Our Mission

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

Our Vision

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering “a hand up” to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

Privacy Statement
Because the St Vincent de Paul Society respects the privacy of the people it serves, the names of any clients featured in this report have been changed and pictorial models used.

The Mini Vinnies Starter Kiet is produced by the Youth Team and the Community and Corporate Relations Team of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, January 2009.

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For more information about Mini Vinnies or for any enquiries, please contact the Vinnies Youth Team in your Diocese.

www.vinnies.org.au
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What is Mini Vinnies?

Mini Vinnies is a group in a primary school. It is a group of young people who get together to help those in need within their school and local community. Mini Vinnies introduces children to social justice issues, to the St Vincent de Paul Society and to living faith through action.

What does a Mini Vinnies group do?

Mini Vinnies is about doing good works in the community, but it is also about young people meeting to talk, to share ideas and concerns, to have fun and to support each other. The Vinnies model of ‘See, think, Do’* is a great way to get young people thinking and talking about their spirituality – connecting their beliefs and values with service activities and issues in their community can help to make their faith real, meaningful and relevant.

The actions of a Mini Vinnies group generally involve three components:

See

Education and Awareness. ‘Seeing’ means becoming aware of some of the community’s social ills and knowing that, whilst there are many beautiful things in this world, it can always be made a little better by good works. ‘Seeing’ is an opportunity for members of a Mini Vinnies group to be exposed, often for the first time, to some of the world’s troubles. It is an opportunity for members of a Mini Vinnies group to develop empathy for those in need.

“Be good, keep your feet dry, your eyes open, your heart at peace and your soul in the joy of Christ.” – Thomas Merton
**Think**

Formation. Thinking means forming a Mini Vinnies group and through that group participating in spiritual activities, personal development and discussions. ‘Thinking’ is an opportunity for Mini Vinnies members to develop a real understanding of some of the world’s causes, its effects and how it might be alleviated. ‘Thinking’ is an opportunity for Mini Vinnies members to share their thoughts, to engage in thoughtful discussion and to consider and form their relationships with their peers, those in need and Christ.

“Small is the number of people who see with their eyes and think with their minds.” – Albert Einstein

**Do**

Community service and Fundraising. ‘Doing’ means supporting the Society in its good works in Australia and overseas. ‘Doing’ is an opportunity for children to do something about the issues they have seen, thought about, and discussed.

“Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what is still possible for you to do.” – Pope John XXIII

*Joseph Cardijn was the founder of Young Christian Workers. He developed the “See Judge Act” method during his work with the YCW movement. The “See Think Do” method outlined above has been derived from the “See Judge Act” method and we would like to acknowledge that the idea was based on Cardijn’s method.*
What do People Think about Mini Vinnies?

Here is what some children and teachers have said about their experience of being involved in Mini Vinnies:

“Mini Vinnies made sure that others in our school are happy because we look out for people who are alone. I am a better person since joining Mini Vinnies.”

“I think Mini Vinnies is about helping other people and making them feel loved and happy in a special way.”

“The children love the experience of helping others and they are also involved in fun activities while fundraising for their local Vinnies. What is really important is that the children feel part of a community and this gives them a great sense of pride. It helps break down the attitude and the peer pressure of joining Vinnies when they enter high school, as it is what they have known their whole primary school life.”

“It is such an amazing opportunity for our young people as it enables them to put what they learn in the classroom for Religion into practice – they are living out their faith within their school.”

“The most important aspect of the Mini Vinnies’ work is the request to care for the children in their own school environment, especially those who didn’t belong to a group, who frequently played alone or were regularly in trouble for misbehaving in the playground. This activity aims to sensitise the children to become aware of the feelings and needs of others, and has made a noticeable contribution to the school atmosphere.”
The St Vincent de Paul Society is a community of people who work towards the alleviation of poverty and suffering throughout the world. The work of the St Vincent de Paul Society is conducted by its volunteers in a spirit of justice and charity.

Frederic Ozanam, the Society's founder, once said, “Yours must be a work of love and unlimited kindness; you must give your time, your talents, yourselves. The poor man is a unique person of God’s fashioning with an inalienable right to respect. You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis; you must study their condition and often the injustices which brought about such poverty with the aim of long term improvement”.

