



Welcome to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Social Justice Newsletter for June 2024

2024 NSW Social Justice Forum wrap-up

We were delighted to see so many members, volunteers and staff at the Society NSW's Social Justice Forum last weekend. Over 110 people came together to hear enlightening discussions on our state's pressing social issues and to workshop actions they can take in their local communities to drive change. Participants heard from over 20 speakers, including NSW Rental Commission Trina Jones, NSW President Planning Institute of Australia Sue Weatherley, Shelter NSW CEO John Engler, and Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Executive Officer Dr Lisa Buxton, along lived experience experts, Bryson and Amy, and our Forum highlight, Mini Vinnies, Maeve Engler.

Following an informative plenary panel discussion on whether increased housing supply will deliver more affordable homes, workshops were held on First Nations Justice, fair treatment for people who use drugs and alcohol, and making the private rental housing market work for people on low-incomes. Attendees also learned skills about engaging with their MPs, how to draw on the stories of the people we assist in our advocacy, and how to build a local network to advocate for change in communities.

The afternoon plenary session saw participants draw upon the skills and knowledge shared in the earlier workshops to identify social issues in their local community and to workshop actions they could take to advocate for change. The Forum presentations and recordings of the sessions will be progressively posted on our newly updated [NSW social justice website](#), and the following sessions are now available to view:

- [Spiritual reflection](#) (Mary Ryan, State Council Vice President, Mission & Spirituality)
- [Opening address](#) (Yolanda Saiz, CEO)
- [Closing address](#) (John Adams, A/NSW President)

Our deep thanks to everyone who attended, spoke and volunteered their time to make the day such a success. We will bring you more highlights in upcoming editions of this newsletter.



Now more than ever - Reconciliation Week 2024

Last month the Society NSW marked [National Reconciliation Week](#) with an online event featuring Elders Uncle Raymond Dennison and Uncle Kelvin Brown, along with our First Nations staff members, Paige Williams from the Matthew Talbot Hostel and Samantha McGuire, First Nations Engagement Manager (pictured below). They reminded us that reconciliation must be in our hearts and in our everyday actions.

The event demonstrated the Society NSW's genuine commitment to embedding reconciliation into the fabric of our workplace culture by creating space for genuine connection, understanding and collaboration between our First Nations people and communities and non-First Nations staff. National Reconciliation Week is a time for us to honour First Nations peoples' and communities' resilience, contribution and diverse cultures, while acknowledging past and present injustices. It is an opportunity for all Australians to pause, reflect and engage in the reconciliation journey.

The Society has a long standing commitment to reconciliation. Around 1 in 5 people we assist identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, climbing up to 4 in 5 people in some areas. It is clear that we have a real opportunity, and responsibility, to positively influence change and to drive reconciliation within the communities we assist and within our sphere of influence. The Society NSW's new Reconciliation Action Plan set to launch later this year, focuses heavily on relationships, as we know these are essential if we are to walk alongside First Nations people and communities towards a just and compassionate society.

We cannot do this alone. We need your help, and we need to work together. Read more about the [Society NSW's approach to reconciliation on our new member and volunteer portal](#).



Federal budget fails to deliver for people doing it tough

The 2024-24 Federal Budget was released last month and the Society has welcomed announcements regarding social and affordable housing, small increases in Commonwealth Rent Assistance and capping PBS medicine prices. However, the [Society's National President, Mark Gaetani](#) noted that little extra funding has been allocated to helping people relying on income support payments or very low wages, leaving thousands of people living below the poverty line. In NSW, attendance at Vinnies food vans has increased by 125% over the past year alone.

We attended the ACOSS post-budget briefing, where Treasurer Jim Chalmers highlighted the government's targeted budget measures including tax cut changes, Medicare incentives, medicine increases, rent assistance increases and social and affordable housing investment. ACOSS CEO, [Cassandra Goldie observed the budget correctly identified the issues](#) facing us - a slowing economy, housing and cost-of-living crisis and climate crisis - but it did not deliver the right solutions. She said direct action to tackle inflation was not targeted to those people worst affected. The budget takes an inverse approach to cost-of-living relief, with too much for those who do not need it, yet too little for those who do. She forecast the result will be worsening inequality across the country.

