members in these communities faced with entrenched poverty or ongoing financial hardship,' Mr Duffy said.



Other postcodes with high disconnection numbers are in Melbourne's northern and outer south eastern suburbs, Adelaide's northern suburbs, Sydney's western suburbs and Brisbane's southern and northern suburbs.

In the central NSW town of Orange, 92 customers were cut off three times. 54 were cut off four times.

The area sustained massive job losses when appliance manufacturer Electrolux, which is based at Orange, announced plans to close its production facility in 2013.

How a community is affected by announcements like these, is partly revealed by electricity data, Mr Duffy points out.

'So in Orange, people are dealing with change by being disconnected, rather than moving. Because if they were moving, there would be no disconnections,' Mr Duffy said.

## Recommendations and conclusions

The study shows that communities with a high degree of social disadvantage are most likely to have high disconnection numbers. At the same time, it also highlights that there are households with a high level of social advantage that are experiencing housing stress and or high transport costs.

Recommendations made in the report to address the issue are directed at energy policy makers and energy regulators at both state and Commonwealth level.

The report's recommendations include:

- scaling up energy efficiency programs targeting low-income households, particularly those in private rental properties and social and public housing





IMAGE BY DREAMTIME

## State by state breakdown of 'top 10 postcodes' with highest number of electricity disconnections (ranked from highest to lowest)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA	
5259	Narrung
5120	Virginia
5690	Ceduna
5700	Port Augusta West
5113	Elizabeth Park
5115	Kudla
5606	Port Lincoln
5277	Penola
5608	Whyalla Stuart
5114	Smithfield Plains

VICTORIA	
3022	Ardeer
3019	Braybrook
3061	Campbellfield
3021	St Albans
3000	Melbourne
3008	Docklands
3214	Corio
3020	Sunshine
3066	Collingwood
3840	Morwel

NEW SOUTH WALES	
2400	Moree
2800	Orange
2880	Broken Hill
2832	Walgett
2663	Junee
2830	Dubbo
2705	Leeton
2641	Lavington
2820	Wellington
2680	Griffith

QUEENSLAND	
4132	Marsden
4114	Woodridge
4510	Bellmere
4131	Loganlea
4501	Lawnton
4506	Morayfield
4508	Deception Bay
4301	Redbank Plains
4102	Woolloongabba
4209	Pimpama

- strengthening regulatory protections for low-income and vulnerable households, including wrongful disconnection payments by retailers who do not follow the required processes when cutting off customers from their electricity supply
- improving the adequacy and targeting of energy concessions
- increased social security payments for households needing to be lifted out of poverty
- education programs that inform households about concession arrangements, access to energy retailer hardship programs, relief schemes and other relevant support measures, including information on how to navigate the energy retail market by shopping around for the best deal. ♦

A full copy of the report is available at [www.vinnies.org.au/householdsinthedark](http://www.vinnies.org.au/householdsinthedark)

# New face on National Council

***As a schoolboy, Warwick Fulton was involved with fundraising activities for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Sydney's south. Fast-forward a few decades and he is now President of the Canberra/Goulburn Territory Council.***

After long hours of managing strata units in the ACT and NSW throughout much of the 1990s and well into the 2000s, another vocation awaited Warwick Fulton.

His second daughter Deborah belonged to the Kambah Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and was keen to get him involved with its work.

'She used to say, "When my dad retires he is going to join Vinnies". So, as soon as I did retire, they came knocking on my door. And I was quite happy to join, and be a part of it', he says.

Eight years later, Warwick is President of the Canberra/Goulburn Territory Council, having taken up the post in March this year.

'I feel that I have something to contribute, to make a difference. And I feel that I have been called to do this work, so I am very passionate about it', the former tax accountant and barrister says.

Raised in Sydney's south, Warwick's early experience with the Society included helping out with collections and other fundraising activities while he was a student at De La Salle College, Caringbah. At the same time, he was aware that some of the boys' fathers were quietly helping those in need behind the scenes, and of the need for such work to be low key in order for privacy to be respected—a trait the Society continues to espouse today.



Warwick Fulton.

He says dwindling membership in the Society's grassroots groups known as Conferences is a key concern.

'We have an ageing membership. Our average age is getting into the 70s', he points out.

With some conferences down to just a few members, he believes it is imperative to appeal to the Society's youth. It was a 20-year-old university student, Frédéric Ozanam, who founded the original conference in Paris in the first place, back in 1833.

'And so, I think we need to go back to our roots. To reach the younger people who are keen to get involved. We don't have the structure that makes it easy for them to get involved.'

Understanding the modern day needs of those the Society assists is another priority. While the deliverance of food parcels is important, what happens beyond that is intrinsic to Vinnie's philosophy.

'The food parcels meet their immediate need, but it doesn't solve their problem', Warwick says.

'And so we need to get in there and see what we can do to get them out of their current difficulties, and back on track.

'Our mission is to give people a hand up, rather than a hand out.

'So if we give them a food parcel, that is a hand out. But we want to give them a hand up, out of where they are. And that takes a little more effort. We have to give of ourselves first, before they will open up to us. And that all takes time.'

In the meantime, adjusting to massive technological changes after an eight-year absence from office life is proving to be easy.

'I enjoy working with such lovely people', Warwick says of his Canberra/Goulburn colleagues, because they are all such happy, friendly people.

'I hadn't worked in an office for several years.

'If I get stuck, there are staff here who, like a rocket, will fix things for me.

'I think that is fantastic. It's just such a friendly, open place to work.' ♦

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## Vale Tom Fisher OAM

The St Vincent de Paul Society (WA) is mourning the loss of one of its longest serving volunteers, Tom Fisher OAM, who passed on Saturday 4 June, aged 95.

Only weeks after leaving the HMAS Sydney, Tom lost all his mates after it was sunk and lost in 1941—one of Australia's greatest naval tragedies. It was only recovered in 2008 after renewed efforts to bring closure to the mystery.

Tom made a promise that if he survived the war he would dedicate the rest of his life to the service of others and that is exactly what he did.

St Vincent de Paul Society CEO Mark Fitzpatrick said the community had lost a loyal and selfless gentleman who had helped hundreds of people during his amazing life.

'Tom's commitment to the Society and the work we do cannot be overstated,' Mr Fitzpatrick said.

'Whether as a member, Conference President, Regional President, State President, or Society archivist and historian, Tom never stopped giving.



Tom Fisher OAM.

'Tom was a loving, giving man who had a cheeky, brilliant and extremely funny sense of humour that made us all laugh and enjoy his company. There are not many people who we have come across that touch our spirit in such a beautiful way as Tom did.

'A homeless service named in Tom's honour is to be officially opened in August and we wish that he could have seen this project come to fruition, but we know his wife Shirley and his

family will be proud to be part of this significant occasion.

'Tom was so chuffed to learn that a homeless shelter would be named in his honour and it will be a living testament to his life of kindness and generosity to the community he served so selflessly,' Mr Fitzpatrick said.

He was the first to open a pantry in his home in 1980 to provide food and clothing to people in need.

'Tom Fisher was a state treasure and we will be forever grateful for all that he has done for the people of WA on behalf of the St Vincent de Paul Society,' Mr Fitzpatrick said.

'His wife Shirley has been equally as generous, dedicating years of volunteer service to Vinnies and our thoughts are with her and the family at this sad time.

'The community has lost a true gentleman. We will make sure his legacy lives on through Tom Fisher House, which helps rough-sleeping individuals and couples,' Mr Fitzpatrick said. ♦

## Homelessness charities push for leadership on chronic housing shortfall

Leaders of Australia's largest homelessness service providers held forums in Sydney and Perth in June, to highlight the chronic shortfall of social and affordable housing.

The charities, Anglicare Australia, Mission Australia, Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society, UnitingCare Australia and Wesley Mission have written a joint letter to all major political party leaders, urging a commitment to halving homelessness by 2025.

On any given night more than 100,000 Australians are homeless. The numbers are growing and

the organisations want Federal Government leadership to address the problem.

Speaking at the Sydney forum, Dr John Falzon, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, said:

'There is no excuse for a country as wealthy as Australia to accept a situation where people are systematically denied a place to call home.

'Australia urgently needs political leadership to reduce homelessness, backed up by a comprehensive plan of action that tackles the lack of affordable housing, strengthens the social safety net and services on the frontline, invests in prevention and early intervention, and ensures that

everyone has a safe and secure place to call home.'

Each political party has been urged to commit to expanding prevention and early intervention services.

This should include a comprehensive national plan that identifies risk factors and population groups, such as women and children escaping domestic and family abuse, Indigenous communities, young people leaving care, and older people in the private rental market.

To generate public support for the campaign, which coincided with the Federal Election, the organisations also launched a petition [www.change.org/p/homelessness-has-no-place-in-australia-i-votehome](http://www.change.org/p/homelessness-has-no-place-in-australia-i-votehome) ♦



# In limbo

BY FELIX DELHOMME

***Nearly 29,000 people seeking asylum live in Australia on temporary bridging visas. Left in limbo and pushed into poverty by work rights restrictions, they are prevented from rebuilding a new life, writes Felix Delhomme.***

The two main Australian political parties have regarded being tough on immigration as key to obtaining or staying in power for over a quarter of a century. The latest government figures from March 2016 report that 1,679 people are still detained in immigration facilities in Australia, and a further 1,373 people in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. As at April 2016, there were still around 50 children in the Nauru processing centre.

In addition to the asylum seekers who have been locked away indefinitely, there are those who live in the community but cannot start to rebuild their lives due to restrictions attached to temporary visas issued to them by the government.

Almost 29,000 people have been granted a 'bridging visa E'—a visa typically given to asylum seekers who have arrived by boat and have made claims for refugee protection.

## **From one temporary visa to another**

A bridging visa E is valid for a minimum of 28 days or up to three years, although a number of people have had successive temporary bridging visas.

Bridging visa E holders are left navigating complex immigration rules that were designed to restrict access to permanent solutions to



asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by plane. Ultimately, bridging visa E holders have no prospect of permanent protection, even if their claim for refugee status is eventually upheld. For those who have arrived by boat and are on bridging visas, the only prospects are for two grossly inadequate temporary schemes—the temporary protection visa (TPV), which is valid for up to three years, and the recently created safe haven enterprise visa (SHEV). The latter is valid for five years but carries strict requirements that have been cynically designed to be almost impossible for anyone to meet. Even if a bridging visa E holder is granted a TPV or SHEV, they will need to re-prove their claim and face the prospect of having their refugee status revoked when their temporary visa expires.