The Saint behind the Society: St Vincent de Paul

Date of birth: 24th April 1581
Place of birth: Pouy, France
Occupation: Priest and servant of the poor
Died: 27th September 1660
Canonised a saint: 16th June 1737
Feast Day: 27th September

Vincent was a very intelligent young man, who spent four years with the Franciscan friars obtaining an education. He tutored children of wealthy families and was ordained at the age of 20.

At the age of 24, Vincent was taken captive by Turkish pirates and sold into slavery. During this time, Vincent witnessed the terrible conditions in which slaves were forced to live, although his own master was a doctor who treated him well and taught him about medicine. When his master died, Vincent escaped and returned to France.
In France, Vincent became a parish priest. He committed himself to serving the poorest of the poor, pledging his life to people who were sick, insane, orphaned, elderly, starving or abandoned, and to beggars, prisoners and slaves. There was no form of poverty or suffering – physical, emotional or spiritual – which Vincent did not try to alleviate. He was appointed Royal Chaplain General and set about improving conditions for prisoners, slaves and people in hospital.

Vincent started an order of priests called the Congregation of the Mission – more commonly known as Vincentians – whose mission it was to share Jesus’ good news to the villages through preaching and service. Along with Louise de Marillac, he also started the Daughters of Charity, who cared for people who were poor and sick.

St Vincent de Paul is the patron saint of: charities, charitable societies and workers, hospitals and hospital workers, lepers, prisoners and volunteers. The town in which Vincent was born in now known as Saint-Vincent-de-Paul.

Vincent believed that in serving the poor, he was serving Christ:

“Go to the poor: you will find God”
The Woman behind the Saint: St Louise de Marillac

Date of birth: 12th August 1591
Place of birth: Auvergne, France
Occupation: Wife and Mother
Died: 15th March 1660
Canonised a saint: 11th March 1934
Feast Day: 15th March

Louise did not know her mother and was raised by her father. From the time she was a small child, she was taken to the Dominican sisters, who gave her a good education. Later, she went on to further education at a residence for young girls in Paris. Her education was much better than that of most children her age, and Louise became one of the best educated women of her time.

Louise had a desire to join a religious order, but she was not allowed to join. She married Antoine le Gras, secretary to the Queen Mother, in 1611. According to Louise, Antoine was a good man. Throughout their marriage, Louise traveled a lot and socialized with the royalty and aristocracy of France. Louise and Antoine had a son, Michael, and lived together happily for many years. Antoine, however, became sick, and he died in 1625.

After her husband died, Louise met and became friends with Vincent de Paul. Despite the fact that she had come from a background of wealth, and knew many rich people, she was just as comfortable around poor people. Louise dedicated her time to helping abandoned children on the streets. She also visited sick men in the prison hospital (which was a horrible place) and established a house near the hospital where, each day, many women would cook food that visitors would then take to the prisoners.
Throughout France, women set up centres to serve the poor. Louise pushed for every village to have its own clinic, school nurse and teacher. With Vincent, Louise started the Daughters of Charity in 1642. The Daughters of Charity were a revolutionary order of the poor. They helped abandoned children, people who were poor and sick, wounded soldiers, slaves, people who were mentally ill and the elderly. Today, there are over 20,000 Daughters of Charity, and they continue to help people in need.

Louise is the patron saint of sick people, widows and orphans, and in 1960, Pope John XXIII proclaimed her the Patroness of Social Workers.

“Love the poor. Honour them, my children, as you would honour Christ himself”
The Man behind the Society: Blessed Frederic Ozanam

Frederic’s family was an upper middle class Catholic family – his father was a doctor and his mother was an heiress. He was the fifth born of 14 children, but he was one of only four to survive early childhood, with 10 of his siblings dying from disease at a young age.

Frederic was a very intelligent young man and decided to study Law at Sorbonne University. People at Sorbonne were very anti-Christian, and there were not many other Catholic students. Many Students – and even teachers – at the university attacked the religious beliefs of Frederic and his fellow Christians, claiming that the Church had become irrelevant and was not doing anything to help the many poor and suffering people of France. Frederic, who was seen as a natural leader of his fellow Catholic students, decided to take action, and he started a Conference of Charity with a few other students.