Read our [National Council's budget recommendations](#) and join calls for the Federal Government to [urgently increase the rate of Job Seeker and other income support payments here](#).



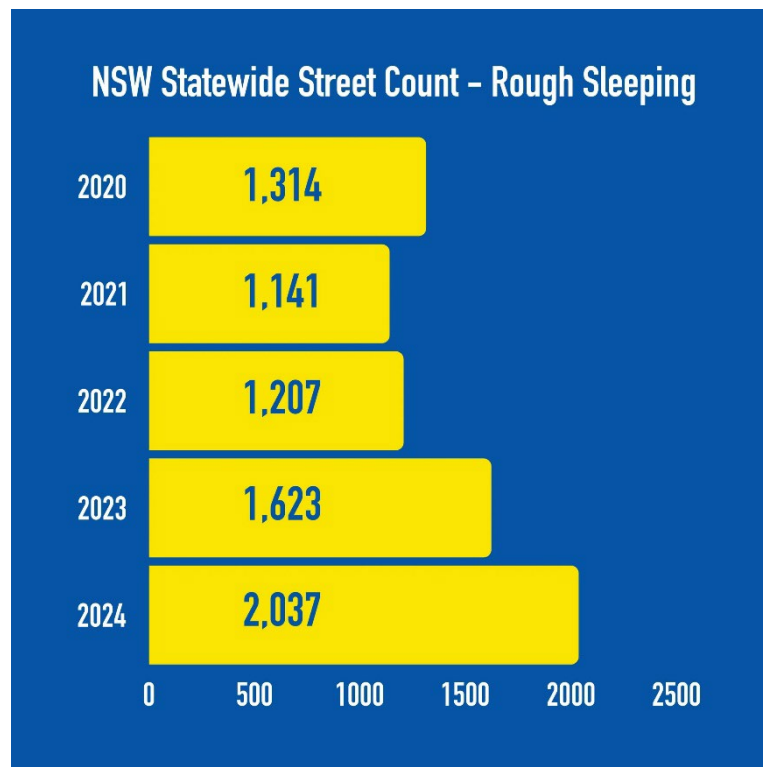
Rough sleeping increase highlights urgent need for more social homes

[New data](#) shows the numbers of people sleeping rough across the state has increased by 26% in just 12 months. In particular, Coffs Harbour, Byron Shire, Newcastle, Northern Beaches, Mid Coast and Liverpool saw a significant increase. NSW Street Count data shows the numbers of people sleeping rough has increased by 69% in just the past two years. The Society NSW's North East Regional Director cautioned this figure only represents the tip of the problem, with many other people experiencing homelessness including those couch surfing or sleeping in the cars or boarding houses.

NSW homelessness services are at capacity with an [88% increase in unmet demand over the last three years](#), and for those who are able to access support, they are staying for longer periods due to a lack of available social and affordable housing. Over the past five years, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW housing and homelessness services have seen a 177%

increase (186 days) in the average length of time it is taking someone to secure a housing outcome.

We are calling on the NSW Government to urgently invest in more frontline homelessness services and to make a transformational investment in social housing in the upcoming State Budget this month. Read our recommendations in full in our [2024-25 NSW Pre-Budget Submission](#).



First Nations justice - Raise the Age advocacy

Did you know that in NSW children as young as 10 years old can be arrested by police, charged with an offence, taken before a court and locked away in prison?

The Society NSW supports reform to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to 14 years old, in particular to help reduce incarceration rates of First Nations children and to improve Closing the Gap targets. [Community-led alternatives to prison](#) are needed, as research shows that children do best when nurtured, loved and supported in communities. The [Raise the Age NSW campaign](#), of which the Society NSW is a partner together with 100 other organisations, is one way that we can raise awareness about this critical legal reform.

We recently signed on as a supporter to the #RaiseTheAge submission to the [NSW Parliamentary](#) inquiry about community safety in rural and regional NSW. The submission focuses on evidence based services and supports that First Nations communities need and recommended the NSW government should invest in more early intervention and prevention, better resource Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and interventions that help kids learn to be accountable, along with raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

Learn more and take action: [Join the #RaiseTheAge.](#)



Renters have their say about making renting secure, affordable and fair

People who rent should have [stable, healthy and affordable homes](#). But with new data showing only 2% of rental homes in Sydney costing less than \$400 per week compared to more than 20% pre-pandemic, this vision is far from the reality for the more than 2 million people who live in a rental home.