This lack of options is compounded by the difficulties asylum seekers encounter when accessing legal assistance and immigration advice. In 2014, the Minister for Immigration Scott Morrison withdrew access to the government-funded Immigration

Advice and Application Assistance Scheme for asylum seekers who had arrived by boat. As a substitute the government developed a toolkit, which provides information on the processing of asylum seeker claims in different languages.

## **Fast-track processing**

While the current government maintains that it inherited an existing backlog of unprocessed asylum claims, it beggars belief that the Department of Immigration, which has offered 570,000 places as part of its total migration program since 2012–2013, has been unable to provide solutions for 29,000 bridging visa E holders.

The government's purported inability to process applications is all the more surprising considering that it specifically designed a 'fast-track process', which turned out to be neither fast nor to resemble any kind of procedural fairness.

Rather than having their claim heard

under Australia's robust refugee status determination process, fast-track applicants face a severely limited process, which sets many applicants up for failure. This system expects people to produce, translate and submit a detailed and comprehensive claim for asylum in just 28 days. Applicants are given just one chance to state their case for protection to an immigration official, which is particularly challenging for people who have experienced serious trauma—such as women who have been sexually abused or individuals who have experienced torture. And if people's claims are knocked back by the Department, they can no longer appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal. Instead, they may only access a limited form of review through the Immigration Assessment Authority.

## **Trapped in poverty**

While allowed to temporarily stay in Australia, bridging visa E holders are left with no clear prospects for the future and are often trapped in poverty due to the strict immigration regulations, including in many cases the requirement that they do not work. Even where they do have work rights, they are excluded from Commonwealth-funded employment assistance, such as Centrelink services and jobactive Australia.

Without the ability to earn a living, many asylum seekers ration their food and turn to the solidarity of community members and to charitable organisations, whose work is made difficult by the surge in demand and the absence of government statistics on the number of bridging visa E holders who do not have the right to work.

Others are pushed into the underground economy where they are exposed to labour abuses and have to live under the constant threat of sanctions from the Immigration Department. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has found that asylum seekers working despite the restriction on their visas are in a vulnerable position which exposes them to exploitation, including not being paid, working long hours for meagre wages and having no recourse to remedy.

## **The toll of uncertainty**

For many, not knowing what the future holds for them and their children is deeply distressing. The difficulty of dealing with past traumatic events experienced in their home country and during their journey to Australia is compounded by the fear that they might be returned to harm.

Uncertainty also has material consequences for bridging visa holders. Many struggle to find accommodation as real estate agents are often reluctant to sign tenants on short-term visas, preferring to set up long-term lease agreements.

The toll of uncertainty is even greater for those whose bridging visas do not get renewed on expiry. The absence of legal status in Australia has extremely negative impacts on their employment, housing and eligibility for Medicare.

## **Under the threat of arbitrary expulsions**

Further pressure is imposed on bridging visa holders through the 'code of behaviour' that they are required to sign. This code imposes

restrictions over and above the law and gives the Department of Immigration extraordinary discretionary powers. It prohibits visa holders from engaging in an all-encompassing category of 'any anti-social or disruptive activities that are inconsiderate, disrespectful or threaten the peaceful enjoyment of other members of the community'.

Penalties for breaching the code's prohibitions can be applied without any charge or evidence. The consequences of breaching the code can be severe, ranging from a reduction or suspension of income support, the cancellation of an existing bridging visa and detention onshore, or even transfer to an offshore detention centre. The Guardian reports that one bridging visa holder has been incarcerated for more than two years for drinking a beer on a train.

## **Change?**

Nearly 29,000 people seeking asylum live in limbo in the community in Australia, pushed into poverty by rules that prevent them from fulfilling essential needs, and destined for failure by a fast-track process that makes it every bit as hard to stay in Australia.

This insidious punishment needs to stop.

The Government of Australia has adopted rules that are cruel, unnecessary and inefficient. It needs to return to a system that is consistent with international human rights law, dignity and the number one objective of any asylum policy—protecting rather than inflicting pain. ♦

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Felix Delhomme is social justice officer at the St Vincent de Paul Society, NSW.

# Lack of legal assistance shuts out hundreds of thousands

BY AMANDA ALFORD

***Hundreds of thousands of vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community are being excluded and forgotten due to a massive shortfall in legal assistance, writes Amanda Alford.***

Against the backdrop of significant and rising demand for legal assistance, publicly funded legal assistance providers are facing underfunding, funding cuts, and uncertainty. It means the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our society are excluded from accessing the legal help they so desperately need.

A number of key inquiries and reviews have emphasised the high level of both met and unmet legal need in Australia.<sup>1</sup> As a result, and perhaps unsurprisingly, there is growing demand for legal assistance. Many members of the community are simply unable to afford to pay a private lawyer, which means they must rely on one of four publicly funded legal assistance providers in Australia. These are:

- Community Legal Centres
- Family Violence Prevention Legal Services
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
- Legal Aid Commissions.

Community legal centres are independent, non-profit, community-based organisations that provide free and accessible legal and related services to more than 215,000 vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community each year. More than 60 per cent of community legal centre clients report having low or no income while some 25 per cent identify as having a disability. Around 17 per cent live in a sole-parent



family and more than six per cent are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.

Community legal centres and other legal assistance providers are increasingly unable to meet this rising demand for assistance, resulting in more than 160,000 people being turned away each year.

The growing demand is occurring against the backdrop of proposed further reductions to funding. Under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance, community legal centres are facing a 30 per cent funding cut nationally from 1 July 2017, with cuts amounting to \$34.83 million over the period 2017–18 to 2019–2020.

These cuts mean hundreds of thousands more people will miss out on the legal help they need. The cuts will also undermine government policy in other areas, such as responding to and addressing family violence.

Given the scale of the problem and

the rising demand for legal help, reversal of the funding cuts is only part of the solution. There is also a need for increased investment in the legal assistance sector, as highlighted by the Productivity Commission in its 2014 Access to Justice Arrangements Inquiry.

These Commonwealth funding challenges are compounded by the inconsistent funding of legal assistance across Australia, which means that accessibility to essential legal advice and assistance for vulnerable and disadvantaged people differs considerably, depending on where someone lives. This underscores the importance of federal leadership in developing a mechanism that ensures adequate investment by all levels of government in legal assistance.

We know that unresolved legal problems generate a range of flow-on effects and that access to legal help can prevent or reduce the escalation of legal problems for individuals. We know that investment in legal



assistance makes economic sense. For example, the Productivity Commission has noted, 'legal assistance services can prevent or reduce the escalation of legal problems, which in turn can mean reduced costs to the justice system and lower costs to other taxpayer funded services (in areas such as health, housing and social security payments).'<sup>2</sup> We also know that access to legal assistance has real implications for safety, financial security, social inclusion, dignity and life.

As a result, regardless of which party or parties form government following the upcoming federal election, the incoming priorities for the federal government with respect to legal assistance should include:

- acknowledgement of, and support for, the distinct but vital and interrelated role played by all four legal assistance providers
- reversal of funding cuts due to take effect from 1 July 2017, such as cuts to community legal centres amounting to \$34.83 million over the period 2017–18 to 2019–2020
- immediate injection of funding into the legal assistance sector consistent with the 2014 recommendations made by the Productivity Commission, which recommended \$200 million per annum (60 per cent from Commonwealth government and 40 per cent from state and territory governments)
- funding and support for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, as community-controlled organisations and therefore the most appropriate providers of legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- a commitment to developing a transparent, public and evidence-based mechanism for determining what overall quantum of legal



PHOTO: ISTOCK.COM/MEINZAHN

assistance funding is required to meet legal need in Australia

- amending the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance to remove the restriction on community legal centres using Commonwealth funding to undertake vital policy, advocacy and law reform work
- Commonwealth, state and territory government collaboration and commitment with respect to responsibility for and funding of legal assistance
- support for and provision of funding for a regular national survey of legal need, similar to the Legal Australia-Wide Survey, to examine met and unmet legal need in Australia.

There is an opportunity for the incoming government to address this crisis, and indeed the crisis facing vital community services across Australia.

Without immediate action, legal assistance services will be forced to continue to turn away hundreds and thousands of people each year and the excluded and forgotten members of our society will be prevented from accessing vital legal assistance, with a devastating impact on their lives and on our communities. ♦

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Amanda Alford is Director of Policy and Advocacy at the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC), the peak body for all community legal centres in Australia.

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1. See, for example, ACOSS, *Australian Community Sector Survey 2013: National Report*, ACOSS Paper 202 (2013); Productivity Commission of Australia, *Access to Justice Arrangements Inquiry Report No 72* (September 2014) 107 & Finding 2.1; NACLC Legal Needs Assessment Toolkit; Indigenous Legal Needs Project based at James Cook University.

2. Productivity Commission of Australia, *Access to Justice Arrangements Inquiry Report No 72* (September 2014) 666.

# Our drought-stricken rural communities need support

BY MARCELLE MOGG

***In a blow to rural communities, the 2016–17 Federal Budget ended the ongoing funding of on-the-ground mental health services. So where does that leave people living in these communities, when they come across tough times?***

Jack, a farmer in western Queensland, has been under financial pressure for many years now, thanks to the drought. The unrelenting stress and anxiety about the future are putting strain on his marriage and his family. He works very long days and is isolated from extended family and friends. Who can he turn to?

Simon, another man on the land, is struggling under the weight of grief following an accident that killed a member of his family. He's having trouble talking to his wife who is also grieving, and the whole situation is making it hard to deal with the daily challenges of running his large dairy farm. Who can help before it gets to a crisis situation?

Up until 30 June, both of these men were able to access tailored community mental health, and family and relationship counselling services that were established two years ago to support drought affected communities. Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) members are among the providers who have been delivering these services, often one-on-one, usually by visiting people on their properties over a period of time, at their request, or through a community event setting, such as men's sheds, afternoon teas, or stands at agricultural shows. However, in a blow to rural communities, the 2016–17 Federal Budget ended the ongoing funding for



these crucial and successful services. So from 1 July, these vital, on-the-ground mental health services ceased.