Guided by a middle-aged journalist named Emmanuel Bailly, the Conference members were driven by a deep desire to build their faith, and they decided to go out and become servants of the poor, just as Jesus Christ had done. The group followed the example of St Vincent – the French saint who had done so much work to help the poor 200 years earlier – and named their Conference ‘the Society of St Vincent de Paul’. The group was also inspired by a young Daughter of Charity, Rosalie Rendu, and the young men worked closely with her to help the poor people of Paris.
As well as becoming a lawyer, Frederic was also a teacher and a scholar. He wrote many essays and journal articles on a whole range of subjects, and was appointed Lecturer in Foreign Literature at the University of Lyon. Much of Frederic's work was based on his passion for social justice, and he argued for better social conditions, higher moral standards and the restoration of the Catholic faith in France.

On 23rd June 1841, Frederic married a woman named Amelie Soulacroix, who in 1845 gave birth to their daughter Marie. Frederic was a sick man his whole life, and was forced to resign from his job in 1852. He died in September 1853, at the age of 40.

“Let us do whatever good lies in our hands”
A Woman with Experience: Blessed Rosalie Rendu

Jeanne Marie Rendu (later called Sister Rosalie Rendu) was the eldest of four girls in her family. Her parents were simple-living but well respected people who lived in the mountains. When Jeanne was only three years old, the French Revolution broke out in France. At this time, many faithful priests were forced to flee because people wanted to hurt them, and the Rendu family home became a refuge for many of these priests.

Following the death of her father and baby sister, Jeanne helped her mother to look after the family. Jeanne’s mother sent her to a boarding school so she could get a good education. During her two years there, Jeanne would walk around the town, and one day she discovered a hospital where the Daughters of Charity cared for the sick. Her mother gave her permission to spend some time at the hospital, and Jeanne soon felt called by God to become a Daughter of Charity.

When she was nearly 17 years old, Jeanne entered the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity and received the name Rosalie. She took vows to serve God and the poor, and spent over 50 years living out those vows. She opened a free clinic, a pharmacy, a school, an orphanage, a childcare centre, a home for the elderly and a youth club for young workers. She became known as the “good mother of all”, and helped Frederic Ozanam and his friends to do good works, which is how the St Vincent de Paul Society started.
As well as assisting the poor in the streets and in their homes, Sister Rosalie showed great courage and leadership during the bloody uprisings that took place in France in 1830 and 1848. During the battles, Sister Rosalie would climb up on the barricades – risking her life – to help wounded soldiers, regardless of which side they were fighting on.

Although her health was always fragile, Sister Rosalie never rested; she preferred to keep serving the poor, and managed to overcome fatigue and illness. Eventually, however, her huge workload – combined with her age and increased frailty – broke her resistance, and she became progressively blind during the last two years of her life. She died on 7th February 1856.

“Never have I prayed so well as in the streets”
The Beginnings of the Society

Frederic Ozanam was a devoted Catholic, but he was in the minority at Sorbonne University, where he studied law. Because of the strong anti-Christian sentiment within the University, many Catholic students would not openly admit to their faith. A professor named Jouffrey argued that Christianity was irrational, and that it was the enemy of scientific inquiry and human liberty. Frederic wrote two letters to the professor to disprove the professor's arguments. He wrote a third letter, which was signed by nine other students. Jouffrey was forced to read the letter in public and promise to never again attack the religious beliefs of students.

Following this incident, Frederic was seen as a natural leader of the Catholic students at the University. He was driven by a deep desire to find a way to help build the faith of his peers. One day, Frederic was challenged by a group of Socialist students who went by the name of Saint Simonians. The students argued that:

Christianity is now outworn and defunct. It may have been useful in the past, but what use is it today? Show us your works, and then we might believe!

These claims troubled Frederic greatly, and drove him to start a ‘Conference of Charity’ with a few friends. The group consisted of:

Frederic Ozanam, aged 19
Joseph Emmanuel Bailly, aged 42
Francoise Lallier, aged 20
Paul Lemanche, aged 23
Felix Clave, aged 22
Auguste Le Tallandier, aged 22
Jules Devaux, aged 22
Under the guidance of Bailly, who was the founder of an influential Catholic newspaper, the students met weekly – starting in May 1833 – and committed themselves to helping the poor people of Paris. Inspired and assisted by Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, the students visited poor people in their homes, bringing food and other necessities. Frederic had a strong belief that this method of serving the poor was much better than what he called “ostentatious philanthropy” (the bold, flashy giving of money without paying much attention to the people who were actually in need of the help).

