

# Mini Vinnies

STARTER KIT



## 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.

## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as the Traditional Custodians of this land, with deep respect. May Elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.

# Contents

<b>1. What is Mini Vinnies</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. What do they do</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Why start a Mini Vinnies group</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. History of the St Vincent de Paul Society</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. What we do</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6. Vinnies social justice advocacy</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7. Getting your school involved</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>8. Taking action with Mini Vinnies</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>9. Make Mini Vinnies your own</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>10. Mini Vinnies Pledge</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>11. Mini Vinnies Prayer</b>	<b>16</b>



## 1. What is Mini Vinnies

Mini Vinnies empowers primary school students to become advocates within their school and local community by putting their values into action. Students meet regularly to learn about social justice issues, develop leadership skills and engage with the wider Vinnies Community.

## 2. What do they do

Mini Vinnies members, with the guidance of school staff, meet to discuss and raise awareness of social justice issues and organise ways to help others in need within their own school community and beyond.

Mini Vinnies is also a great opportunity for students to reflect on the needs of those they want to help in their community, help shape compassion and understanding with their fellow students, and share their passion to raise awareness about social justice issues.

We offer engaging resources and on-going support to help you empower your students to create a more just and compassionate society today, and to build the foundation for a more equitable future.



### 3. Why Start a Mini Vinnies group

By encouraging your students to get involved, you will be building their capacity to raise awareness about important issues, to fight for social justice, and to be proactive within their school and wider community.

Your school would be joining hundreds of primary schools across Australia working alongside Vinnies to build up the next generation of social justice advocates, and caring, compassionate members of society. It also gives your school the opportunity to recognise and respond to the needs in your local community.

The support of schools such as yours helps us greatly in providing services across Western Australia, including our Emergency Assistance and Support Program, homelessness services, housing services, financial counselling, and mental health services.



## 4. History of the St Vincent de Paul Society

The St Vincent de Paul Society, well-known as Vinnies, is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to assisting those affected by poverty and inequality throughout the world. In striving to achieve our purpose, we employ the ambitions and actions of our founder, Frederic Ozanam.

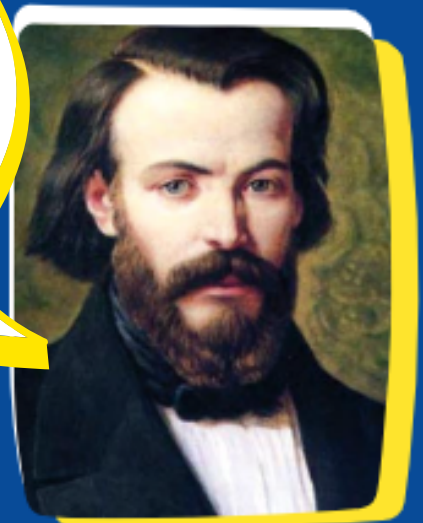
Frederic was a 20-year-old university student who, with no firsthand experience of poverty himself, felt the desire to alleviate the suffering around him in war-torn France in 1833.

Responding to the great poverty in the Paris of his day, he and a group of friends began visiting the homes of those in need, bringing practical assistance of food and firewood, as well as something less tangible - empathy and love.

Frederic and his friends began meeting regularly and formed the first conference. They decided to adopt the name of the St Vincent de Paul Society after the patron saint of charities.

Conference is a French word meaning “coming together”. A Conference is a group of people who get together on a regular basis to meet and discuss ways to address particular needs in their community.

Frederic Ozanam, the Society's founder once said, “Yours must be a work of love and unlimited kindness... 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”.





## 5. What we do

### Vinnies around the world

Vinnies has grown since its beginnings in nineteenth century France, and is now present in 153 countries helping over 30 million people daily. In the heart of all that we do is connection; we support a range of people including families, young people, the elderly, people experiencing homelessness, refugees and migrants and people who are sick.

We also work to care for our common home through sustainability and recycling initiatives.

