

THE



SPRING 2015

# BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



**GOVERNMENT CAUSES  
SOCIAL DIVISION**

**THE PLIGHT OF MEN  
WHO LIVE ALONE**

**DEMENTIA DESTROYS  
35,000 IRISH PEOPLE**

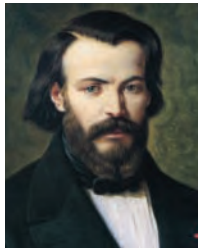
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THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND



## **CREE INDIAN PROPHECY**

Only when the last tree has died  
And when the last river has been poisoned  
And the last fish been caught  
Will we realise we cannot eat money



This magazine is named in honour of the principal founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Frederic Ozanam

# THE IRISH SVP OZANAM BULLETIN

SPRING 2015  
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## PROPER WORDS IN PROPER PLACES

Twenty-five years is a long time editing a magazine. Over that quarter-century The SVP Bulletin has changed from a black-and-white format to a much larger magazine in full colour; as technology changed from typewriter to computer; paste to digital design, encompassed the use of mobile telecommunications and adaptation to social media. During those years the Society has also 'come out' from a somewhat hidden, anonymous background, where it was neither heard nor seen in public, though still carrying out its dedicated work effectively. A voice for social justice for the deprived, the forgotten, those

in need of assistance, was required and the Society transformed itself into that role, where members can now be seen and heard and where the Society has become a respected, trusted and effective voice to Government and its State services and also in dealing with commercial interests. The SVP has effectively challenged, opposed and welcomed, as appropriate, on issues and developments, always bearing in mind that it is a voice for the less fortunate in Irish life.

I leave the post of Editor of The SVP Bulletin, looking back on that quarter-century where The SVP Bulletin has been a tool in the work of the Society, conveying its voice in public, its content quoted in the media and in debates in the Dáil and Senate and in the Stormont Assembly on relevant issues.

I have been a member of the SVP for over 40 years and my family connection with the Society goes back even longer; to the 1920s. The Society's work has always been dedicated towards those in need and in current times, there is a lot of resentment in Ireland, much of it amongst those struggling to live because they are suffering the ravages of austerity imposed on them by the greed of those who have not been penalised. There remains failure at Government level to understand the reality that there are people who do not have enough to live on in Ireland, who are deprived of hope and a future, while those interests which caused the Irish economic collapse are recovering their position and once again creating a nation of 'haves' and 'have-nots' - creating a social situation against which this magazine, representing the voice of the SVP, has warned for many years.

"Proper words in proper places make the true definition of style," wrote Jonathan Swift.

"Christianity, hope, humanity," are words which have regularly been printed under my editorship in this magazine during the past 25 years .... 'Christianity,' to embrace all people in a Christian way, following the teachings of Jesus Christ; 'Hope' which the Society can provide to those it helps and 'Humanity,' a most important asset in working for social justice .....

With those thoughts, I leave the editorship of The SVP Bulletin.

NATIONAL PRESIDENT  
GEOFF MEAGHER

OPINION

# EMPHASIS ON SELF SUFFICIENCY



In recent issues I have noted the work of the Society in being part of the national debate as to how we can make Ireland a better and more equal place for all of our citizens, where there is equality and opportunity for everyone and where we have policies that focus on people as much as on economic issues. That debate and our input will be ongoing over the coming months.

The Society is already playing its part in providing equality for many people. Our Members across the country assist people in need. We are making on average in the order of eight thousand home visitations every week. Therefore we know at first-hand the challenges being faced by households, the reasons for the need are varied depending on individual circumstances.

As part of our work SVP Members are in many instances trying to help in getting the person or persons in need of help back to some form of sustainability where they can manage their own affairs without the assistance of the Society or any other charity. In this way we respect the dignity of the person and meet a key part of the mission of the Society which is to find longer-term solutions.

This approach by members of the Society is increasing across the country with considerable success. In many instances families have been supported who are in difficult financial circumstances. Clearly the Society will not always have the resources to entirely resolve some of these issues but we can direct people to where support can be received, whether it be through MABS or some other appropriate organisation. Most importantly we are there to listen and to give our support as a family go through a difficult period.

To do this takes a significant amount of time as to be able to direct a person to the appropriate help, the full circumstances need to be understood. That is a sensitive issue which takes time. The experience of people who have been assisted in this way has been most positive, both from the point of view of the recipient and the SVP member.

As we go through 2015 I encourage more of our SVP Conferences and Members to examine the possibilities, where appropriate, of getting people back to self-sufficiency. That will involve more initial work by our members, with outside assistance where appropriate, but I think it makes the work of the Society even more meaningful.