The Conference adopted the name “The Society of St Vincent de Paul” because they were inspired by Saint Vincent, who had devoted himself to helping the poor people of France about 200 years earlier. Sister Rosalie taught Frederic and his friends to see the face of God in the poor people who they visited. In this way, the Conference members recognised the importance of providing company and friendship as well as material assistance to people in need – those they visited were not just physically poor, but emotionally and spiritually poor as well.

Frederic came to realise that, in serving the poor, charity was not enough, and he began calling for social reform and justice for the working classes. The Society of St Vincent de Paul began to focus not just on helping people through their immediate poverty, but also on the changing laws and structures that continued to create poverty and disadvantage. Frederic said:

“You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis: you must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of a long term improvement.”

As the student members of the Conference completed their studies, they started up Conferences in other provinces of France. Within two years of the first Conference meeting, there were over 100 members of the Society. Soon, the Society spread beyond the borders of France, and there was a Conference in Rome, Italy, by 1842. The Society was then established in other countries in the following years:

1843 – Belgium, Scotland, Ireland
1844 – England
1846 – Holland, Germany, Greece, Turkey, the USA and Mexico
1847 – Canada, Switzerland
1850 – Austria, Spain
1854 – Australia

By the time of Frederic’s death in 1853, the Society was thriving in France and had spread throughout the world, fulfilling Frederic’s desire to “embrace the whole world in a network of charity”. Today, the St Vincent de Paul Society is present in over 100 countries, with approximately 49,500 Conferences and over 950,000 members.

The Society in Australia

The Society spread throughout Australia over the following years:

1854 – Victoria
1865 – Western Australia
1881 – New South Wales
1886 – South Australia
1894 – Queensland
1899 – Tasmania
1949 – Northern Territory
Mission Statement

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

Vision Statement

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering a “hand up” to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

The Vinnies Logo

The logo for Vinnies in Australia was created by a sculpture artist named Tom Bass. It symbolises the presence of Jesus Christ in the work of the Society:

- The hand of Christ blesses the cup
- The hand of love offers the cup
- The hand of suffering receives the cup
Services Offered by Vinnies around Australia

The St Vincent de Paul Society is organised into Conferences (groups of members focussed in a particular area, usually linked to a particular parish) and Special Works, which are programs with a specific focus, addressing a particular need within our community. Through these Conferences and Special Works, Vinnies volunteers help marginalised people in a number of ways. Some of these are detailed below.

Home Visitation
The first work of the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1833 was that of Home Visitation. This act of visiting people in their homes is still active today and is one of the main works of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. People call the emergency assistance number at Vinnies seeking help. They give their name and address, and volunteers from the Vinnies Conference in that area then visit the person in their home and talk to them about what they need. The volunteers can then provide material support by giving a voucher for food, clothing or furniture. The volunteers also offer personal, emotional support to those they assist.

Vinnies Centres
There are many Vinnies Centres across Australia, and they are probably considered one of the most visible and well-known aspects of the Society’s work. Vinnies Centres are retail outlets where clothing and household goods donated to the Society are sold at low prices. Goods are donated by members of the public through donation bins or through school and church collection boxes. Vinnies Centres generate income for the Society – money raised through the sale of goods can be used by Vinnies to help those in need within our community.

Refuges and Emergency Accommodation
Refuges owned and operated by the Society provide shelter and support to men, women and children who are homeless. Some refuges might be women and children specific and deal with those made homeless due to domestic violence. Other refuges might be youth specific and provide assistance to young people recovering from alcohol or drug dependencies.
Family and Welfare Centres
Family and Welfare centres provide counselling and welfare support services to those in need. Welfare support includes things like nappies, chemist vouchers, food vouchers and parcels. Counselling and support are also provided to those who have suffered through addictions, loss, substance abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, relationship difficulties, sexual abuse and grief.