### Vinnies in Western Australia

In addition to our Vinnies Shops, which are often seen as the ‘front door’ to our organisation, Vinnies provides a number of community support programs across Western Australia.

At the very core of Vinnies is our Emergency Assistance and Support Program , in which conference members provide support to people experiencing hardships through assistance with food, clothing, furniture and more. In this work, our members also maintain community pantries which can be supported by local schools through non-perishable food drives and donations.

**Vinnies also facilitates programs that aim to service a need identified within the community, these include:**

- Financial Counselling
- Homelessness services
- Drop-in support for vulnerable youth
- Community Hubs
- Accommodation services (including emergency, short and long-term accommodation)
- Christmas gifts and hampers
- Advocacy initiatives
- Vinnies Youth Engagement programs

For more info visit the ‘[Get Involved](http://www.vinnies.org.au/wa)’ page at [www.vinnies.org.au/wa](http://www.vinnies.org.au/wa)



## 6. Vinnies social justice advocacy

St Vincent de Paul Society members cannot see injustice and let it go unchallenged. We advocate on behalf of the people we assist and speak out on the barriers that keep people in a cycle of poverty and disadvantage. We call for solutions to injustice by engaging government, working with other agencies and raising awareness across the community.

### **Our key areas of advocacy include:**

- Income Support, Poverty and Debt
- Australia's First Nations People
- A Fairer Tax and Welfare System
- Housing and Homelessness
- People Seeking Asylum and Refugees
- Energy Cost Awareness

Schools can play a key role in this advocacy work by running awareness-raising campaigns, participating in Society initiatives such as, the Vinnies School Sleepout, Winter and Christmas Appeal, and raising funds for our work engaging government and other agencies to enact change.

Together we can work towards addressing entrenched injustice and create a fairer society.





## 7. Getting your school involved

### 1 Let your school know

Let your school's executive staff know you'd like to start a group in the school.

Let the children in your school know what Mini Vinnies is all about and find out if they are interested in forming a group. Generally students in Years 4, 5, 6 are best suited, though each school is different.

If you already have a social justice group, Mini Vinnies activities can be a great source of information and discussion points to add to your program, and connecting your group with Vinnies can help the group to explore current needs within their community.

### 2 Find a coordinating staff member

Find a coordinating staff member (if not yourself) to help the group and offer supervision. This could be any staff member within the school who is willing to support these students to learn about social justice issues, think of ideas to make a positive change, and help them run awareness-raising and fundraising activities.

Their role is to guide group discussions, help the students put their passion and ideas into action, and support the children in their individual and collective growth.

### **Generally, we ask that this coordinator:**

- Organises regular group meetings
- Helps their group learn and think in new ways – there's some great resources online to help. See the 'Get Involved' section at [www.vinnies.org.au/wa](http://www.vinnies.org.au/wa)
- Keeps in touch with their local Vinnies team so we can support you and share your successes with others
- Makes sure activities are safe, and that students have permission slips, etc, if/when needed

## **3 Connect with your local Vinnies team**

Form a connection with your local Vinnies team – our contact details are in the back of this booklet! We have dedicated youth engagement staff who are able and excited to support you in this work.

There are also Conferences in most regions that can present to students about the Society and the work they do to assist the local community. To start this relationship, you can organise for them to speak with students about Mini Vinnies and drum up interest in forming a group.

## **4 Recruit Mini Vinnies Members**

Recruit your Mini Vinnies members and hold your first meeting. Put posters around school, make daily notices, and assembly announcements to invite students to join.

Make your first meeting fun and exciting, share a bit about Vinnies and what the group is all about, and include a nice reflection about positive change.

Start a brainstorming session about some of the issues the students care about and what they could do to help. Your group can choose how structured or relaxed it would like its meetings to be - there is also an example activity at this end of this book to get you started.

## **5 Recognise their commitment**

[Optional] Hold a Commissioning Ceremony to recognise your students' commitment to helping others and identify them as leaders in the school. This can be part of an assembly or special event, and usually the students are thanked and presented with a certificate and a Vinnies badge by the school principal or a representative from Vinnies.