When we speak about a 'more just Ireland,' we as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are and can continue to play our part, week-by-week, by helping people reach their potential. That can be by being part of resolving a debt issue, helping a son or daughter get an education or in many other ways.

We are into another year of work, so may I wish all of our Members, Staff, Donors and all those we assist a very happy and peaceful 2015. I thank all those who made the work of the Society in 2014 so successful. That has only been possible by a lot of hard work and dedication from so many.

Thanks again to all for your continued work and support.

Geoff Meagher  
**National President**  
**SVP Ireland**



# SVP WINS PEOPLE OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul was awarded 'Community Group of the Year 2014' at the People of the Year Awards.

The prestigious Awards, organised by Rehab, provide a unique and special opportunity for the Irish public to honour and celebrate "people who do extraordinary things," as the organisers describe the Awards. The winners are all nominated by members of the public and have contributed to society and to their local communities, making a difference to the lives of people.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul was awarded the Community Group of the Year 2014 Award for "the commitment the Society has shown in helping the most vulnerable people in Irish society for 170 years and the integral role it plays in Irish



*Mary Dempsey and Kieran Stafford presented with the People of the Year Award by Mary Kennedy of RTE*

society, focusing on effective solutions to deal with poverty and alleviate its effects on individuals and families."

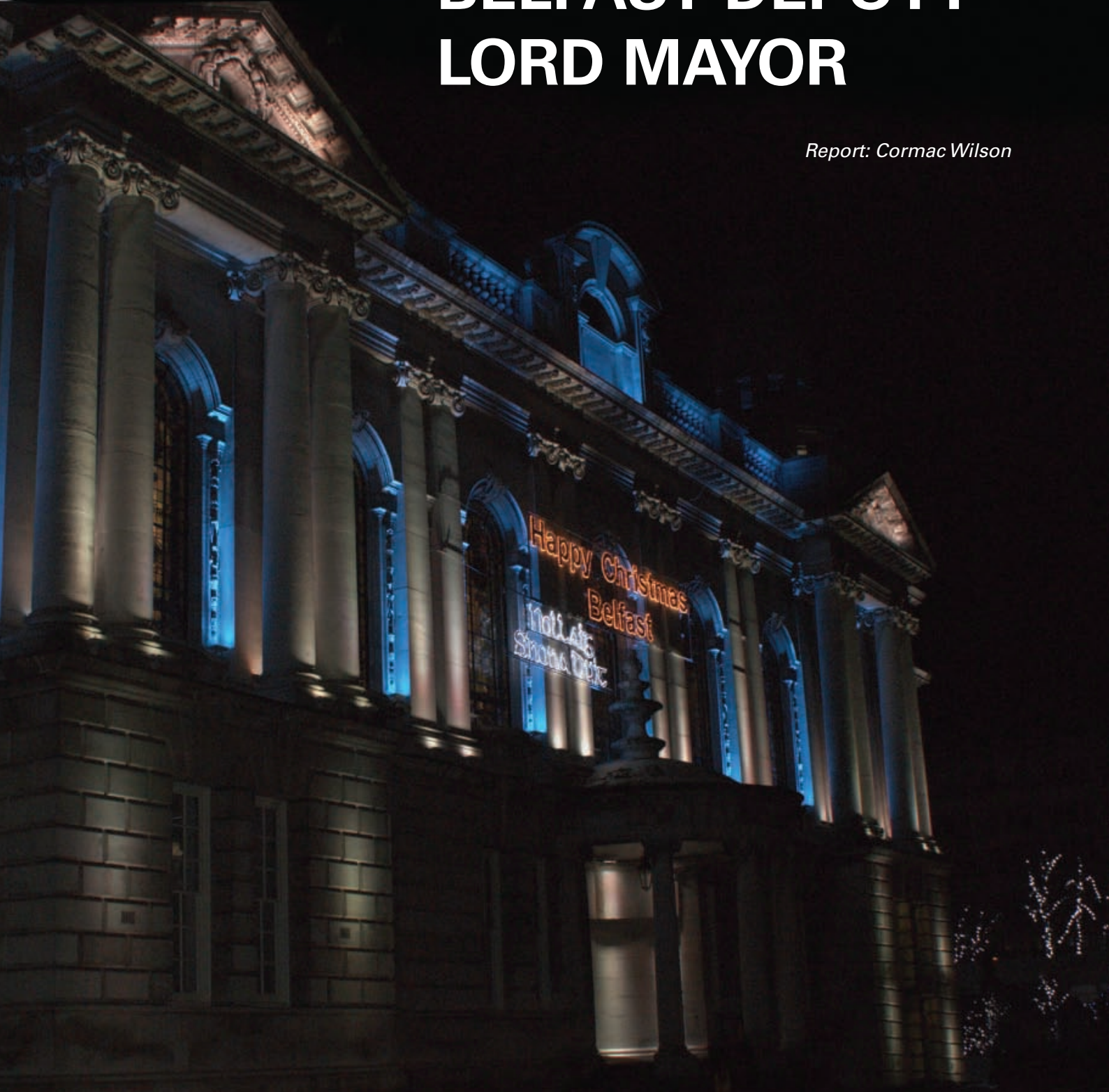
SVP Visitation member Mary Dempsey and Kieran Stafford, of the National Management Council, accepted the award on behalf of the Society.