Respite Centres
Respite centres offer care and a place to spend some time for people in need such as children and adults with disabilities, those with mental illnesses or the aged. Clients enjoy social and leisure activities appropriate to their needs, including barbecues, social outings and sporting activities.

Night Patrol
Night Patrol vans, staffed by volunteers, travel the streets of towns and cities to serve food, hot drinks and offer some friendly conversation to those experiencing homelessness. Many thousand sandwiches, biscuits, cups of tea and coffee are served by Night Patrol volunteers each year.

Migrant and Refugee Services
The Migrant and Refugee Committee works specifically with individuals and families who have recently arrived in Australia. The volunteers in this committee give material support (for example, blankets) but also personal and social support – they help people to find accommodation and to access health and education services, and assist in making people feel comfortable and welcome in their new home. Vinnies have also established programs such as homework help classes that assist refugee children in their transition into schooling.

Overseas Partnership and Development
The Overseas Partnership and Development coordinates the Society’s efforts to assist disadvantaged people in other countries. One of the ways Vinnies in Australia helps people overseas is by ‘twinning’ with developing countries. For example, a Vinnies conference in Australia may be twinned with a Vinnies conference in India. Their ‘twinned’ Australian
conference would support and encourage the Indian conference by praying for them, writing to them and offering financial support to assist them in their works.

In NSW the St Vincent de Paul Society is twinned with the following countries: India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Fiji.

**Youth Programs**
Vinnies runs a number of programs and activities aimed at supporting young people who are marginalised or ‘at risk’. This includes young people who come from poor, disadvantaged or abusive family situations, young people who lack a safe, stable or loving home life and young people who have made some negative life choices or are at risk of doing so. Youth Programs – which include camps and holiday activities – aim to assist these young people by providing fun and friendship as well as promoting life skills such as teamwork, confidence and positive thinking.

**Assist-a-Student**
Assist-a-Student is an education scholarship program aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty. It gives the opportunity to provide funding for a scholarship to educate an overseas student for one year. The donation of $70 will be matched with a child in need in one of our partner countries. There are currently around 800 students being assisted through Assist-a-Student. Perhaps your Minni Vinnies group could raise funds to Assist a Student.
A Mini Vinnies group may be the first opportunity for children to be exposed in a structured way to issues such as poverty and social justice. It is therefore important that this exposure be provided in a caring and empathic way.

Statistics and definitions do not often assist children in understanding the problems other people face. Mini Vinnies facilitators should consider communicating social ills in ways in which children can easily relate. Images and stories are often a helpful way of communicating a problem.

This may mean explaining that there are children who do not have many of the opportunities that most primary students take for granted.

Children who are less fortunate often:

- Cannot afford to go on a school excursion;
- Are embarrassed about inviting their friends to their houses to play;
- Do not attend school dances because they don’t have the clothes;
- Never go on holiday;
- Do not have birthday cakes;
- Don’t have a computer to do their homework;
- Do not have both parents living with them at home;
- Don’t have enough food to eat;
- Have never been to a dentist;
- Are compelled to look after a younger brother or sister;
- Are compelled to look after their parents;
- Never have enough time to play.
Issues that Mini Vinnies groups might like to discuss include:

- Social Exclusion
- Poverty
- Indigenous Issues
- Homelessness
- Refugee Issues
- Mental Health
- Elderly

What is Poverty and Social Exclusion?

Nelson Mandela once said of poverty:

“Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom.”

Poverty is a basic cause of social disadvantage in Australia.

Poverty is often defined in one of two ways. Poverty is either referred to as ‘Absolute Poverty’ or ‘Relative Poverty’. Absolute poverty occurs when people do not now have the basic necessities of life, that is, food, shelter and clothing. Some Indigenous communities in Australia are often described as living in absolute poverty. Relative Poverty, on the other hand, occurs where there is inequality in a community and is often measured using a ‘poverty line’. Relative Poverty is a concept most frequently used in developed countries like Australia to define poverty.

Social exclusion occurs when members of the community cannot participate in key activities for whatever reason. This may mean they have restricted access to the economic resources and/or services they require or they are effectively disengaged.
from many of the activities many community members would take for granted. Examples might include an inability to see a dentist or medical practitioner or an inability to take the kids on a holiday.