Where will people living in rural and remote communities go when they are doing it tough? The government has said that from 1 July, they can access traditional mental health services, such as telephone counselling and clinical mental health counselling through Primary Health Networks, but existing evidence shows people in rural and remote areas are reluctant to seek support through those channels. This is due to the stigma of accessing mental health services in rural communities, fears around lack of anonymity, or the lack of specialised mental health services. The high rates of depression and suicide in rural communities are clear evidence of the need for counselling support in these areas.

Catholic Social Services Australia has developed a proposal for a Rural Community Resilience Programme to take over the existing services that have been defunded.

The proposed programme will draw on the success of the earlier model, and enable counsellors and community workers to work alongside

rural and remote communities and extend mental health, family and relationship support to people in their homes, on their stations and at community events.

Importantly, the Rural Community Resilience Programme recognises that the challenges faced by rural and remote communities are ongoing—not just one-off episodes that can be dealt with and forgotten.

It's a programme that meets farmers and farming communities where they're at and talks their language.

Previously, Catholic Social Services Australia member agencies, such as Centacare Toowoomba and Centacare New England North West, have delivered individual and family relationship support services in 52 of the 69 drought-affected local government areas (LGAs) across Australia, at a cost to the Australian Government of around \$290,000 per year for each LGA. Similarly, Centacare Catholic Family Services, Adelaide, has worked with communities in the Adelaide Hills, Alexandrina, Mount Barker and the Coorong LGAs.

Evidence from the past two years clearly shows the effectiveness of a

# Mini Vinnies

community mental health model and family and relationship counselling services working in rural and remote settings to complement mainstream service providers. Investing early in preventative measures, such as developing social cohesion, provides a foundation for the community and individuals to cope when times get tough.

Jack and Simon, and their wives and families, have received help through individual counselling and support visits at their farm or station, and through community-based discussion groups. All are now doing well and receiving ongoing support.

In Jack's case, the counselling he and his family received in their own home enabled the case worker to engage with the family face-to-face, over a period of time, building a climate of trust and respect, in a way which may not have been possible in any other setting. The home visits also provided opportunities for the case worker to meet and chat in an informal setting with eight other local people, and to introduce, from a non-invasive and respectful position, information on drought assistance programmes, as well as offer support and referrals to other relevant services, such as financial counselling.

The community mental health model works. It saves lives, saves marriages, saves families and saves communities. It can only keep working if the Federal Government commits to supporting it through the provision of ongoing funding. I urge you to support struggling farmers in your region by joining Catholic Social Services Australia in calling on politicians and political candidates from all sides of politics to commit to this programme and help build a stronger, happier future for our families on the land. ♦

*\*names have been changed for privacy.*

Marcelle Mogg is Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Social Services Australia.



PHOTO: CHRISTIAN LONGOBARDI, MURRAY PIONEER, RENMARK, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

*St Joseph's School Renmark year 7 student Jessica Price, year 7 teacher Nicole Sciancalepore, and year 7 students Jessica Sadler and Chloe Smith, in a purpose built cardboard box made by the students, to raise awareness of homelessness.*

***Mini Vinnies is a program designed for groups of primary school students who are interested in social justice. Groups usually run their own fundraisers and other events on school grounds; however, they may visit other schools, aged care facilities or similar for projects.***

Students from St Joseph's School Renmark, in South Australia, raised close to \$1500 for the St Vincent de Paul Society, by holding a cardboard box sleep out.

As part of the school's Mini Vinnies program, the students learn about social justice issues that affect their local community.

The school's principal, Don DePalma, said the students were keen to explore different ways of expressing concern for people facing social justice issues.

'The Cardboard Box Sleepout was to raise awareness for the homeless. We learned there are many homeless people in the Riverland, and certainly in Renmark,' he said.

The event involved 24 students from year seven collecting donations from family and others, and repurposing a cardboard box to sleep in.

'They had to design a box and the intent was for them to sleep outside, in a box, on a cold night, and experience what it is actually like,' Mr DePalma said.

That they did, on 30 June, a week after the main Vinnies CEO Sleepout event. Mr DePalma said the students slept underneath a covered area, with their teachers. ♦



# Early recollections of injustice

BY BELINDA CRANSTON

***The St Vincent de Paul Society is strong on tackling issues of social injustice. For this edition of The Record, we asked several Australians to share a moment from their childhood or young adulthood that really brought home the reality that life was not always fair.***

Some told of moments when they became uncomfortably aware of others being treated shabbily.

Others told of a time when they were the victims of injustice.

Vinnies volunteer Keith, for example, was wrongfully jailed at Goulburn correctional centre in the 1970s.

Storyteller and amputee Priscilla Sutton recalled an incident involving a swimming pool and an officious physical education teacher at her school. Academic Dr Susan Carland also endured humiliation due to a lack of awareness from a school teacher. Thirty years later, she says people in positions of power should be respectful of vulnerability in children in particular.

Meanwhile Graham Long, Pastor of Sydney's The Wayside Chapel, was mistakenly beaten by a teacher when he was barely old enough to be at school.

Deputy Labor leader Tanya Plibersek was saddened by an incident involving a shopkeeper in the Northern Territory choosing to serve her 12-year-old self ahead of an Aboriginal man who had been waiting longer.

'It just shamed me so deeply to be in a situation where a man much older than me was overlooked because of his race,' she said.



And Vinnies' Western Australian State President Bob Burns recalled Aboriginal people needing a 'Certificate of Exemption' during the 1960s, to grant them the same rights as white people.

'They were certainly discriminated against, unless they had one of those Certificates,' he said.

To listen to recordings of prominent and everyday Australians discussing early recollections of injustice, go to <https://youtu.be/5tUtevLnU8> ♦

*Deputy Labor leader Tanya Plibersek, Wayside Chapel Pastor Graham Long, St Vincent de Paul Society Western Australia state president Bob Burns and academic Dr Susan Carland, feature in a recording whereby prominent and everyday Australians tell an early recollection of injustice.*

Belinda Cranston is Media Adviser at The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council office.

# Assist a Student

## SUPPORTER NEWSLETTER – 2015



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

An education program  
aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty

### Focus on Thailand



The official name of Thailand is the Kingdom of Thailand and it was formerly known as Siam. Thailand has over 1430 islands and also has land borders with four countries including Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. The population is over 67 million people and Bangkok is not only the capital, but also Thailand's largest city. Buddhism is the primary religion in Thailand, the national symbol is the elephant and the currency is the Baht.

Thailand has participated in the Assist a Student program for well over a decade and the National Council of Thailand endeavours to assist every single child that applies for assisted student help. They do a remarkable job.

On an Encounter trip to Thailand, Vincentians from NSW including our National Project Coordinator, Matthew Kirkham, had the privilege of meeting and spending time with very excited and grateful students from the Northern areas of Lampang and Chan Mai and the very isolated area of Chantaburi.



National Project Coordinator Matthew Kirkham presents a certificate to an assisted student at Lampang, Northern Thailand on St Vincent de Paul Feast Day.



Young Australian Vincentian on an Encounter trip meets students from the hill tribes at a poor settlement in Chan Mai. The children are so happy to meet with the Vinnies youth and so grateful to Australia for the support.



# 'Thank You'

## ***'Thank you, AAS donors!' From students in Thailand***

*Dear Donors,*

*My name is Panadda Ritsri, age of 14 years old, studying in Grade 8 in the Bung Karn Province, Thailand.*

*On behalf of Thai students who have received support from you and kind donors, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to you for your support that helps our further education.*



*We used your support for buying the school materials such as school uniforms, sport uniforms, shoes, socks, school bags, text books, note-books, pens and pencils. Besides, we used the support for transportation fee to school, meal expenses, extra course fees, etc.*

*Thank you again for your generosity.*

*May God bless you and your good works.*

*Gracefully,*

*Panadda Ritsri*



The last two Assist a Student Newsletters have brought lovely insight from Celina Lai, former National Assist a Student Coordinator. Celina has now moved into the position of National Overseas Development Council Chairperson. The National Council and National Overseas Development Council thank Celina for her time in the former role.



This newsletter has been prepared by the National Overseas Development Advisor, Kimberly Watson. Kim can be contacted via the National Council office on 02 6202 1200.



# AAS Statistics 2015

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS SUPPORTED
Cambodia	400
Bangladesh (new to the program)	134
Fiji	677
Pakistan	185
Indonesia	500
India	1,000
Sri Lanka	820
Philippines	1,152
Vanuatu	210
Thailand	900
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,978</b>



## Schooling Statistics for Countries participating in 2015 in the AAS Program

Ref. "The State of the World's Children 2015 Country Statistical Table", <http://www.unicef.org>

Country	Youth literacy rate (%)		Number per 100 population		Primary School				Secondary School			
	Male	Female	Mobile Phones	Internet Users	Net Enrolment ratio (%)		Net attendance ratio (%)		Net Enrolment ratio (%)		Net attendance ratio (%)	
					Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Australia	-*	-*	107	83	97	97	-*	-*	85	86	-*	-*
Bangladesh	78	82	67	7	94	98	77	81	44	51	43	47
Cambodia	88	86	134	6	100	97	86	86	40	36	46	45
Fiji	-*	-*	101	37	-*	-*	-*	-*	79	88	-*	-*
India	88	74	71	15	-*	-*	85	82	-*	-*	59	49
Indonesia	99	99	122	16	95	96	94	95	75	77	56	54
Pakistan	78	63	70	11	77	67	67	60	41	31	45	38
Philippines	97	98	105	37	88	89	88	89	56	67	55	70
Sri Lanka	98	99	95	22	94	94	-*	-*	83	87	-*	-*
Thailand	97	97	138	29	96	95	96	96	77	82	75	83
Vanuatu	95	95	59	11	-*	-*	76	78	51	53	22	26

\* Data not available.

# 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 Australians are used to provide education scholarships 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 a scholarship 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. Scholarships 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.

**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 of 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 the scholarship.

