

Submission

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR MULTICULTURALISM

By

St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn

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INTRODUCTION

The St. Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn (the Society) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission as part of the consultation on the “Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism”. This is our furtherance of our conviction that, the work of the Council is progressive and presents an opportunity that can make Canberra more inclusive and welcoming, than is already the case.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society (the Society) is a member based lay Catholic organisation that has been assisting people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in the region since 1924. We seek to shape a more just and compassionate society by working to address the causes of poverty and injustice, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

As a registered charitable not for profit organisation, we are operational in the Australian Capital Territory and in surrounding southern and western regional areas of New South Wales. The Society’s conference model of support has members¹ of the Society undertake visits to the homes of people experiencing disadvantage, including those at risk of homelessness. Members refer those at risk to our homelessness services, where staff then offer case management, support services, and referral to other agencies to help prevent people becoming homeless.

There are presently² 520 Members, 1482 volunteers and 242 employees working to deliver person-centred support and assistance to those in need in our community.

ABOUT THE TERMS OF REFERENCE - OUR OBSERVATION

The Terms of Reference of the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism addresses comprehensively the 3 key areas that it sets out to be operational in. We observe that the relationships as established in the Terms of Reference is heavily focussed on the Multicultural Community and the ACT Government. This we observe is a direct effect of the provisions of the Multiculturalism ACT 2023 that establishes this Council.

RECOMMENDATION

The recommendations are borne out of the interest of St. Vincent de Paul Society (the Society) in creating a multiculturally friendly environment, and for which, we believe that the Council’s work may potential be important to organisations such as us who may find reasonable course

¹ A Conference Member of the Society is a volunteer who joins a conference and attends regular meetings which include scripture discussion, prayer, reflection and how to improve assistance given within the local conference area. A member takes part in the work of the Society providing assistance through charitable works including home visitation.

² As of January 31, 2023.

to want to engage the Council, but who, under the present Terms of Reference, may encounter difficulties.

ENGAGEMENT

Recommendation 1: Include a set of responsibilities that encourage institutional engagement.

The set of responsibilities captured under the section on engagement is heavily focussed on community and sectoral engagements. What we find as not being prominent, is an attempt to encourage institutional engagement. Members of the Multicultural Community work in organisations across the ACT. It would be a good opportunity to engage institutions to understand how they make policy and regulation to accommodate members of the multicultural community.

***Proposed Wording:** Establish and maintain collaborative engagements with the community sector and business entities on matters that affect multicultural community.*

ADVICE

Recommendation 2: Include a set of responsibilities that allows the Council, to offer advice and services to Institutions on Multicultural issues.

Under this sub-heading, the Council offers advice only to the ACT Government. We believe, as a secondary function or responsibility, the Council may be better positioned to offer advice to institutions and business on the best practices to put in place to make their work environments multiculturally friendly.

***Proposed Wording:** Provide advisory services, in collaboration with the Minister, to community sector organisations, and business institutions on the best practices to put to create a multiculturally friendly workplace.*

PROMOTION

Recommendation 3: Include a set of responsibilities that allows the Council, in collaboration with the ACT Government, to recognise the efforts of organisations that actively live out the principles of multiculturalism.

To advance multiculturalism, organisations, institutions, and businesses must be bought in on the ideals. This would make a lot of impact on the work of the Council. The Council in collaboration with the ACT Government may establish an award scheme, that recognises institutions for that effort.

***Proposed Wording:** Establish a Multicultural Award Scheme to recognise institutions that reflect multicultural ideals.*

ABOUT THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY CANBERRA / GOULBURN

The Society implements many programs that deliver services to a cross section of the vulnerable within the ACT, some of which are outlined below.

Blue Door Program is a drop-in centre located in the middle of Ainslie Village in Canberra. It provides support to those living in the village and beyond in the form of meals, emergency relief material aid, information, referral, and support. The service had about 1,500 drop-ins per month and provided some 34,000 free meals throughout the year.

Community Inclusion Program, which operates out of the Oaks Estate and is designed for people living with psycho-social disabilities who are ineligible for National Disability Insurances Scheme (NDIS) funding. It is funded by an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Grant from the Australian Government. It exists to build innovative ways to increase the independence, social and community participation of people with a psychosocial disability who are ineligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It provides advocacy, support, information, referral case management and the development of activities in response to identified needs. The program supported 276 companions throughout the year.

Emergency Assist Line: Our Canberra based Emergency Relief Helpline links people living in the ACT and Queanbeyan who are in crisis or experiencing hardship with their local volunteer members.

Families and Youth Program provides outreach support services to families and young people in the ACT currently at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness to enable them to access and maintain safe, secure, independent and affordable housing. The program supported 112 families throughout the year.

The volunteer members will contact you to discuss your needs and let you know how they can help. Types of assistance that may be provided include Advocacy support; Food assistance; Transport and travel costs; Health and medical costs; Help with utility bills; Connection to other services; Essential clothing and bedding; and Education Support

Justice Housing Program provides accommodation options for individuals who otherwise would remain in detention due to a lack of suitable community-based accommodation. The program also provides accommodation support services to women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved with the criminal justice system, with a focus on trauma-informed, gender-informed and culturally safe practices. Funded by the ACT Government, the program is a core element of its Building Communities Not Prisons initiative, which seeks to address the lack of available and affordable housing for people released from custody.

Night Patrol operates across Canberra and Queanbeyan on every night of the year from its 2 vans and with the support of 300 volunteers. It provides food, material items such as jackets, sleeping bags and hygiene items, and most importantly, an opportunity to engage socially

with companions who are experiencing homelessness and/or social isolation. It served 7,992 companions throughout the year and provided 5,212 material items.

Refugee and Migrants Program: The Migrant and Refugee Program aims to support children and young people from a migrant or refugee background to feel connected, safe, valued and empowered. Volunteers work one-on-one or in small groups with primary and secondary students using a strengths-based, trauma-informed and relationship focused approach.

Samaritan House is a 13-bed facility in Canberra that provides crisis accommodation and support for men experiencing homelessness, working to break the cycle of chronic and acute homelessness. The service supported 79 men throughout the year.

Street to Home Program supports people who are 'sleeping rough' and/or experiencing long-term chronic homelessness through case management and assertive outreach. The program provided case management to 75 rough sleepers and outreach to 184 more in the last year.

Youth Programs: Vinnies Youth Programs provide young people with a safe, supportive space to connect with a strong support network, make friends and engage in activities that enhance their experience of childhood.

The three programs, St Joseph the Carpenter Youth Program, St Nicholas' Young Carers' Program and VINES are provided free of charge throughout the year and are staffed, facilitated and organised by volunteers.

The programs provide young people with camps and activities that they may not otherwise access due to their caring role, social isolation or financial restraints on their family.

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