Social exclusion is a newer concept which is broadening our understanding of the disadvantaged in Australia.

**Why is it Important to Learn about Poverty and Social Exclusion?**

It is important for children to learn about these justice issues so that they are aware of the injustices in the world. Children who grow up with an awareness of other people suffering and the reasons why they suffer grow into more compassionate, giving adults. They also have a greater understanding of the blessings in their lives.
‘THINK’ - FORMATION

Thinking means forming a Mini Vinnies group and through that group participating in spiritual activities, personal development and discussions.

Thinking is a form of faith formation. It allows Mini Vinnies members to develop their understanding of social justice issues in a personal way through reflection, discussion, expression and prayer.

How to Form a Mini Vinnies Group

The first step is to introduce the children in your school to the idea of Mini Vinnies and find out if any of them are interested in forming a group. You could spend some time learning a bit about the Society and how volunteers of all ages can help, or request a member of the St Vincent de Paul Youth Team, a teacher, parent of Vinnies Conference Member to come and speak to the students and answer any questions they may have about the Society.

You will need to find a teacher* who is willing to help coordinate the group. Once a Coordinator has been appointed, the Coordinator should decide which years/classes they want to open the Mini Vinnies group to. Many schools limit membership to their Mini Vinnies group to the older years 4, 5 and 6. However, Mini Vinnies groups are open to primary school children of all ages. Once the Coordinator has selected what years he or she wants to open the Mini Vinnies group to, he or she can arrange a time, date and room for the first meeting.

To advertise the first meeting, the Coordinator can either put up a poster, put a notice in the school bulletin, speak to students at the School Assembly or personally invite any children who are interested in Mini Vinnies to come along.

It is often a good idea to invite someone from the St Vincent de Paul Youth Team, or from a local St Vincent de Paul Society...
Parish Conference to come and speak at your first meeting. They can offer significant experience in running Mini Vinnies groups around their Diocese and can provide valuable advice on what works, what doesn’t work and how best to manage the group.

The First Meeting

1. Open the meeting with a prayer or reflection;
2. Allow the representative from Vinnies to briefly address the group;
3. Decide as a group when, where and how often you will hold meetings;
4. Discuss what activities and projects the group could undertake or look into;
5. Discuss what roles will exist in the group and what would be required of people in those roles;
6. Close the meeting with a prayer and details of the next meeting.

Roles:
You might decide to have particular leadership roles within your group. These could include:

- **President** – works closely with the coordinating staff member to look after the Mini Vinnies group, and may chair the meetings and help allocate work to different members of the group;
- **Vice President** – is supportive of the president, and may take on the leadership of meetings or activities when the president is absent;
- **Secretary** – takes notes of the meetings and keeps a record of projects and activities undertaken by the group;
- **Treasurer** – keeps track of money raised by the group;
- **Spiritual Advisor** – is responsible for preparing a prayer or reflection for each meeting;

Any other role that your Mini Vinnies group has a need for.
Commissioning Ceremony

Many schools launch their Mini Vinnies group with a commissioning ceremony at a school assembly or liturgy. At a commissioning ceremony, the students in the Mini Vinnies group are recognised for being part of the group and for wanting to help people.

Usually, the Mini Vinnies children are presented with a certificate and a badge by the school principal or a representative of Vinnies.

At the ceremony, the Mini Vinnies group can also recite a pledge – there is a pledge in this resource kit which the group can use, otherwise they may wish to create their own which is special and unique to their Mini Vinnies group.

At the ceremony, someone from Vinnies can speak about the Vinnies symbol and the aims of the Society, and congratulate the students for getting involved. You can then have a commissioning ceremony at the start of each year, to welcome students who have joined the group and to launch the group’s activities for another school year.
The Role of the Teacher

Any staff member within the school can take on the role of coordinating the Mini Vinnies group – it does not necessarily have to be the Religious Education Coordinator. What is important is that the person is willing to commit some of their time to attending Mini Vinnies meetings and other events and fundraisers that the group organises.

In a Mini Vinnies group, it should be the children that identify the needs in their community, come up with ideas of how to help and make decisions about fundraisers and service activities. The role of the teacher is to guide these discussions and assist the students to put their passion and ideas into action by keeping discussions within the realm of possibilities.