In choosing to donate money to the Assist a Student program, you are taking the opportunity to provide education scholarships 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!**

To donate online please visit [www.vinnies.org.au/aas](http://www.vinnies.org.au/aas)

- ☐ 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 receive a certificate for this donation.

**I would like to donate** (Donations over \$2 are tax deductible):

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

**Payment method:**

☐ EFT: BSB 062-000 Acc 16047336

☐ Debit my credit card (details below)

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

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

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

- ☐ Cheque, payable to 'St Vincent de Paul Society'

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



# A place to call home

***The 2016 St Vincent de Paul Society's CEO Sleepout raised close to \$6 million nationally, with 1475 CEOs taking part.***

***It was held in major metropolitan and regional cities on 23 June (the Adelaide event was on 16 June).***

***This year Dr John Falzon, CEO of the Society's National Council, bedded down at Canberra's Questacon, The National Science and Technology Centre, on what proved to be a cold and wet, blustery night.***

***He also delivered this speech:***

We're a rich nation,  
So how can we not afford something as basic,  
Something as essential, as a place to call home?

What are the compelling economic reasons  
Why we can't make sure everyone has a place to feel safe,  
A place from which we can go to school,  
Take care of our health,  
And go to work?

How is it OK to deny people,  
Including children,  
A place where they can love and be loved,  
Where they can connect with each other instead of being cut off?

If we want to be clever; if we want to be innovative;  
We'll make sure everyone has a place to call home,



Along with a well-resourced needs-based education system  
And universal healthcare.

Let's face it;  
Not having a place to live and feel safe in is just about as bad as it gets  
When it comes to barriers to education.  
Homelessness can also mean unbearable and overcrowded living conditions,  
Parents struggling with the difficult job of trying to get a job  
Whilst being told that they are just not trying hard enough,  
Or kids trying to attempt the herculean task of studying  
When all they have is a tiny corner of a cramped and noisy lounge-room  
That doubles as a bedroom at night.  
There will always be some in the community  
Who think that the people who are homeless  
Are the ones who must change.

But when we look at ourselves as a nation and we see  
Not only how far we have come  
But how many we have left behind,  
It is clear that it is we who must change.

We must change by making sure that  
the woman who, with her children,  
Is escaping domestic violence,  
Is housed instead of being forced to sleep in a car,

For housing should be a human right for all  
Rather than just a matter of luck for some.

We must change by tearing down the walls  
That lock people out or literally lock them up,

And instead build bridges not only to secure and affordable housing  
But to education, health, employment, and hope.

We must change as a nation by both sides of politics committing to  
Halve both homelessness and the housing shortfall by 2025  
And to offer a place to call home for all who are sleeping rough.

I salute all who are joining us in the struggle to achieve this goal.  
In many ways there can be no higher priority for a nation  
That prides itself on being progressive.

There is a place in our society for compassion,  
A place for justice and a place for thinking outside the square,  
But there should be no place for homelessness.

The truth spoken by the people on the margins,  
The people denied a place to call home,  
Will always speak louder than the lies told about them.

In the beautiful words of Lila Watson  
And a group of Aboriginal activists in Queensland in the 1970s:

*If you have come to help me you are wasting your time  
but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine  
then let us work together. ♦*



# Nights out with the Vinnies Night Patrol crew

BY BELINDA CRANSTON

***Rain, hail or shine, Vinnies volunteers man the Night Patrol van in Canberra on most nights of the year. Belinda Cranston joined them on two wintry nights in June.***

It's a damp Monday night in Canberra city. Smudges of dark grey stain the sky as a small group of people huddle near the Cube sculpture on Ainslie Avenue.

They are waiting for the comforting sight of a white van stamped with blue Vinnies logos. When it pulls up at 7.30pm they stroll towards it.

Tonight there are sandwiches, biscuits, cordial, bottled water, coffee, tea and hot chocolate on board, thanks to the generosity of a contingent of organisations across Canberra who supply such goods.

Now that the mercury has dropped, blankets, socks, beanies, coats and sleeping bags are also available.

A man with yellow hair humbly approaches Alison, a long-time volunteer who was enticed to the work by a father and daughter team who work at her accountancy firm.

He is after a coat, if it is not too much trouble. She produces a fully-lined, weather proof jacket, complete with hood and Hawthorn football club insignia. The man smiles, wanders off, and re-emerges to show Alison it fits him well.

Another man declares himself a fan of the football club, and wants one too. He has come all the way from Tuggeranong, he says. Unfortunately another one of its kind isn't available.

Rain, hail or shine, the St Vincent de Paul Society's night patrol van has



Vinnies Night Patrol van volunteer Gabriela Falzon.

been pulling up in Canberra city on most nights of the year, since August 2001, with the aim of reaching out to people on the streets.

Some are homeless. For others, living arrangements are tenuous. Many have health problems. Loneliness and isolation are also concerns. For some people, the volunteers might be the only people they get to interact with.

A smartly dressed man with white hair takes a call on a mobile phone nearby. At first glance he is as ordinary as anyone else in Civic making their way home after a day at the office.

He stops at the van, orders a coffee and chats with Tim, a volunteer who by day coordinates the Street to Home program for Vinnies. The man tells him he is a fan of Russian

author Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and that *Crime and Punishment* is his favourite.

He asks if he can have a sandwich, then reveals he has ongoing problems with his teeth, and can only eat soft food. He also says he has hypo mania, hence his incessant chatter. 'I live on my own, so when I'm out with people, I can't stop talking,' he says.

Volunteer coordinator Erin assures him he can come down for a chat anytime he wants to. "That's what we are here for," she says.

The company of others is possibly just as important, if not more so, as the light refreshments, clothing and other items the van provides. While some who swing by pack sandwiches in small day packs and



head off soon after, most stay and chat.

A short woman with a trolley and a Pomeranian called Button starts reciting the names of capital cities around the world that come to mind.

Then a woman with a teenage boy dressed in a yellow onesie comes along.

The wind picks up and enough water drops from the sky to warrant an umbrella.

It's time to move on to the next location, which is just outside the McDonalds fast food restaurant in Garema Place. Some who were at the Ainslie Avenue spot are already there to continue conversations with each other, when the Vinnies van pulls up at 8.30pm.

A man with a red bandana asks for socks. He is given a thick black pair.

He takes off his shoes, revealing bare feet, and pulls on the socks. 'They take the miles off your feet,' he says. 'It's like dipping them into a hot bath.'

He orders a hot chocolate with nine scoops, drinks it, then returns for another.

He says something about playing the harmonica later that night, to earn enough money for powdered milk. He is self-taught. 'You just sort of learn,' he says.

Another man moans about school groups taking over the hostel he planned to stay at.

I recognise a man who was in the same spot on a Saturday night, a

few weeks earlier, when volunteers Kathleen, Rex, Gabriela and Jacqui were working on the van.

His speech is difficult to understand, due to a degenerative illness, but there is enough history between him and the volunteers to ensure ongoing banter.

Watching Saturday night in Civic play out as a backdrop while Kathleen, Rex, Gabriela and Jacqui warmly welcome those who come to the van is confirmation that people are generally social creatures who need to touch base with others—despite their differences.

When a youngish man with three dogs visits the van, seemingly carefree night clubbers stop to admire the animals. They continue chatting to the dogs' owner for some time.

Others approach those working on the van simply because they want to make some sort of contribution towards the running of it.

Recently, hair dresser Brooke Ford donated 100 'hygiene' packs containing toothpaste and tooth brushes, soap and other items.

It's heartening knowing the generosity of others is alive and well in the nation's capital.

For me, spending two nights observing volunteers run the Vinnies van is a bitter-sweet experience.

It's humbling watching those who use its services being treated like old friends, rather than people experiencing tough times.

But walking away from the van, so I can drive back to a warm, secure home is not something I do with ease. ♦

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Belinda Cranston is a media adviser at the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council office.



# Treasures and hand ups

BY BELINDA CRANSTON

***New look Vinnies stores have something for everyone. From trendy one-off pieces to antique silverware to much-loved vinyl records from a bygone era, writes Belinda Cranston.***

Ahead of customers wandering into Vinnies' inner north Canberra Dickson store each morning, manager Simon Felgate can be found in a small office out the back, researching some of the gems that are donated.

In April a light tan suitcase, circa 1950s, caught his eye. Retro pieces of luggage are in demand nowadays—not for travelling, but as storage and display items. Even Canberra's Hotel Hotel has a pile of them stacked against a wall in the foyer.

'Four sold within a day,' says Felgate, a former project manager at the Department of Defence.

The light tan suitcase is intriguing because a hand-written tag identifying the owner, a Melbourne surgeon by the name of Sir Edward Hughes, and his address, is still attached.

In the same week the suitcase arrived, Felgate also received a tiny suit comprising of pale blue shorts and a white shirt, neatly pressed and carefully wrapped. He believes it is also from the 1950s, and that it should possibly be in a museum.

'I'm not sure what I'm going to do with it,' he admits.

Shaking off stereotypes depicting the retail arm of charities as mothball-smelling enterprises, the newly opened Woolley Street Dickson Vinnies, five kilometres north of Canberra's CBD, is clean, spacious and light-filled.



Clothing is neatly categorised on racks, and shoes carefully arranged on shelves. One-off pieces include a caramel faux fur coat from Hungary, lined with genuine leather. There is even a bright red dressmaker's mannequin, a 1970s coffee flask from Japan with matching cups, antique silverware, Polaroid instant cameras from the 1980s, lava ware from Germany and Pianola rolls.

Bargains include a three piece Royal Albert tea set for \$15, a Barry Manilow vinyl record for \$1 (Julie Andrews fetches \$2) and stacks of cheap CDs and DVDs.

Shoppers range from a boisterous young woman with shaved hair, to history buffs and collectors, to people wearing no shoes, and the occasional person who pulls up in a new BMW.

'They all shop and interact in the same space with no qualms,' Felgate points out.

At Gunghalin, in Canberra's outer north, and at Cootamundra, in south-west NSW, new look stores are similarly appealing to a broad range of shoppers.

It's all part of a need for Vinnies stores to reinvent themselves, now that there is less government funding available to meet the needs of those doing it tough in the community.

'We can never lose sight of the reason why the shops were initially set up—that is, to provide people with goods they couldn't otherwise afford,' Mr Rick Stankiewicz, Chair of the National Retail Shops Committee, says.