With rental housing a priority issue for our members, the Society NSW was pleased to help facilitate the first NSW Renters Forum hosted by the Tenant's Union NSW and Sydney Alliance last month. Close to 60 renters gathered in Sydney to have their say about renting as it currently is and how it should be. The NSW Rental Commissioner, Trina Jones, along with local members of Parliament, Jenny Leong (Newton) and Kobi Shetty (Balmain) attended to

listen to the concerns of renters and take away the issues and solutions to help shape a better future for renters.

If you are a renter and missed out on the first forum, don't worry, there will be more forums in the Sydney, Illawarra and Hunter regions in the coming months:

- [Revesby, Southwest Sydney - 26 June 2024.](#)
- [Blacktown, Northwest Sydney - 24 July 2024.](#)
- More dates and locations coming soon - [see here for updates.](#)



Refugee Week 2024: Finding Freedom

This month marks [Refugee Week 2024](#) from Sunday 16 June to Saturday 22 June 2024 with the theme of Finding Freedom. It follows in the wake of [\\$20m being cut from the Status Resolution Support Service program](#) in the recent federal budget. Our [National Council had called for the program to be increased](#) given years of successive funding cuts. More welcome was \$121 million for refugee settlement and new measures to support people who have been displaced due to the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

The Society NSW's new *Migrant and Refugee Community of Practice* met with [NSW Refugee Health](#) last month to better understand the healthcare support they provide to people seeking asylum in NSW. They also provided information on a NSW Health fee waiver that is available for people seeking asylum if they find themselves in need of urgent emergency health care. If you are a Society NSW member, volunteer or employee who is supporting refugees, people seeking asylum, temporary visa holders or other vulnerable migrants and would like to learn more about the Community of Practice, please email social.justice@vinnies.org.au.



Reflections from Leo Tucker, Mission and Spirituality

...We're afraid. Terrified. This big, brash wealthy country. We have an irrational phobia. We're afraid of strangers. Not rich strangers. No. The ones who frighten us out of our wits are the poor strangers. People displaced by war and persecution. We're even scared of their traumatised children. And if they flee their war-torn countries in boats, well, then, they're twice as threatening. They send us into the wild-eyed conniptions. As if they're armed invaders. But these people arrive with nothing but the sweat on their backs and a crying need for safe refuge. Yet, they terrify us. So great and so wild is our fear, we can no longer see them as people, as fellow humans.

I read this quote from renowned Australian author Tim Winton and there is certainly much to reflect on as a Society, with a strong history and legacy in advocacy and the work we do to "shape a just and compassionate society". For us the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is radically people-centred with empowerment at our heart. People are never to be treated as transactions or commodities, nor are they just as mere receivers of assistance.

Pope Francis in a World Day of the Poor statement expressed that; *Unless we choose to become poor in passing riches, worldly power and vanity, we will never be able to give our lives in love; we will live a fragmented existence, full of good intentions but ineffective for transforming the world.* In these statements we are called to not just accept others but to embrace all people regardless of all labels and status, profoundly because they hold the grace and dignity of humanity.

There is a truth to Winston's strong robust statements, and it is a continuing challenge to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW to change and open hearts to the plights of the disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised. The Society NSW's focus remains on seeing Christ in the face of those who experience poverty or disadvantage as we are called to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. May we embrace the essence of Winston's reflections as we strive in our call to justice and compassion in our local

communities, and in the wider Australia landscape, not just because it is 'the right thing to do' but because as Vincentians we are called without judgement or fear, to stand side by side in solidarity for all in need.



Events

What is Coercive Control?

14 June, 10am - 12pm

Warringa Baiya, Redfern

Email info@warringabaiya.org.au for more information

Foundations of Community Organising (2 day) training

4 & 5 July 2024

Sydney Alliance

[Click here to learn more and register](#)

Refugee Week 2024

16 - 22 June 2024

[Click here](#) to learn more and find local events to attend

Tattoos on the Heart - The Power of Boundless Compassion

3 - 18 October

GPBS & Father Greg Boyle, SJ

[Click here to learn more and register](#)

**Do you have a local social justice event or news item to share?
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St Vincent de Paul Society

NSW

good works