The teacher will need to help the group by looking into the feasibility of projects according to school OH&S and duty of care requirements. Such considerations should not be a barrier to any and every project that the group plans; all that is needed is for the teacher to spend some time looking into the OH&S requirements and ensuring that the requisite processes are followed so the activities are safe. This may involve organising permission slips, getting the principal’s approval or recruiting parents or teachers to assist with supervision.

In Mini Vinnies, children can really have a say and make decisions about how they can help people in their community. The coordinating teacher should help make this happen, and should support the children in their individual and collective growth and formation in the process. Someone from the St Vincent de Paul Society Youth Team of local Conference member can assist and support the coordinating teacher in their role.

Meetings

When your Mini Vinnies group is established, your meetings can follow a similar format to the first meeting, although you don’t need to invite a Vinnies member to every meeting. You may, however, invite guest speakers to address the group from time to time, perhaps once a term. You could invite a guest speaker might talk about a particular social justice issue, which could influence the group’s activities for the following term and inspire the children to continue in their efforts to shape a more just society.
Learning about Vinnies

It is important for a Mini Vinnies group to learn about the history and works of the St Vincent de Paul Society, both locally and on an international level. The children may want to read about the founders of the Society, or a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society Youth Team can give a presentation about how the Society began. A local St Vincent de Paul Society Conference member could talk to the group about when and where the Conference meets, what the needs are in their region and ways the Conference helps local people. The group could also visit some different places to learn about how Vinnies works in their Diocese, such as the warehouse where all the donated clothes are sorted and distributed or a local Vinnies Family Centre.

Having Fun

As well as helping children to develop leadership skills, learn about issues in their community and discover their ability to make a difference in the world, Mini Vinnies can be a great way for young people to make new friends.

As well as providing time in meetings for children to talk and get to know each other better, it is good to have some social activities within your Mini Vinnies group. A shared lunch or morning tea at the start or end of each term is a good way to celebrate the good works the group has done and to give the children a good opportunity to get to know each other better, which will help them to work well as a team.

This fun, social element of Mini Vinnies makes it more enjoyable and interesting for the children involved. It can also help them to establish friendships and support networks that will be of great benefit to them as they leave primary school and perhaps get involved in a Vinnies group at their high school or out of school hours.
‘DO’ - COMMUNITY SERVICE

This is an opportunity for children to put all their learning (seeing) and formation (thinking) into action. It is important for members of Mini Vinnies groups to understand that they can make a difference in this world. To this end, doing means undertaking an achievable project that will make a difference in the lives of the poor, isolated or marginalised.

It is important to understand that simply by setting up a Mini Vinnies group, the members are doing something tangible:
• They pray as part of each meeting,
• They learn and
• They develop into more socially aware and responsible adults

Sometimes it is easier to teach children a lesson when the good works and its effects are tangible. Measurable good works include:
• Fundraising for St Vincent de Paul Society
• Performances at Nursing Homes
• Christmas Appeal
• Card Making

There is an obvious benefit in ensuring that members of a Mini Vinnies group KNOW they can effect real change and that the world’s problems are not so large that one shouldn’t at the very least try. If a toy they donate makes just one more child smile at Christmas, then it is all worth it.

Raising Money

Your Mini Vinnies group may decide to run one fundraiser per term, or only one or two for the entire year – it will depend on the ability and desire of the children to organizer fundraisers, the extent to which the school will allow the group to raise
money, the needs within the local community and the extent to which people can support the group’s fundraising efforts. There is no obligation on a Mini Vinnies group to raise money the circumstances are different for each school and each Mini Vinnies group, with some groups able to do lots of fundraising but little community service, and others able to do lots of service activities but little in the way of fundraising.

Where Does the Money Go?

It is up to the Mini Vinnies group to decide what they want to raise money for. There may be a particular need within their community which they want to address through fundraising, or a guest speaker may have talked to them about a particular Vinnies program which they would like to support. The money could be used by the Mini Vinnies to set up a project or program within the school, or given to the St Vincent de Paul Society to assist in good works across Australian and overseas. The money could go to the local Vinnies conference, or to a Special Work of your choice.

