

Mini Vinnies



STARTER KIT



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

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.

"THE CHILDREN LOVE THE EXPERIENCE OF HELPING OTHERS AND THEY ARE ALSO INVOLVED IN FUN ACTIVITIES WHILE FUNDRAISING FOR THEIR LOCAL VINNIES. WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT IS THAT THE CHILDREN FEEL PART OF A COMMUNITY AND THIS GIVES THEM A GREAT SENSE OF PRIDE. IT ALSO HELPS THE TRANSITION INTO HIGH SCHOOL AS THEY'RE FAMILIAR WITH VINNIES AND THE VALUES IT INSTILLS."



The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW acknowledges 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.

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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. They meet regularly to learn about social justice issues, develop leadership skills and engage with the wider St Vincent de Paul Society.

WHAT DO THEY DO?

This group of students, with the guidance of 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.

It 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.

WHY START A MINI VINNIES GROUP?

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.

Mini Vinnies gives your school the opportunity to raise awareness about and respond to the needs in your local community. It helps young people become active contributors to a more just and inclusive society — starting right in their own school.

The Vinnies Schools and Youth teams offer engaging resources and ongoing support to complement your school curriculum and help you empower your students to create a more just and compassionate society today, and to build the foundation for a more equitable future.

By getting your school involved, you will be helping the St Vincent de Paul Society's services, members and volunteers provide food relief, clothing, bills or rental assistance, crisis accommodation and emotional support to people right across NSW.

HISTORY OF THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a community of people who work towards the alleviation of poverty and suffering throughout the world.

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 town 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.

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. Conferences are still an essential component of the work of the Society, with many connected to Catholic parishes. Contact your local Vinnies Schools and Youth representative to find out how your school can support a conference.

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".



Use our Mini Vinnies Resources at youthnsw.vinnies.org.au to help your students learn about the history of the Society!

Likes to
Holiday
lie



SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY

St Vincent de Paul Society members cannot see injustice and let it go unchallenged. We feel compelled to raise our voice; to 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 Social Justice network offers practical solutions to effect change on issues such as:

- 1 Ending homelessness
- 2 Social and affordable housing
- 3 Cost of living pressures
- 4 First Nations justice
- 5 Climate justice

Schools can play a key role in this advocacy work by running awareness-raising campaigns and collecting petition signatures in the school community, 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.



Check vinnies.org.au/nsw/advocacy for our current campaigns and how you can get involved.





GETTING YOUR SCHOOL INVOLVED

1 Spark Interest

Start by getting your school's leadership team on board. Then, build excitement among students, especially those in Years 4 – 6, by sharing what Mini Vinnies is all about. Every student is different, so aim to inspire your whole school community. Already have a social justice group? Great! Mini Vinnies can complement it beautifully.

2 Find a Champion

Appoint a teacher or staff member to lead the way. They'll use Vinnies' online resources to help run meetings, guide activities, and connect with the wider Vinnies network. Their role? To help students turn passion into action, growing individually and as a group.



3 Make Local Connections

Reach out to your local Vinnies team! Our schools staff and local Conferences are ready to support you. Invite them to speak at your school and share how Vinnies helps the community. It's a great way to inspire students and kickstart your group.

4 Build Your Team

Spread the word! Use posters, announcements, and assemblies to promote your group. Host a fun first meeting with reflection and brainstorming. Want to assign roles like President or Spiritual Advisor? Go for it!

5 Celebrate the Launch

Hold a Commissioning Ceremony to honour your students' commitment. Make it part of an assembly or special event. Hand out certificates and badges and invite Vinnies representatives to join the celebration.

6 Keep the Momentum Going

Recognise your Mini Vinnies group throughout the year! Use Vinnies' certificates and awards to celebrate students who show compassion, leadership, and dedication. Present them at assemblies, graduations, or end-of-year events. Invite Vinnies to be part of the moment.



TAKING ACTION MINI VINNIES STYLE

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



SEE

An opportunity for students to be exposed to some of the social justice issues affecting people in their community and beyond. This stage helps students develop empathy for those in need.

Mini Vinnies should offer a safe and structured environment for children to learn about disadvantage and social justice issues in a caring and empathetic way. Images, videos and stories are helpful tools to make it easier for students to relate and engage with these topics in a practical sense.

Students learn to:

- Look for and identify injustices in the world around them, such as the unfair treatment of those experiencing homelessness and unequal access to resources such as education, water, and medicine.
- Consider how other people may not have been as fortunate as them.
- Learn about what's happening in their local community and the world around them in a fun and exciting way that will complement curriculum learning.



THINK

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?

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



DO

The students' enthusiasm will be needed at this stage! It's really up to them (provided it's safe and appropriate) to come up with ideas of how to help and make decisions about what actions to take.

It may be as simple as sharing a positive thought for those suffering or creating a poster to put up around the school about the importance of keeping the playground tidy or looking out for one another.

Of course, your group might choose to take some bigger actions, such as:

Awareness raising & advocacy

Educate others in your school community about these injustices:

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

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, held during winter and Christmas time, help raise much-needed funds to support people experiencing hardship at these difficult times of the year. Schools can also donate food, gift cards, toiletries, and other items, depending on local needs.

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 universities across Australia host Sleepouts, as well as hundreds of community groups and CEOs, with many primary schools adapting this as a 'stay out' or 'stay late' event.

Other fundraising opportunities

Be as creative as you want – coin lines, rice days, pyjama days, etc.

Supporting people

Reach out to those in your community who are disadvantaged or isolated. How about visiting the local nursing home or setting up a buddy system to support isolated students in your school.



An example to get you started:

SEE

- As a group discuss some of the opportunities you have in your day-to-day lives (write them on a mind map if this helps).
- List some of the opportunities that other young people might be missing out on if they are experiencing disadvantage.
- How would you feel if you were to go without these opportunities? What other problems can arise from missing out on these opportunities?
- Reflect on how one missed opportunity often leads to missing out on opportunities in other areas which in turn leads to greater disadvantage.
- Why do these disadvantages exist? Try researching what are some cost of living pressures, starting at vinnies.org.au.

THINK

- Share the information you found about the above issues and what support is available to help these people.
- Draw a big mind map of how we could support families struggling with these cost of living pressures – don't be afraid to dream big!
- Who can you talk to about these concerns to try to create some change – your principal, your mayor, your local member of parliament?

DO

- As a group make a shortlist of some of the achievable actions from your mind map that you could do as a group.
- Note which items you can do anytime like “ask someone if they're sad” or “donate some clothes to Vinnies that don't fit me but are still good quality”, and note which ones need a bit more planning and support to get started.
- Now it's time to take those actions!





An example of a Mini Vinnies pledge taken
by a Mini Vinnies group:

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.

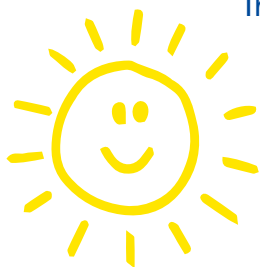
Strengthening my friendship with Jesus by praying each day and
understanding his compassion for those in need.

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 God's creation –
the environment.

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



An example of a Mini Vinnies Prayer that can be used for meetings and events:

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.



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YOUTHNSW.VINNIES.ORG.AU