'For this purpose, we are careful to ensure we carry a mix of relevant items.

'But many stores, particularly city stores, are now catering for a growing number of opportunity shoppers looking for something unusual.'

It means pricing items accordingly, so





that they still represent a bargain, but at the same time, provide a source of revenue for vital services Vinnies runs across the country.

In the state of Victoria, around 28 stores have had a complete makeover, with former Myer merchandise manager Liz Randle spearheading branding and store layouts.

‘She has a strong background in terms of looking at space. And in determining how to effectively use that space,’ explains Vinnies Victorian retail marketing manager Nicole Pinder.

Instagram and other forms of social media are used to target demographics as broad as students looking for quirky, one-off items at a price they can afford, retirees who have the time for op-shopping, and parents in need of good quality children’s clothing and footwear.

In the affluent inner Melbourne

suburb of Kew East, a Vinnies store on High Street is promoted as one containing ‘fabulous vintage finds’.

Vinnies’ Stones Corner, Brisbane store is similarly conscious of the need to appeal to discerning shoppers, given the area’s trendy reputation.

‘We naturally put in the more upmarket clothes, at a higher price,’ says Stankiewicz—a price which is still very competitive and attractive to people, he adds.

Meanwhile in Canberra, many of the goods that get donated to Vinnies are sorted at a massive warehouse at Mitchell, ahead of being redistributed to people and stores across the Canberra/Goulburn region.

Manager Gary Crowder says military clothing is in demand—the warehouse’s retail store has many pieces to choose from. ‘We do remove patches and insignias, to

prevent people from using the items to misrepresent who they are,’ he says.

Some stores iron garments before putting them on racks, but there is a preference for items that are ready to wear the moment they are handed over.

‘Only garments that are clean and in very good condition are of use,’ the director of the centres, Lindsay Rae, says.

At the end of the day, Vinnies is all about ordinary people helping anyone in need, he points out.

‘Vinnies shops are full of high quality one off treasures, the majority of which are not available when you walk into the commercial traders today. Buying one of these from Vinnies means that you get a genuine treasure and somebody else is given a hand up.’ ♦

Belinda Cranston is media adviser at the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council office.

# 2016 Nganmarriyanga immersion experience

BY RAY AKHURST

***The National Immersion Program provides a unique experience for Vincentians to get a taste of life in a remote Indigenous community. The 2016 program proved to be a powerful experience in terms of our interaction with the youth and adults of the community, and of our own growth in Vincentian spirituality.***

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Immersion Program commenced in 2004 after an invitation from the remote Aboriginal community of Nganmarriyanga to provide a program of activities for their children during the school holidays. The community asked for a long-term commitment, and the Society has delivered on that commitment each year since the inception of the program. The program is organised by members of the National Immersion Committee, who consider the applications and arrange interviews. After holding teleconference interviews, a team of nine was chosen for the 2016 Immersion.

This year's program was superbly led by Angela Versteegh (NSW), a veteran of four immersion programs, supported by Rosie Franco (WA) and the team's spiritual director, Br Greg MacDonald FMS (VIC). Seven of the team were very enthusiastic and energetic younger Vincentians (19–33 years), who made this oldest member of the team (69 years) feel very comfortable and welcome. The team was well-balanced in terms of expertise, interests and personalities, with the choice of team members being a credit to the selection panel.

We assembled in Darwin for an



orientation program on Saturday 26 March. After a period of prayer and reflection, a very important part of the immersion experience, we spent the morning learning more about the Nganmarriyanga community and the logistics of the program. The afternoon was devoted to cross-cultural awareness training, which was provided by an indigenous woman. This was in addition to reading material that had been provided to us shortly after we had been notified of our selection.

On Easter Sunday, we participated in a Mass at the St Martin de Porres Aboriginal Community Church in Darwin. We were made very welcome, given a blessing by the elders at the end of Mass, and invited to join the community for a lunch to celebrate the Baptism of one of their adult men. We were also able to return to the same church when we returned from Nganmarriyanga two weeks later, with two of our team giving a short report on our time in Nganmarriyanga.

The road between Darwin and Nganmarriyanga is inoperable during the wet season, so the immersion team had to fly into the community on Easter

Monday morning. After settling in and a brief orientation, we started on some painting projects around the school. We continued with the painting at various times during the week when a few of us could be spared from other activities.

We started the program in earnest on Tuesday, when school resumed after the Easter break. During school hours, we operated as teachers' aides (preschool to junior secondary), which gave us a good opportunity to meet and get to know the younger members of the community and their teachers. We then helped the sports and recreation officer conduct after school games (AFL, cricket, soccer, softball etc). During the second week, we conducted a holiday program for the children and youth of the community. In general, this involved some outdoor games in the morning and then movement to the Sport and Recreation Centre as the heat started to bite, where craft activities and indoor games were held, before lunch was provided for the attendees. In the late afternoon, we again ventured outdoors for more active games.



A vital part of the program was our morning and evening prayer and reflection sessions, which were organised by Br Greg. They provided a very important focus on Vincentian spirituality for our experience in the community and beyond.

Apart from the children, most of our interaction with the members of the Indigenous community was with the women elders and a few of the younger women. While they cooked damper and kangaroo tail for us after Mass on Sunday, the women elders happily chatted. They walked and talked with all of us later that afternoon as we visited the cemetery and also the graves of some particularly important members of the community who were buried in a separate place. The male members of our team were able to have several conversations with the senior male traditional owners and also with a young male Church leader.

Relations with the non-Indigenous community were very positive. We worked most closely with the teachers and sports and recreation officer but also with some others in the community. It was quite impressive to see the level of energy and enthusiasm that the non-Indigenous community members brought to their roles at Nganmarriyanga.

All members of the team were very enthusiastic about the immersion experience. We felt that there were valuable lessons learned, new questions raised, and an excellent feeling of Vincentian solidarity in the team. Several members of the team are exploring opportunities of making further contributions to giving a hand-up to people in remote Indigenous communities. We all look forward to bringing our experience in the Immersion Program to bear in our lives and activities in our respective communities. ♦



BY CLAIRE WHITE

***Claire White was another Society member who took part in this year's program, which ran from 26 March to 10 April. She shared this reflection***

An immersion program like this is complex in many ways. We went not really knowing what to expect, and in the two-day preparation before flying into Nganmarriyanga, we focused on letting go of assumptions and expectations and being fully open to the experience. Guided by daily spiritual reflection and debriefing, we were able to deeply immerse ourselves in the experience of

supporting the community through helping in the school classrooms and providing full-day holiday programs.

We each experienced a rollercoaster of emotions as we worked with members of the community—from babies to elders—sharing and smiling with them and supporting each other as a group. Questions without ready answers kept arising, and we were able to consider in new ways issues that we had only heard or read about prior to visiting Nganmarriyanga.

Was it a worthwhile experience? Absolutely. Would I recommend the Immersion Program to others who want to deepen their understanding of what it means to be an Indigenous Australian in a remote Australian community today? Without question. ♦

### **Joining the National Immersion Program**

Each year the program commences with a call for applications from Vincentians aged 18–79 years through the national website ([vinnies.org.au](http://vinnies.org.au)) in September. The application forms are assessed by a selection panel from the Society's National Immersion Committee. The panel assembles a team of 8 to 10 people with a range of experience and expertise to select team members based on written applications and a teleconference interview.



# Can Australia afford not to invest in its aid program?

BY MARC PURCELL

***Marc Purcell questions the merits of massive cuts in foreign aid spending.***

As a boy I was always struck by the story of the Good Samaritan told by Jesus in Luke 10:25–37. It is about a traveler who is mugged, and left half dead alongside the road. Passersby come across the man, but avoid him. Finally, a Samaritan comes by and helps the injured man.

More than 1.5 million Australians have chosen to donate to international aid agencies every year, including the Vinnies development projects overseas. Donations total about \$800 million a year. Aussies respond quickly to help our neighbours during humanitarian emergencies, donating \$50 million last year. Corporate and philanthropic supporters have contributed about \$30 million every year to Australian aid organisations working to end extreme poverty.

That's a clear sign of the Australian people's generous spirit. And it's a fair indication they expect our government to also care about the welfare of the poorest people and communities beyond our borders.

Yet the past three years have been devastating for Australia's aid efforts overseas.

Our aid program has experienced savage, rolling federal budget cuts that have left Australia with the lowest level of aid funding in history. Just 0.09 per cent of the federal government's budget now goes to Australian aid and development assistance.

I'm concerned about the strategic implications of Australia closing aid programs in fragile and emerging democracies like Burma where, after last year's aid budget cuts, aid for maternal and child health, communicable disease and food security programs ceased. After a decade of military sacrifice in



*Australian aid to Northern Sumatra.*

Afghanistan, and our politicians saying we would never cut and run from the Afghan people, we slashed our aid program by 40 per cent, leaving a beleaguered populace to survive in poverty.

All over the Asia-Pacific, Australia stopped investing in programs that provided much needed health care to vulnerable communities—that means fewer vaccinations and fewer health clinics and treatment centres opening in local communities. Fewer laboratories and facilities are now tracking and monitoring infectious disease outbreaks, like the Zika virus, multi-resistant tuberculosis and malaria in our neighbourhood.

Australia has all but withdrawn from long-term poverty alleviation across Africa, which still has some of the highest rates of poverty in the world.

And yet, a recent political scuffle over aid funding projections and 'budget black holes' missed a basic point—a well-funded Australian aid program is in our national interest.

Well-targeted Australian aid can tackle the root causes of mass migration. Well-directed Australian aid can prevent conflict and emergencies that force people to flee their homes and seek Australia's care and protection.

Australian aid creates livelihoods for the poorest while building closer relations between the Australian people and our neighbours. Helping our neighbours end extreme poverty is great value for money.

A question that Australians need to ask their political leaders before they head to the polling booths on 2 July is: can Australia afford not to invest in Australian aid?

My organisation, which represents 126 Australian aid and development organisations, is calling on the next federal government to restore the funding that was cut in the devastating 2014 aid budget and invest in Australia's aid program, getting it above 1 per cent of our annual federal budget.

Australia's aid efforts are in our national interest, as well as a moral imperative.