Visit [www.vinnies.org.au/wa](http://www.vinnies.org.au/wa) for more information and get in touch with your local Vinnies team to arrange the badges and to request a representative to attend on the day.

## 8. Taking action with mini Vinnies

An easy mantra we like to teach our Mini Vinnies students that can help to guide meetings is to See, Think and Do. This is a model adapted from the Young Christian Workers movement.

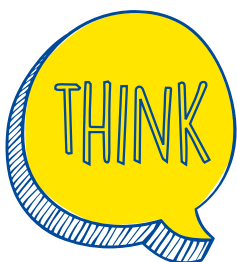


An opportunity for students to learn about some of the social justice issues affecting people in their community and beyond.

This stage helps students to develop empathy for those in need, and challenges them to recognise what social injustices exist in their local and wider communities.

This can be done in a structured way where they learn about the topic in the meeting, or informally through reflection and activities.

Images, videos and stories are helpful tools to make it easier for students to relate and engage with these topics.



Develop the students' understanding of social justice issues in a personal way through reflection, research, discussion and expression.

Reflect on what can be done about this issue – what can they do about this issue, individually and as a group? Ideas and guidance can come from your local Vinnies conference or local Vinnies Youth team.

This can be done during meetings or at home, however it's important to not rush this step.

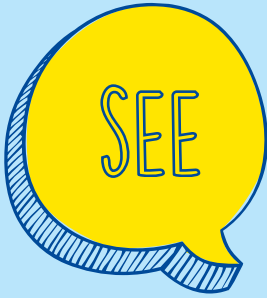


A time for action - the students' enthusiasm will be needed at this stage.

It's really up to them (provided it's safe and appropriate) to make decisions about what actions to take.

Your students may want to share a positive thought for those experiencing disadvantage or create a poster to put up around the school about the importance of keeping the playground tidy, fundraising for a specific issue or looking out for one another.

## Example

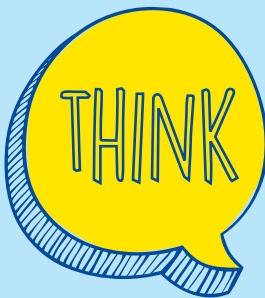


A student was in the city with their family and saw someone sleeping outside. They observed that the person had a sleeping bag and was using a rolled-up jumper as a pillow.

The student asked their family why someone would be camping in the city. Their family said that the person was most likely “sleeping rough” and didn’t have a choice.

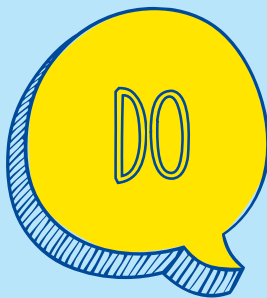
When the student went to school the next day, they asked their Mini Vinnies teacher if they could learn more about sleeping rough.

The Mini Vinnies teacher found some videos explaining homelessness and used the Vinnies Winter Appeal Kit to find activities they could do with their Mini Vinnies group.



After learning about homelessness, the Mini Vinnies teacher leads the students through a discussion about what they think they could do to help, individually and as a school.

The students decided they would like to do a fun fundraiser for people to remember!



The Mini Vinnies group hosts a whole school Talent Show during lunch. Anyone can perform and audience members give a gold coin for their entry fee.

The Mini Vinnies group has a bake sale near the entry point to raise further funds. They raised \$503 which they donated to a charity that helps people experiencing homelessness.



## 9. Make Mini Vinnies your own

How you decide to run Mini Vinnies to best fit your school is up to you. Some ideas below may guide you to for how to engage throughout the year.

### Awareness raising & advocacy

#### **Educate others in your school community about injustices:**

- Present at an assembly
- Hold a stall or event that draws attention to that issue
- Make posters to display around the schools

#### **Then start advocating for change:**

- Write letters to a government representative or local council telling them how you feel about the injustice and why it needs to be changed.
- Write a letter of compassion/solidarity to those experiencing hardship.
- Collect signatures for a petition.

