

ACT WOMEN'S PLAN 2016-26 PLAN

RESPONSE

SUBMISSION

BY

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY CANBERRA/GOULBURN

FEBRUARY 2023

INTRODUCTION

The St. Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn welcomes the opportunity to make a brief submission as part the 2023-24 ACT Budget Consultation process with the Community Sector being organized by the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) and ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS).

As an active stakeholder with a footprint and presence in the ACT and greater Canberra region, we share our input informed by our experiences in how we have observed the impact of the previous year's budgets in the lives of the segment of society we serve, coupled with our institutional expertise in delivering services in partnership with the ACT Government.

ABOUT THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY CANBERRA / GOULBURN

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 provide material support and can refer those at risk to our homelessness services, where staff then offer case management, support services, and referral to other agencies to help keep people at home.

There are presently² 520 Members, 1482 volunteers and 242 employees working in Vinnies Canberra/Goulburn to deliver person-centred care in the most efficient way possible. The passion and dedication of our members, volunteers and employees is evident in the many programs and services we operate, some of which are outlined below.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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

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.

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

- **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.
- **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.

WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR PROGRAMS

Conference Support

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

In the year 2022, our Conferences have responded to requests received through our Call Centre:

- Women formed 66% of all people who were assisted. This translates to 1527 women in absolute terms.
- 63% of the women (the 66% assisted) fall within the ages of 25-49 years; and 22% fall within the 50-64 years age group.
- Food represented 37% of all requests; followed by travel cost (16%), clothing (14%) and bedding/blankets (10%)

Our Street to Home Project

Street to Home Program (STH) supports people who are 'sleeping rough' and/or experiencing long-term chronic homelessness through case management and assertive outreach.

- Out of the 108 clients supported between 2018-2022, 22 of them were females, accounting for 20% of all clients.
- Women within the ages of 26-35 years represented the group with the greatest need for support.
- A current trend that STH is seeing emerging is younger females who are sleeping rough or have transitioned to becoming rough sleepers.

- A gap that could be noted is that we know there are more female rough sleepers who are going unrecorded as they could be using a friend or family members couch as opposed to actively rough sleeping in the streets.

Family Service and Young Parents Homelessness Services (FYPHS)

FYPHS provide specialist housing services to families and young parents (parents below the ages of 25) in the Australian Capital Territory who are currently at risk of or experiencing, homelessness. The aim of the service is to support participating families to access and maintain safe, secure, independent and affordable housing.

Between 2018-2022,

- **Family Service** supported 324 females and 243 males.
- Of the 324 females supported, 120 (approx. 38%) females stated the main reason for seeking assistance via Family Service was Domestic and Family Violence.
- For families with **the Primary Caregiver being under 25 years**, 96 females and 52 males were supported.
- Of the 96 females supported, 16 females (15%) stated the main reason for seeking assistance via Family Services was Family and Domestic Violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS - ACT WOMEN'S PLAN 2016-26

St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn supports the spirit and intention behind the ACT Women's Plan. The Society is of the belief that the total implementation of the Plan will support the work that the community sector does towards addressing the issues of vulnerability in the ACT.

The recommendations below seek to provide feedback that the Society hopes will strengthen what is already a strong Plan. We share this based on our experience through program delivery.

Housing and Homelessness

We have noticed as part of our work, an increasing number of younger women rough sleeping. In recent times, rough sleeping takes the form of couch surfing among young women.

Recommendations

1. To increase and diversify the support services for all cohorts of women, particularly those under 40 years who may be falling under the radar because they are couch surfing with friends.
2. To engage with appropriate agencies to either fund or increase communication and publicity among younger women who may be at risk of homelessness but unsure of where to get assistance.

Health and Wellbeing

Across our programs, the Society is interacting more and more with younger women, primarily within the age cohorts of 25- 36 years. Of those being at risk of homelessness, the causative factors our case managers have noticed relates to a combination of different factors such as Family and Domestic Violence, mental health, breakdown in relationship with family or partner and rise in the cost of living.

Recommendations

3. We advocate for more funded programs and services that attend to the health and wellbeing of younger women in the ACT.

We note that the 2022-23 ACT Budget allocated \$70 million to mental and community health care support. The Society recommends a proportionate increase in this figure to cater for emerging cohorts such as younger women.

CONCLUSION

The St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn welcomes the opportunity to make a submission as part of the 2016-26 ACT Women's Plan Consultation Process.

Together with our Members, Staff and Volunteers, the Society remains open to further engagement and collaboration with the ACT Government in relation to issues that relates to the advancement of women in the ACT.

CONTACT DETAILS

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