Restoring Australia's aid budget, now at its lowest ever, and rebuilding our aid program are the first important steps any new government must take. It's a chance for Australia's next leader to adopt a bold, credible vision for Australia's place in the world. ♦

Marc Purcell is CEO of the Australian Council for International Development.

# Soup Van man Frank Mullins features in Vinnies video

***Every Thursday, for the past 40 years, there has been one familiar and friendly face greeting people in need on the streets of inner-city Melbourne; our beloved Vinnies Soup Van volunteer, Frank Mullins.***

At 77-years-young, Frank hasn't skipped a beat. Volunteering, in his words, is 'part of my life and a real privilege,' and the spark in his eye when he arrives at the Soup Van kitchen in North Melbourne is proof.

'The first night out on the van was a bit of an eye opener, to see how people live. It's been over 40 years now. It's just flown,' said Frank.

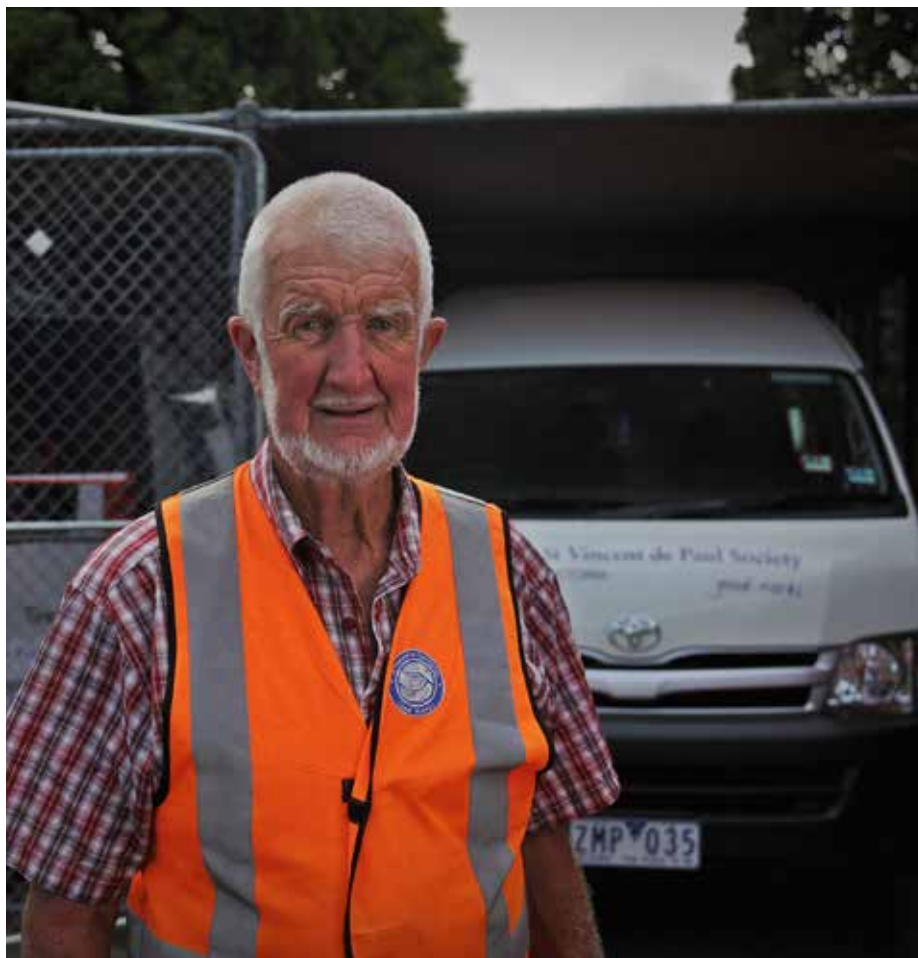
Frank is the longest serving 'Vannie', as they're affectionately known, and his dedication has never wavered. These days, he travels over two hours for his weekly shift, all the way from his seaside home in Angelsea. Onto the train, into the kitchen and off with the Soup Van—a ritual that he takes in his stride.

The reward at the other end is hard to spot if you're not part of the Thursday night Soup Van clique; they have their own signature humour and decades of shared memories. A special bond that is theirs and theirs alone, shared generously with people in need on the street.

'I see a lot of good people, very good people. I do get emotional about it, because it is pretty close to my heart,' said Frank.

The Vannies' helping hands arrive holding cups of hot soup and sandwiches too; but through shared meals and conversations, volunteers like Frank often change lives.

'Thinking back on my life, I started



Frank Mullins.

off pretty young appreciating what help can do for a family. We try to provide companionship—if you haven't got support it's very hard to survive,' he says.

As the years tick on, he's now hopeful that others will make volunteering a staple part of their lives too. 'I'd just like to see it continue, with the same goals that we have now—that the people on the street always come first.

We need new people and new minds, people who think differently to us.'

He said volunteering on the Soup Van is a chance to do something for other people, to do something real. 'A little bit of help, somewhere, can go a very long way.' ♦

A video commemorating Frank's work was uploaded by the Melbourne communications team in May. It can be viewed at [https://youtu.be/FHXKV3yO3\\_k](https://youtu.be/FHXKV3yO3_k)

## Support the Vinnies Soup Vans

Our Soup Vans rely on the generosity of our donors and volunteers. If you would to offer your support, visit our website to find out more at [vinnies.org.au](http://vinnies.org.au).



# Reflections and recollections of a Conference member 1976–2015

BY MICHAEL DWYER

***From mowing overgrown lawns to delivering fruit and vegetables from Belconnen Markets—forty years after he was first asked to serve his community through Vinnies, Michael Dwyer reflects on the value of the Society’s work in Canberra’s north over the decades, while offering insights into how it can maintain its relevance in future.***

My introduction to the Society began with a friendly tap on my shoulder one Sunday morning after Mass.

It was mid-1976 and St Monica’s Evatt in the ACT was a newly established parish in Belconnen. A fellow parishioner, John Gum, said to me: ‘Would you like to join the St Vincent de Paul Society?’ The term ‘Vinnies’ was not in everyday use back then. This direct, personal approach is, in my opinion, still the most effective method of gaining new members. I agreed and joined John at the first ‘meeting’ of our newly formed Conference. John explained how the Society operated and then he set up accounts at two small local supermarkets, a system which our Conference still uses some forty years later. I was working full-time and studying part-time, and there was also a new baby in the household. So my volunteer work in the first year of service was limited to shopping and delivering food.

Thanks to John’s recruitment style, our St Monica’s membership numbers grew steadily. So did the number of clients, many of them residents of a very large complex of government



*Michael Dwyer at home in his Melba backyard.*

flats called Baringa Gardens. These buildings, also known as the Melba Flats, had a short and unhappy life. They were described as a failure as a home for the ‘socially under-privileged’. To ease the workload of St Monica’s Vincentians, the flats were divided among three Conferences. In 1991 the buildings were closed down and demolished.

In those early years we didn’t always visit in pairs, so my recollections of my first visits include some feelings of frustration and doubt about what I was doing. I would load bags of food for several people into my old Valiant ute and then walk around at night in badly lit areas of the Gardens trying to find door numbers—and without a mobile phone. But then I thought about how difficult it must have been for Frederic Ozanam and his student

friends going on home visitations in the unsanitary and overpopulated city of Paris in the 19th century. He and the members of the newly-formed Conference of Charity saw Christ in the poor. They helped families living in terrible poverty, often without life’s basic necessities.

Many of our clients were unemployed and I wondered if giving what I mistakenly thought of then as ‘hand-outs’ was what I really wanted to do. However, I have a vivid recollection during the first few weeks of meeting a well-spoken, neatly-dressed gentleman living at Baringa Gardens. He had been a successful small business owner but was now going through hard times. He sincerely thanked me for the basic food parcel, looked me in the eye and said: ‘You wait and see. I’ll get back up there’.



I wish I had given him my contact number, as I truly believed he would re-build his life once again. That single visit played a very significant part in my commitment to stay on as a Vincentian member. I immediately saw the outcome of good works by giving just a few minutes of my time to help others. Perhaps it was my 'Road to Damascus' experience?

Over the years I have paired up with other Vinnies members and visited families, mostly delivering food parcels, and sometimes providing assistance with bill payments. We distributed clothing credit notes to needy families to use at Vinnies shops. On occasions we placed an order for household furniture or a second-hand washing machine. For several years late on Sunday afternoons we collected leftover fruit and vegetables from the Belconnen Markets and delivered them to families. I have emptied clothing bins and sorted clothing at the local Vinnies shop. I have spent an evening with the homeless people at a men's shelter, and I have been part of the team collecting for the annual Door Knock (I was the organiser for three years at St Monica's.)

Our first meetings were held in the parish priest's home but this was not always available. Instead, we met in members' homes, which caused some inconvenience to the householder and family but it was a great way to get to know your fellow members of the Society. Nowadays we gather in a modern Parish meeting room with excellent facilities. Members are also encouraged to bring along excess garden produce or other food items to share. Sometimes we indulge ourselves in eating cake and drinking coffee, interspersed with lots of laughter. Now there's an idea for attracting new members!

Some forms of assistance that we carried out in the early years have been discontinued. For example, we

mowed overgrown backyards for several of our clients, and helped a single parent move house on a Saturday morning by borrowing the truck from the Mitchell warehouse.

In my opinion, the majority of our clients appreciate what we like to call the 'hand-up' approach. They eventually become independent of us and get on with their lives. Most visits have been uneventful and I found that people were grateful for the assistance we provided—and without excessive probing into their personal lives. The longest journey I made was to a young man living alone in a very isolated farmhouse, north of the village of Hall. He was very grateful for the food.

I'm sure there are potential Society members who may be concerned about how much time is involved, but I can honestly say it's not a big commitment. Many visits can be completed in 30 minutes. If that is too difficult, you can offer to be the person in your parish who distributes the incoming calls. And our meetings are now held only once a fortnight, rather than every Monday evening.

Over the years I have also found the time to complete terms as Secretary and President of St Monica's Conference. It is in part thanks to my understanding wife, Cathy, that I have always been able to remain an active

## New parish in Belconnen

**THE** Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Canberra-Goulburn, the Most Reverend T. V. Cahill, announced this week that there would be a new parish in Belconnen on November 1.

