

## **Vinnies NSW Future Directions**

The St. Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies) has been established in NSW for 131 years. In this time, the Society has worked to meet the needs of the poor and marginalised in our communities, and has adapted to meet new challenges in ensuring that someone advocates for those who are voiceless or powerless.

In NSW we have 23,922 dedicated people consisting of 8,801 members and 15,121 volunteers endeavouring to meet the needs of those people in need. In the last financial year, we assisted 682,029 people through 202,344 home visitations, 15,134 visitations to hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, and through our Special Works. We spent over \$58 million in accomplishing this crucial work.

This large organisation is co-ordinated by 418 conferences, 215 Youth & Young Adult Conferences, 59 Regional Councils, 10 Diocesan Central Councils and the NSW State Council. We have 103 Special Works catering for the disadvantaged, disabled and homeless. Vinnies also operate 253 Centres which not only help fund these works through the sale of clothes and other goods, but also provide direct assistance to those struggling to make ends meet. All of these activities are supported by a number employees throughout the state.

It is obvious from the above, that Vinnies is a significant and important entity. With the advent of the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) in July this year, all charities will come under closer scrutiny by the Federal Government. The main aim of this Commission is to improve public trust and confidence in the sector, through promoting good governance, accountability and transparency.

To meet these requirements, the NSW State Council has seen the need to incorporate as a company limited by guarantee. It is also imperative that we have a map for the future. This will be accomplished by developing a Strategic Plan that will identify future goals and the resources needed to accomplish them. Our Rule states, "The Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions. It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those most rejected by the society". This statement is a huge challenge to all of us in the Society to stop and take a look at what we are doing in order to meet the current needs of the poor. Our last plan was issued in 1994 and titled "Vision 2000". Seventeen years later, it is now time to reassess the situation.

One of the key ingredients in any Strategic Plan is to ensure sufficient resources are available to maintain existing services and cover any new initiatives to be undertaken. The majority of our current Members are in the 61 to 80+ years of age group with a median age of 68.57 years. It is obvious that if this trend continues, our total Member numbers will dwindle over the next ten years.

The Society is making inroads with young children and young adults through its Mini Vinnies programs in primary schools across the state and in secondary schools, where there are some excellent people involved in Youth Conferences undertaking fundraising and other initiatives. Universities too, see a relatively large number of people helping the Society carry out its various activities.

However, people in the 25 to 55 years age group are very scarce in the Society. In years past, this was the strongest cohort within Vinnies. There are a multitude of reasons for the downturn in this age group; a problem also shared by the Church. Our challenge then is, 'How can we revitalise ourselves sufficiently to encourage new members in this age group to join the Society?'

In answering this question, we must firstly consider the changing environment in which the Society now functions, the challenges and opportunities for our organisation, as well as our strengths in order to mark a clear way forward.

Extended periods of participation in education and increased involvement, especially of women, in paid employment, have contributed to shaping family relationships and circumstances, which today differ substantially from the patterns of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The average family size has become smaller and many women now become mothers much later than in previous generations. Many children also live with one parent. Current trends indicate that one in three marriages will end in divorce and just under half of these divorces occur among couples with children under 18 years of age. This means that each year, around 50,000 children experience the divorce of their parents. This can impact on youth homelessness and the need more youth services.

Vinnies also now moves in a much more competitive environment, with over 600,000 charities operating within Australia. Vinnies is providing services in a diverse range of areas which means that it is competing with a number of other charities for funding, donations, members and volunteers.

Some of the challenges we face is the recruitment of new members and volunteers in order to address long term sustainability, meeting the increasing demands of government in order to secure funding, and adapting our service provision to meet the changing family relationships and the new face of the poor and disadvantaged. These are just a few of the challenges we face, and there are many more that we will have to consider.

The Society has many strengths such as a strong commitment to our faith and helping people in need, a dedicated group of members, volunteers and support staff, and a strong income source from our Vinnies Centres, which means that we are not as heavily reliant on government funding or donations as other charities.

Vinnies also has some opportunities including using our asset portfolio to invest in improving existing services and delivering new services. With an increased demand on our

services, we also have a great opportunity to build stronger relationships with businesses and other charities.

In order to establish a Strategic Plan, we have engaged consultants called Noetic Solutions. They have an excellent track record in assisting organisations in preparing Strategic Plans. The NSW Provisional Board has appointed a Strategic Planning Committee to work with Noetic.

It is important for any Strategic Plan, to have ownership. Experience has shown that to achieve this ownership, the genesis of the plan should begin at the grass roots.

Noetic will soon begin consultations with the membership, volunteers, staff, clients, government representatives, the church, benefactors, sponsors and community sector partners. These consultations will gather a broad range of information about Vinnies including but not limited to what we are doing now, what we should be doing and the general perception of Vinnies. These consultations will provide the research and evidence base for the development of a Strategic Plan which will set out the future direction of the Society.

It will ensure that we have a strong understanding of where the Society fits into the external environment and what its major internal drivers are before developing a future strategic direction.

It will ensure that the Strategic Plan is not just a collection of good ideas but a plan that provides clear strategic direction and objectives, and most importantly tangible outcomes.

Ray Reynolds  
President, NSW Provisional Board