With any fundraiser, it is important to let people know where the funds will be going (for example, to supporting kids in need, to provide material support to struggling families in the local area, or to feeding homeless people). People are more likely to support the fundraiser if they know exactly who they will be helping by making a donation. This also helps you to raise awareness at the same time as raising funds.

Supporting People in the School Community

You could also raise money for struggling families within the school. Money raised could be put into a fund – to be managed by the school bursar or administration staff – and used to help families cover the cost of excursions, uniforms, stationery etc. Even though the Mini Vinnies group would not know who exactly is being helped through such a program (confidentiality is obviously important), they would know that they are giving vital support to a family within their immediate community.
Raising Awareness

Raising awareness of social justice issues is a very important part of the work the St Vincent de Paul Society, and Mini Vinnies groups can play a key role in this.

There are heaps of ways your Mini Vinnies group can stand up and speak out in your school community. The best way to start is with education. Teach people about the injustices in our communities, once people know and care about an issue they’re more likely to stand up and speak out against it. Here are some examples of ways you can raise awareness about issues in your school, but by no means is this a full list – the best way to do it is to be innovative, come up with ways to communicate your message that best suits your school.

Hold school assemblies, let the whole school know about the injustice and educate them on all the things that are happening and why they are unjust. (You can do this in a variety of ways – speeches, drama plays and other performance pieces, art installments etc.) At recess and lunchtime create stalls or events that draw attention to the injustice and educate your peers on what’s happening. Make announcements over the school PA. Organise a week dedicated to the cause with something happening each day. (E.g.: Have a ‘Refugee Week’. With an assembly on the Monday, a fundraiser on the Tuesday, an art show on the Wednesday etc.)

There are so many ways you can educate people on injustice. Be creative! Some of these ideas can easily be tailored to suit your school.

Advocacy

Once you have people caring about the issue, the next step is to go and do something about it! Be advocates for social justice and take action against injustice. Examples of things you can do include: (again – this is not a complete list)
Write letters! Start with your Mini Vinnies group then get your class/grade/school to write letters to a government minister telling them how you feel about the injustice and why you think it needs to be changed. Alternatively you can write a letter of companionship/solidarity – e.g.: write to developing school communities overseas, or marginalised communities in Australia; let them know that you are thinking of them, give them a chance for their story to be heard.

Let your community know! Once your school community is educated and cares about an issue, let your local community know. Deliver pamphlets, mail outs. Hold stalls and educate locals on what’s going on.

Discuss with your Mini Vinnies Group about what types of advocacy would work best for your school and send the most powerful message.

**Fundraising Ideas**

Fundraisers commonly run by schools and Mini Vinnies groups include:
- Raffles;
- Guessing competitions (i.e. guess the number of jellybeans in the jar);
- Casual days / crazy sock days;
- Cake stalls;
- Sausage sizzles;
- Coin lines;
- Chocolate drives;
- Rice Day.

These are all good ways of raising money within the school. The best fundraisers, however, are ones which are new and creative, because they generate more interest and can therefore yield greater results.
MINI VINNIES PLEDGE

An example of a Mini Vinnies pledge taken by a Mini Vinnies group:

As a member of Mini Vinnies, I promise to make a difference in my world by:

• Caring for, respecting and loving myself;

• Strengthening my friendship with Jesus by praying each day and talking to others about him;

• Caring for others in my school and community by being a friend to those who are alone, in need or in trouble;

• Contributing to the happiness of my family through my help, respect, consideration, joy and kindness;

• Caring for, appreciating and enjoying God’s creation: the environment;

• Treating others the way I would like them to treat me.
You can contact your local Vinnies Youth Team to get more information about Mini Vinnies, organise a guest speaker, get in touch with other Mini Vinnies groups or Vinnies Conferences, or to have someone come out to your school to present certificates to your Mini Vinnies group or help organise activities. They could also help you to advertise your activities and let everyone else know about your group’s Good Works by putting an article or photo in Vinnies newsletters and magazines. You can also ask about merchandise and materials – prayer cards, badges, wristbands, certificates, balloons, tattoos, brochures, posters etc – to assist you in forming a Mini Vinnies group or running a particular project.

For more information about Mini Vinnies or for any enquiries, please contact the Vinnies Youth Team in your Diocese.

You can find contact details at www.vinnies.org.au or (02) 9568 8666