The new parish will be Evatt. Father Adrian Cork, parish priest of Brimbaree, near Young, NSW, has been appointed to Evatt. The patron of the parish will be Saint Monica.

Tomorrow at 9.30am a family service will be held at the Canberra Baptist Church, Kingston, to celebrate the opening of the new fellowship centre at the church.

The theme of the service will be 'Not by bread alone'.

A film for children will be shown. Parents are advised there is a creche.

The president of the Baptist World Alliance, the Reverend Dr V. Carney Hargroves opened the centre, on Thursday. Dr Hargroves is on a two-week visit to Australia.

The English Pop star Cliff Richard will star in a film to be shown at 7.30 tonight at the Assemblies of God Church in Templeton Street, Cook.

musical, 'Wake up Charlie', in Goulburn several weeks ago.

Members of the Canberra East Rotary Club will parade with their families at the 11am service tomorrow. The president of the club, Mr Alex Carson, will read the lesson, and the address will be given by a Rotarian and Salvation Army captain, Captain Errol Woodbury.

Dr Evan Burge, formerly a lecturer in classics at the Australian National University and now the warden of Trinity College at Melbourne University, said on Thursday that he could see the physical form of church services changing.

Speaking on his arrival in Canberra on Thursday, Dr Burge said there would be architectural changes so that people were not so separated from the person leading a service.

The greatest enemy of church services was the use of pews, which kept people separated. Alternative seating such as matting, cushions and removable chairs could be made without a great deal of expense.

Dr Burge gave the Douglas Hobson Memorial Lecture at St Mark's Library on Thursday night. The title of his lecture was 'Renewing the liturgy: hopes and problems'.

*Canberra Times, Saturday 28 September, 1974.*

Vinnies member. I'm sure there are many other charity volunteers in the community who must also appreciate their partner's support.

To quote the poet John O'Brien, when I first joined the Society, the step was light and fire was in the blood. I am now a person living with Parkinson's, so this year I'll finally 'pull up stumps' and bring my active commitment with Vinnies to a satisfying conclusion. I hope that some other parishioners, wherever they may be living, will be inspired to bring theirs to a start. ♦

# Inspiring positive social change through faith in action

BY MARIA NGUYEN

***Moved by Graham West's 'Ozanam Oration 2016' piece in the Autumn edition of The Record, Victorian State Youth representative Maria Nguyen expresses her thoughts on attracting young members to the St Vincent de Paul Society.***

Throughout my time as State Youth Representative, I have been asked on several occasions to speak about the works of Young Vinnies in various forums. I am often asked the same question: 'How can we draw more young people into Vinnies? How do we get them to stay as volunteers, and to step up into leadership roles?'

Invariably, conversations steer towards narrowing the somewhat formidable gap between younger and older members, and a few despairing comments occasionally manifest: 'I hardly see any young people volunteering these days!'

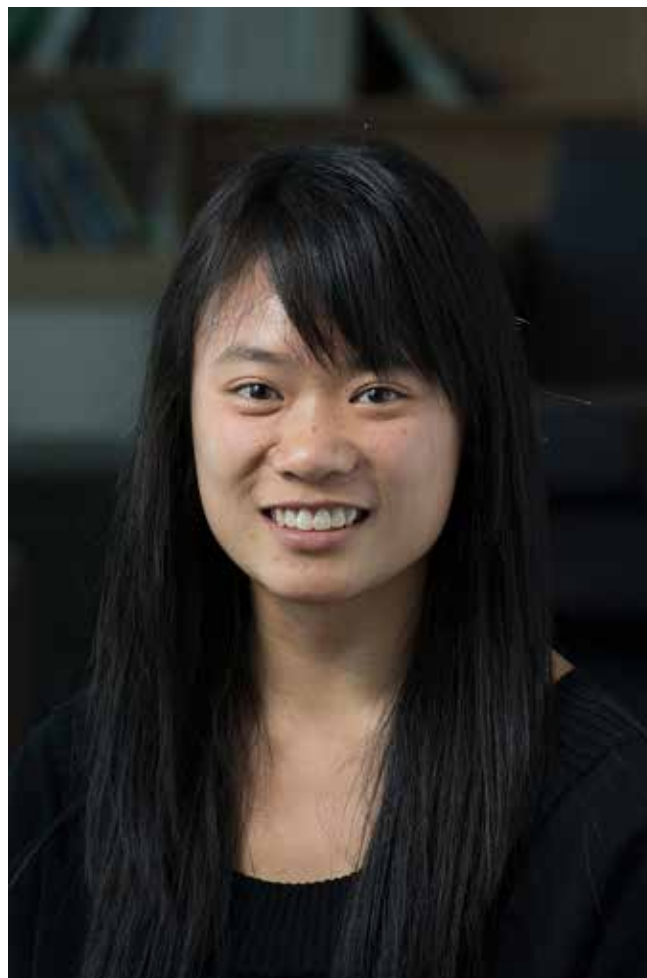
In the more rural and remote areas of the country, this sentiment can be particularly valid, and often disheartening.

Apart from being, in a literal sense, 'the future of this Society', how do young people benefit from the St Vincent de Paul Society? Probably the first thing to note is that the Rule is fairly transparent in its enthusiasm for young people. In Article 3.7, under the heading of Young Members, it states:

*Young members keep the Society young. They see with new eyes and often look far ahead.<sup>1</sup>*

It also advises:

*Young Vincentians reflect the original spirit and charism of the Society by enhancing its mission with their enthusiasm and dynamism.<sup>2</sup>*



Maria Nguyen.

Young people keep the Society young! Not just in the sense that they ensure succession and the future continuation of the Society, but rather, they encourage a youthful spirit within the Society. I see this spirit every time I interact with Young Vinnies. I meet young people who are impassioned, and almost impatient, in their willingness to respond to need, and their enthusiasm is contagious. In fact, they can often motivate and move to action large groups of people for causes that they see are worthwhile.

They can bring new ideas and initiatives to the table, both realistic and grandiose, and are not deterred when plans do not come to fruition. I see Young Vinnies members

approaching their work with a combination of courage and joy, engaging with current societal issues, and taking inspiration from leaders such as Pope Francis. In this way, young people reflect the experiences of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, who initiated the Society as a young university student in a time when religion was on the decline and atheism and skepticism were increasing.<sup>3</sup> Like our founder, young people within the Society today are moved by what they see on the streets and on the news, to the point where they need to bear witness to their faith and their values through action.

Similarly, as young people benefit from the Society, the Society also



benefits from young people. Volunteering itself already encourages conscientiousness and community engagement. However, the St Vincent de Paul Society offers an experience of volunteering unlike any other charity, and part of the reason why is because of how our works flow from our faith. Our Society's charism and values instill in its members the mindset that they must look beyond themselves, to God and to all those around them in society, most especially the poor.<sup>4</sup> This is in stark contrast to some other messages that young people can be exposed to in the media which can encourage a narcissism that leads to complacency and indifference.

Rather than being an aspect of the Society that young people simply tolerate, I continue to see members, Catholic and otherwise, engage in spiritual reflection and discussion. I have seen real examples of evangelisation: young people who did not originally consider themselves religious on any level, discovering and connecting with God through their involvement with the St Vincent de Paul Society. Indeed, some go on to become practising Catholics and great advocates of the gospel message. In this way, the St Vincent de Paul Society can transform the lives of its volunteers.

Earlier in the year, Young Vinnies in Victoria held their annual Planning Day; one of our facilitators led the group through a reflective exercise, asking us to share one thing we love about Vinnies. What I heard people saying was that they loved the people in Vinnies—both the people we serve *and* the people we serve with, our fellow volunteers. There are a host of reasons why young people start to volunteer, whether it be to fulfil university course requirements, to experience something new, to

round out their CV, to engage in their community, or to tag along with friends. However, time and time again I hear that the reasons that young people stay in Vinnies revolve around the incredible sense of community and friendship that they encounter, which is one of the reasons why the St Vincent de Paul Society is unique. I was once told that, when it comes to meaningful connection within a group, you don't join a group and then feel like you belong. It's the opposite—you feel like you belong first, and then you join. Young people stay in Vinnies because first and foremost they feel like they belong. They feel respected and heard within their groups. They are around like-minded people who spur them to action and, indeed, empower them to lead through their actions. Even if young people don't align with the Vincentian spiritual identity, they still stay within the Society because they connect with the values of its other members. And even if the active volunteering ceases, these deep friendships continue to exist.

A friend, my age, volunteers for the Vinnies Soup Van on a weekly basis, and he has developed friendships with the other regular volunteers who come from a variety of backgrounds and ages. I once asked why he doesn't also join a Young Vinnies conference. 'There's a plethora of other works for young people in the Society!' I would exclaim enthusiastically. But alas, he didn't want to, or perhaps he didn't need to. He had already found meaning and belonging within his Soup Van group.

To encourage young people to be involved with the Society, I recommend that you invite anyone suitable you know to meetings, and not just one, but a few (that is, invite a few young people, and to a few meetings!). Encourage ways for your conferences to be both independent

and interdependent. Coordinate fundraisers and recruitment drives together. Offer mentorship at their own meetings and events. Experience, in person, the works that Young Vinnies do. Assist in the organising of child-related activities, activities that do not need to be championed by Young Vinnies alone. We say that no work is foreign to the Society. Similarly, no Society member should be isolated from a particular work. Working with children and teenagers need not be limited to Young Vinnies.

Invite young people to speak. Believe in them, and be patient. Granted, we make mistakes, and it can take time for young people to learn the ropes (myself included!). Recognise that young people are not simply a nice addition to have at the table when possible, but rather an essential opinion that holds the same weight as any other volunteer.

In this way, we can start moving towards the vision of 'One Society'—not an idealistic indulgence, but rather an attainable goal. ♦

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Maria Nguyen, Victorian State Youth Representative.

Article adapted from the response to Graham West's address at the Ozanam Oration (February 2016).

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1. National Council of Australia. 2012. *The Rule of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia*; 7th ed. Part I. Article 3.7 Young members, pg 21.