In accepting the award Mary Dempsey said "This award is for all 11,000 volunteers, staff members and donors, without whom we wouldn't be able to do what we are doing today. With this continuing support we will be in a position to help those in need for another 170 years".



# SVP IS CHOICE OF BELFAST DEPUTY LORD MAYOR

*Report: Cormac Wilson*



Belfast Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Maire Hendron, adopted the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as her "chosen charity" for her year in office

As part of this generous support to the Society's work in Belfast and the Northern Region, she also provided the Society with a great public promotional opportunity by providing an external TV screen in front of City Hall, for display of a video about the works of the Society in the region which was run continuously over several days prior to Christmas. This was of great benefit in raising awareness of the works of the Society and the support it gives to the community. The video was provided by the Society's national public relations and media team and promoted and portrayed the works of the Society for public consumption. Deputy Mayor Hendron met with the Regional Fundraising Committee and also provided free-of-charge the prestigious "Great Hall" at Belfast City Hall, as the venue for the Society's Christmas Fund Raising Dinner. As a result, it was the most successful event to date.

The large attendance consisted of Church dignitaries, political representatives, Society members, including representatives from National Headquarters, many benefactors and totalled 360.

Brian O'Reilly, International Vice-President and Kieran Murphy, former National Director made speeches and then Shaun Dougan, ably supported by his father Kevin and assisted by Pauline Brown and Cathy Carroll, conducted a most successful auction of sponsored quality gifts, raising additional much-needed funds.



Northern President Aidan Crawford presents the SVP History Book to the Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast

The evening then continued with dancing to a local showband "The Miracles" into the small hours.

The Regional Fundraising Committee of Pat McCann, Kevin Dougan and Cormac Wilson, led by the Regional President Aidan Crawford and the Regional Manager, Mrs Pauline Brown, are due thanks for their organisational effort which raised more than stg£20,000 on the night.

SVP Group at Belfast Dinner





*Students help the SVP to raise funds*

# SVP ANNUAL APPEAL

The SVP Annual Appeal is the Society's biggest fundraising event and aims to facilitate the extra demands placed on the Society's finances during this time. The support that the Society receives from individuals, schools and businesses over this period is phenomenal and this year was no exception. The Annual Appeal was launched in the Sean MacDermott Street Vincent's shop by SVP National President Geoff Meagher, and supported by a host of special guests including RTE's Ryan Tubridy; GAA stars Denis Bastick and Killian Young and members of The Claddagh Band to name just a few.

This year SVP partnered with Aldi to launch the 'Give a Gift with Aldi' campaign which saw Aldi encouraging people to give toys or virtual gifts to Saint Vincent de Paul, and offering an incredible prize of a year's free shopping at Aldi worth over €5,000 to those who did. The campaign was also supported by 2FM who ran a 'telethon' from the Benetton store in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, during which a range of celebrities including Ollie Murs, David O'Doherty, Homeland, Hosier and many more came by to show their support and bring in a gift for the campaign.

One of the most inspirational aspects of the SVP Annual Appeal is the way in which people come together to support us in whatever way they can. Our warehouses were hives of activity; full of volunteers pulling together to make sure all of our donations were sent out on time. Some of our Young SVP members broke a Guinness World Record for the world's longest Christmas cracker chain with 798 participants, raising both money

and awareness of the Society's work. A group of children in Stillorgan, Co. Dublin, gave up their play time to sell holly to their neighbours. Some dedicated SVP supporters took time out of their Christmas Day celebrations to take part in a charity cycle in aid of SVP. Schools all over the country put together thousands of invaluable hampers and gifts for those in need. During our Annual Appeal this year SVP members made over 160,000 visits to provide food, toys, fuel and friendship to people in need. We would like to thank everyone who donated their time, gifts, money and energy this year. Because of you, the people we helped will remember Christmas for the right reasons this year.

