

Social Justice Update - December 2012

Christmas wishes to one and all

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia would like to take this opportunity to thank the Society's members, volunteers and employees for their efforts in helping to alleviate poverty in 2012 and wish them a very Merry Christmas. Staying with this theme, the latest issue of [The Record](#) has a distinctly Christmas feel to it, starting with an image of the star of Bethlehem on the front cover and poetry and reflections inside. The Society has also launched its [Vinnies Christmas Appeal](#) for 2012 with the branding '*In every face of despair we see a face of hope.*' Traditional media and online advertisements have been airing around the clock since November and so in case you missed it you can view the Christmas Appeal film clip on our [YouTube Channel](#).

Homelessness statistics released

The recent release of the [2011 Census data](#) by the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed 105,237 people experienced homelessness in Australia compared to 89,728 in the 2006 Census. This reflects an increase in the rate of homelessness of eight per cent over the last five years (taking into account population growth). The increase has been attributed to the rise in the number of people living in severely crowded dwellings. There were 41,390 people living in inappropriate housing in 2011 compared to 31,531 in 2006. In a [statement](#) issued to the media on November 12 the St Vincent de Paul Society Chief Executive, Dr John Falzon, said the data "...particularly confirms our members' experience of seeing evidence of overcrowding and inappropriate housing among many of the families we visit." While the Society was disappointed by the increase in homelessness, it did welcome a reduction in the number of rough sleepers and renewed focus on the issue of inappropriate housing. Concerted efforts reduce the number of people sleeping rough appears to be working with the figures down to 6,813 in 2011 from 7,247 in 2006.

Steps to reduce homelessness

The Society welcomed a new commitment by the federal government to fund 50 per cent of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) in its first year. The [commitment](#) was announced by Minister Brendan O'Connor at the National Press Club in Canberra on November 14. National President, Mr Thornton said anxiety over the expiry of the current \$1.1 billion NPAH in June 2013 would remain until a funding agreement between the Commonwealth and States was reached. "The members of the St Vincent de Paul Society are following the issue of the future funding agreement closely. These are the frontline volunteers and staff, who help people experiencing homelessness and who know the enormous economic, social and human cost of homelessness and the devastation it causes in people's lives," Mr Thornton said. Read the full [media release](#) here.

Condemnation of latest decision on refugees

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council has strongly criticised the introduction of a 'no advantage' immigration policy announced by Minister Chris Bowen on November 21. Under the policy refugees will be left on bridging visas with no right to work and very little support. National President, Mr Thornton told [The West Australian](#) the policy was inhumane and in a [media release](#) the St Vincent de Paul Society Chief Executive, Dr John Falzon said it was time for Australia to accept its international obligations and to respect the human rights and human dignity of the people who seek asylum in our country. In the meantime, the Society will continue to assist asylum seekers through its established refugees and migrant programs and the National Council office will monitor the fallout from the 'no advantage'

approach to community detention and continue to advocate for the rights of refugees.

Inquiry acknowledges problem but fails to fix it

The St Vincent de Paul Society urges the Government to bite the bullet and address the glaring inequality in support payments in Australia. The Society was disappointed by a [Senate Inquiry's findings](#) into Newstart released on November 29, in which Senators acknowledged the problem but failed to fix it. In response the Society issued a [media release](#) stating it was steadfast in its resolve that Newstart was too low to live on either in the short term or the long term and that it must be increased as a matter of urgency. Later that day Dr Falzon told ABC Radio National's [PM Program](#) the reality is "...for people who are on unemployment benefits, including single mums who are going to be pushed onto that unseemly benefit as of the first of January [as a result of the recent migration of many Parenting Payment recipients onto Newstart], charity will mean the difference between staying in accommodation and sleeping in a car. This is a matter of grave injustice that people are being left to rot on a level of unemployment benefit that keeps them below the poverty line," Dr John Falzon said. He later added: "That fact has been screaming out to all of us for quite some time. You've got an unemployment benefit that has not been lifted in real terms since 1994 - so low that it has become a barrier to employment participation. This is no way to help people into the workforce. You don't help people up by putting them down, and that's what this allowance does. The Government shouldn't feel it's been let off the hook just because there's no recommendation to increase the Newstart allowance. We certainly will not be letting them off the hook. The facts do not let them off the hook."

Upcoming events

- [International Human Rights Day](#) will be marked on Monday, December 10.
- A book launch for [The Language of the Unheard](#) by Dr John Falzon will be held in Canberra on December 7 and in Melbourne on December 14.
- The [World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees](#) is on January 8, 2013.
- The UN has declared February 28, 2013 the [UN World Day of Social Justice](#).

Twitter

On December 3 @VinniesWA tweeted: Shop at IGA and support the Vinnies Christmas Appeal today! For further information visit www.vinnies.org.au/IGA