2. Ibid. Part III – Articles for Australia. Procedural Guidelines, 'Youth in the Society', pg. 71.

3. St Vincent de Paul Society Inc. History. Founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Blessed Frederic Ozanam. <https://www.vinnies.org.au/page/About/History/>

4. Prof. Greg Craven. Feb 2016. Why should the Church foster intellectual capital? *Melbourne Catholic*. Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. East Melbourne. pp. 6–8.

# The Battle of Brisbane

BY MICHAEL MORAN

***When a group of young ladies took it upon themselves to entertain wartime sailors at Brisbane's Ozanam House, their kind gesture saw tensions between British and US sailors reach boiling point, writes Mike Moran.***

If you mention 'the Battle of Brisbane' to people, they'll usually think of the notorious wartime incident when violence between Australian and US servicemen broke out in Brisbane's CBD in November 1942.

Or they might think of several infamous rugby league test matches, such as the bloody 1958 clash between Australia and Great Britain at the Brisbane Exhibition Ground.

What they probably *won't* think of is an incident at Ozanam House one week before the violence in the CBD, when tensions erupted between British and American sailors.

Brisbane was a troubled place at the time. Its population had doubled with the influx of hundreds of thousands of American servicemen. Their General, Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander of American and Australian forces, had made Brisbane his headquarters for waging the Pacific war.

The influx caused some dislocation and resentment. The Americans were better paid than the Australians and enjoyed better conditions. They were possibly seen as a little overbearing. Local men resented seeing them in the company of Australian women.

Tensions grew and a series of violent incidents led to open battles over



*British cargo ship SS Port Auckland. The ship regularly sailed between Brisbane and Liverpool in the UK.*

two days at the end of November. One Australian serviceman was killed and hundreds on both sides were injured. The story was hushed up.

A few hundred metres from the site of the battle lay Ozanam House in Gotha Street, Fortitude Valley. This building had been the headquarters of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Queensland since 1937 and remained so until it was compulsorily acquired by the Commonwealth Government in 1947.

It also hosted the Society's major special work of the day, the Catholic Institute for Seamen, which carried out a mission to seafarers. The work was undertaken by the Stella Maris Conference, whose members visited hundreds of ships and thousands of sailors in the port of Brisbane each year, even in wartime. They invited sailors ashore to attend Mass and Benediction, and hosted entertainment at Ozanam House with the aid of the Institute's Ladies Committee.

'These young ladies attend weekly and help to entertain those most neglected and despised followers of Christ—the seafarers,' a society report noted. 'Day by day our home is becoming more and more a home away from home for the seafarers, keeping them in the right atmosphere, away from temptations and making them welcome in a strange land.'

In 1942 the ladies were staging three dances a week. Many of the guests were sailors from the US Navy.

But trouble was brewing, and brewing at exactly the same time as the infamous riots.

SS *Port Auckland* was a British cargo steamer which regularly sailed in and out of Brisbane on the run to Liverpool, UK. She carried a crew of 108 and sometimes a few passengers. In November 1942, nineteen of her crew signed a letter of protest to the St Vincent de Paul Society, complaining about their treatment at Ozanam House, Brisbane.

We can see in their letter glimpses of the tensions which erupted in the CBD a few days later. They wrote: 'The above institute is conducted as a common dance hall and not as a Catholic Seamen's Mission, the purpose for which it is set up. Many of our work mates have been refused dances by the girls there and were informed by the priest attached to the Mission that he could not do anything about it. The Mission is overrun with American Sailors and soldiers and the British seamen are practically ignored ... The majority of our crew are Catholics ... Why not have another Catholic Seamen's Club and let Ozanam House be handed over to the American authorities if they wish to have it?'



# Culture and faith

Another battle followed, a battle of letters between our National President, John Mullen, who was very concerned about the complaint, and Walter Underhill, President of the Brisbane Metropolitan Central Council, a position equivalent to today's State President. The latter defended the Seamen's Institute and wrote, somewhat tersely: 'It would appear that the seamen of the *Port Auckland* would desire that a notice be placed over the door of the Institute "For British seamen only". Is not the Institute for seamen of all nationalities? It would seem that when these men see Americans they see red.'

What's more, Underhill observed, the seamen of the *Port Auckland* had complained every time they visited Brisbane, and complained not only about Ozanam House, but also about the Church of England Seamen's Mission. 'As a matter of fact', he wrote, 'the men at Ozanam House are very anxious for the return of the Port Auckland, as they have their eye on these men for something serious that has happened at Ozanam House', adding, somewhat menacingly, 'So when next this ship visits Brisbane, these people will be under close scrutiny ... This complaint appears to me to be entirely frivolous and actually we would be glad if the men of the Port Auckland did not visit the rooms again.'

And they did not. Ozanam House and the Society's work for Seafarers continued to thrive, but SS Port Auckland sailed out of Brisbane en route to Liverpool, UK, carrying a cargo of 7000 tons in frozen produce, and was sunk by a German torpedo in the Atlantic in March, 1943. Fortunately most of her crew survived. ♦

Michael Moran is archivist for the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.



BY DEACON  
BONIFACE PERDJERT

***When I read the Gospels, I read them as an Aboriginal. There are many things in the Gospels that make me happy to be an Aboriginal because I think we have a good start. Christ did not get worried about material things.***

He was born in the countryside in a cave, like many of us have been born.

He walked about like us and with nowhere to lay his head. He died with nothing, on a cross.

So many of our people die with nothing. He liked the bush as we do. He loved nature. He loved the big things like the hills and open spaces. He loved the little

things like the mustard seed and the grain of wheat and the corn, drops of cold water and the little sparrows.

We have similar things like seeds and berries and yams, small water holes, and we like the quietness of the hills and the bush. Like him we have a deep sense of God in nature.

We like the way he uses the things of nature to teach, and the important part nature plays in the Sacraments. We can appreciate also the community nature of the Church, because we are very conscious of being part of a group bound by religious ties. We are strong on ceremony, through dance and song and painted bodies. Our ceremony closely involves groups and participation. So the ceremony of the Mass, the ceremony of the Sacraments and the ceremony of the liturgy should form a ready response in us, provided it is made meaningful, based on a theology that is attuned to the Aboriginal mind. ♦

Source: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council website.

# Letters to the editor

For many of us, winter is a time to rug up and spend cosy nights inside with loved ones, warm food and heating to keep us company. But experiencing rough sleeping during a Canberra winter has shown me how deeply challenging and saddening the winter experience is for some of the most disadvantaged Canberrans. Without anywhere warm to sleep, a good night's rest is impossible. Without a warm shower to refresh your body and mind, the weight of the winter quickly takes its toll. So now, winter means to me a time to reflect on our own supports, advantages and privileges, and offers a real opportunity to give to those most in need. Whether through donating money, clothing or time at a soup van, the harsh winter can bring out the best in all of us. ♦

*Law student Joseph Frawley*

Mr Frawley slept in his car in a Canberra street for 15 weeks in winter 2015, to raise money for the St Vincent de Paul Society's Clemente Program.



*Joseph Frawley.*

In the Autumn 2016 edition of *The Record*, National President Graham West expressed concern over the Society's dwindling membership.

Despite the Society being founded by a 20-year-old Frederic Ozanam in 1833, Graham made the point that it struggles to connect with the youth of today.

In October 2001, I attended a National New Ways Forum at the Bayview Conference Centre in Melbourne, where it was suggested that non-Catholics be invited to join us in our work. There was real excitement that there would be change coming, and soon!

To quote Graham in his piece for *The Record* titled 'Ozanam Oration 2016': 'People are not joining institutions;

we can't simply lament that people are not joining us, we must find out why and we must change.'

Change is never easy—many find comfort with the status quo which has worked well for them in the past.

For me, the solution is simple. Recruitment from parishes is not an option now nor in the future, due to irregular attendance and increasing indifference to a formal practice of religion.

Church statistics bear this out. In any case, many regard social justice issues and helping the disadvantaged as major priorities. Spurred on by their particular faith practices, they are there to assist the poor.

To enable people from a broad

range of faiths to carry out work that alleviates poverty, I recommend parish-based and non-parish-based conferences that are open to all people of good will.

A commitment towards changing the format of meetings, so that they are not so Catholic-centric, is a good place to start. This would enable people from a broad range of faiths to feel more included and valued. It would also provide Vinnies with more resources to carry out its good work. ♦

*Peter H Lyall*

Peter has been a member since 1995, State President Tasmania, a National Vice President and is currently Chairman, State Shops Committee Tasmania.



# Technology and Vinnies youth camps

***There is no doubt that the incorporation of new technologies will revolutionise the Vincentian service we provide to people experiencing all forms of hardship.***

Since October 2015, West Australian youth members have been pioneering the use of technology for children attending camps run by Vinnies. This includes the use of iPads and computer applications to suit their needs.

With children entering the care of our youth members, paperwork is unavoidable. Traditionally, the extensive documentation needed for camps to run smoothly was contained in lever arch files. With the growth and expansion of camps in WA, the bulky and heavy lever arch files became problematic, often breaking under the weight and thickness of their contents. The introduction of iPads meant no longer carrying around large files of paperwork, printing time was minimised, and processes streamlined. The reduction in paperwork has also resulted in the program's carbon footprint decreasing.

First aid officers on camps are now using the iPads to not only fill out injury and illness forms, but also to get advice from recognised first aid computer applications, and to use the alarm and notepad functions to keep track of daily tasks. Using the camera application to take photographs of injuries has allowed first aid officers to track the healing of wounds, as it can normally be difficult to identify infections over short periods.

Youth members who hold



*Top: Jarrad Stewart and friend; Bottom left: Western Australia youth members Dennielle Massang and Sophie Hellemans; Bottom right: First aid officers on youth camps carry packs containing essential items and an iPad, for logging incidents.*

leadership positions on camps can also use the iPads during emergencies such as a bushfire. They can assign a fellow member to monitor Department of Fire and Emergency Services updates, for example, allowing for more informed decision making, and a calmer response during a crisis. Moving forward, there are plans for youth members from WA to further explore

iPad functionality in other youth support programs they provide, as well as school engagement activities. Our youth members are looking forward to witnessing how sustainable and more efficient technologies will be incorporated into Vincentian service in the future. ♦

Jarrad Stewart is State Youth Manager, Western Australia.





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