# ABC Interview Transcript

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And that is that more than 3 million Australians are currently living below the poverty line, and 774,000 of those are indeed children. So any increases to any income support payment for these and other battlers are welcome. But to be perfectly honest with you, with everybody's living expenses continuing to rise, um, these increases are, to be honest, inadequate and will indeed lift very, very few people out of poverty.

Well, it's said that they're indexed once a year to ensure that they keep up with the rising cost of living. What do you think about that, Mark?

Oh, look. Yes, yes they are, but we're asking for significant increases to both youth allowance and JobSeeker parenting payment. We would like to see increases to those income support payments. Very similar to the way that the aged pension is increased. The age pension is increased by two factors. And that's CPI plus a percentage of income growth for men's wages. So we just think it's inadequate. It will provide some relief. But we're asking for more.

Well you mentioned youth Allowance. And as you know, when you open up that document, there's a lot of lists there about the different situations that someone who is eligible for Youth Allowance might receive. But basically their increase will be somewhere between $22 and $45 a fortnight. So somewhere around $11 to $22 a week extra for someone who's on youth allowance. Pretty challenging, isn't it, Mark?

Oh look, it is challenging and as I mentioned previously, we're living in a situation where cost of living is getting completely out of control for a lot of people, not only those on Youth Allowance and those on income support payments, but those middle income earners who are subject subjected to increasing rents, mortgage stress, food stress. It's really across the board where we're seeing that the costs of living are starting to bite. And yeah, look, as I mentioned previously, whilst it will be some relief to those on Youth Allowance and Youth study, we would like to see more assistance to all Australians, including those on sole support, parenting payments, disability payments, etc..

We're speaking with Paul Gaetani, the president of Saint Vincent de Paul, and I'm interested to know Mark, apologies, Mark Gaetani I'm interested to know Mark. Um, what are you seeing walking through your doors and the people who are requiring the support of your charity and your services?

Well, we're definitely seeing an increase in requests for our assistance increased by up between 15 and 39% across the country and 20% here in Victoria, in New South Wales. So we're seeing quite a significant number of increase requests for assistance for the basics, right. Food, clothing assistance with rental assistance with day to day bills. Uh, the pressure is building on the community out there and it's really sad to see that in such a rich country as Australia, where we're just seeing so many people calling charities like Saint Vincent de Paul for basic assistance.

And what do you need to help these people?

Well, this can be fixed, Bridie. It can be fixed. And what we're calling for the Albanese government to do is to increase JobSeeker by or up to $1,100 per fortnight, parenting payment up to $1,440 per fortnight. And we'd like to see a significant jump in youth allowance to $887 per fortnight. So our advocacy is to the federal government to consider increasing those payments. But we're also, um, submitting some advocacy work to the federal government to increase the emergency relief that they provide by 30% for the next calendar year, from 50 million to 65 million to for us to cope with the ever increasing need for emergency assistance that we provide on a daily basis around Australia, including Victoria.

Um, I mean, we saw the impact on North Queensland after Ex-cyclone, Jasper and then even now on the Gold Coast and parts of the Sunshine Coast, huge flooding power outages. So people really struggling for food and to have just the basic amenities, aren't they?

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And with um, you know, with these ever increasing weather events, whether it be fire or flood, we're going to see more Australians across the country in the situation that a lot of people are in northern Queensland.

Mark, before I let you go, tell me it's a new year today. Starting off, do you have any plans or resolutions or goals for 2024?

Look, I do I my resolution for my work with the society is to continue to advocate for the poor and for those vulnerable in our community, to be able to at least have an opportunity to live not in poverty, but above the poverty line and to enjoy themselves. That's my resolution and that's what I'm working to do in my role as national president for St Vincent de Paul Society.

Mark, thank you so much.

My pleasure. Thanks, Brody. Thanks for the opportunity to talk.

Mark Gaetani there, the national president of Saint Vincent de Paul. And his news resolution. An admirable one is absolutely to advocate for those who are living below the poverty line.