### Appeals

Our two national appeals at winter and Christmas time help raise much needed funds to assist people experiencing hardship at these difficult times of year.

The Winter Appeal seeks donations of food and blankets, and the Christmas Appeal calls for donations of food, toys and gift cards to create Christmas Hampers for local families.

### Sleepout

A national initiative to give people a small glimpse into the realities of homelessness by 'sleeping rough' for a night in the middle of winter, whilst raising awareness and funds to provide crucial assistance to people experiencing homelessness. Schools and unis across Australia host Sleepouts, as well as the hundreds of community groups and CEOs.

This program can be modified to better suit Mini Vinnies by running an evening rather than a full night. For more information visit [fundraise.vinnieswa.org.au/sleepouts](https://fundraise.vinnieswa.org.au/sleepouts) or speak with your local Vinnies Youth Engagement team.



## Other fundraising opportunities

Support a student in an overseas country to get an education through our Vinnies Assist a Student program.

Visit [www.donate.vinnies.org.au/assist-a-student](http://www.donate.vinnies.org.au/assist-a-student) for more information.

## Other fundraising opportunities

Be as creative as you want – crazy sock days, rice days, pyjama days, etc.

## Supporting people

There are many ways to support your community through a Mini Vinnies group! Reach out to those in your community who are disadvantaged or isolated to see how you can help. How about visiting the local nursing home or setting up a buddy system to support isolated students in your school?

**For additional resources or support, reach out to your Youth Engagement Coordinator. They are here to support the work you are doing in schools, and can offer ideas, resources, and suggestions.**





## Mini Vinnies Pledge

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

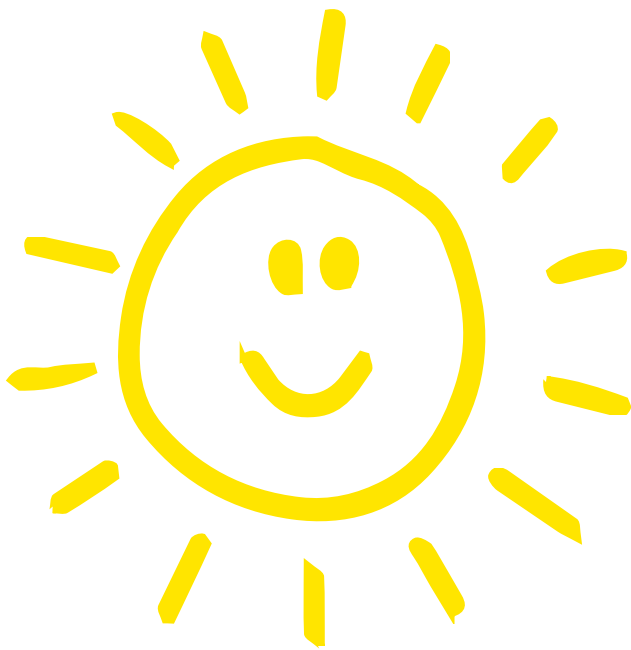
Caring for, respecting and loving myself.

Caring for others in my school and social community by  
befriending those who are alone, in need or in trouble.

Contributing to the happiness of my family by my willing help,  
respect, consideration, joy and kindness.

Caring for, appreciating, enjoying and nurturing the  
world around us – the environment.

Treating others the way I would like them to treat me.



## Mini Vinnies Prayer

Lord, open our eyes that we may see the  
deepest needs of your people.

Move our hands that we may feed the hungry.  
Touch our hearts that they may bring warmth to those who are sad.

Let us share our time and possessions  
with those in need.

Give us the care that strengthens the sick.  
May we all be a source of support and  
encouragement for each other as we strive  
to build a more loving society.

AMEN.



While this pledge and prayer has been widely  
adopted by Mini Vinnies groups, you  
may adapt them to suit your school's needs.







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