The winter months are some of the busiest for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, with the cold setting in and many of those who are just managing to get by are tipped over the edge with the extra demands on their income.

Due to the local nature of SVP fundraising, it takes some time for each of the SVP's 1,200 Conferences to report the income they raised during the Annual Appeal, which overall adds to national giving and on-line donations. However, anecdotally, throughout the Society our volunteers were delighted with the support received from their communities. We remain very grateful to each and every person who so generously contributed to the Annual Appeal.

- SVP National Fundraising Team





# BEDSITS NOT THE LONG TERM SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS

A return to bedsits as a way of alleviating the homeless situation is not acceptable nor is housing families in hotels the SVP indicated in a public statement on the homeless issue.

“The current crisis requires a cool, strategic approach and avoid knee-jerk reactions such as the call for the re-instatement of bedsits. This would be a retrograde step and would not significantly increase supply. It would serve to further undermine the case for quality physical standards in the sector,” the Society’s Social Justice and Policy Team declared.

“SVP Conference Visitation to households in need and our network of homeless services across the State provides us with an unique perspective on homelessness and relevant policy solutions. We believe that Dublin is a bell-weather for what will happen in other parts of the country over time, especially Cork and Limerick. Rough sleeping has increased in Cork and in one of our Cork hostels, 13 people are on a waiting list. As supply reduces, rents are increasing and rent allowance caps are increasingly out of touch with rents.”

“The SVP believes that the long-term solution to homelessness is social housing provision with ‘wrap-around’ supports and access to quality, affordable private rented accommodation. There are many people in emergency accommodation with whom SVP have worked who could be living independently or with tenancy support, but who remain in hostels due to the lack of appropriate accommodation.”

There are five co-ordinated actions that need to be taken, the SVP said:

1. Implementation of the new Social Housing Strategy immediately, tackling the issue of vacant units (voids) in social housing developments. Addressing vacant units must be front-loaded in the social housing strategy from the beginning of 2015, while still ensuring that these units are of reasonable quality and thermal efficiency
2. Replicate the Dublin Rent Supplement protocol beyond Dublin, this model assists people in private rented accommodation with a helpline. Rent Supplement increases where appropriate, and supports to people in emergency accommodation.
3. Continue the roll-out of the Homeless Strategy by funding and co-ordinating effective, safe emergency services and accommodation, which avoid duplication of effort and identify and fill gaps in service provision. This requires enhanced co-ordination between voluntary providers – but it also requires funds to much needed services currently struggling.
4. Resource sufficient levels of tenancy sustainment and other wrap-around supports for people moving out of emergency accommodation.
5. Design and implementation of measures to create increased levels of affordable private rented accommodation, of reasonable physical quality and energy efficiency, and raise awareness of the existing rights of tenants, including security of tenure. Rent supplement caps will need to increase in urban areas and some system of ‘rent certainty’ is required for tenants.



**The Society of St.Vincent de Paul has welcomed the Government's new ambitions for social housing construction in the context of its publication of a new Social Housing Strategy,**

## **LONG OVERDUE STATE RETURN TO SOCIAL HOUSING**

**Since the late 1980s Governments and local authorities have drastically reduced new social housing, focusing instead on facilitating home ownership and assuming private landlords would provide accommodation**

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul has welcomed the Government's new ambitions for social housing construction in the context of its publication of a new Social Housing Strategy,

"Social Housing Strategy 2020 is long overdue. Ireland is paying the price for the previous policy which has been operating since the late 1980s and which caused a degree of homelessness bigger and more acute than ever previously experienced with 800 children and their families becoming homeless in the first 10 months of this year," the SVP commented when the Government published its new strategy. "Rents are high and rapidly increasing in the private rented sector; resulting in insecurity and homelessness; and local authority social housing supply is completely insufficient to meet the housing needs of the record-level 90,000 households on housing waiting lists.

"We welcome the actions contained in the Strategy which, when implemented, will provide hope of a secure, better quality home for those who need support in acquiring one. The Strategy restores the role of the State in the direct provision of social housing through a resumption of building on a significant scale."

However, the new Planning and Development Bill (2014) requires that 10% of new units in private developments must be delivered for social housing solely. This needs to be implemented and honoured. Private profit for the few- including powerful construction interests- must not derail plans again.

The central role that the private rented sector plays in the Irish housing system means that it has the capacity to provide quality, thermally-efficient, secure housing - but has a long way to go. The sector requires support and investment to deliver a real housing choice, given that the State is a massive funder of the private rented sector with over half of all rents to landlords - over half a billion Euro coming from Rent Supplement, RAS and related supports at major cost to the exchequer.

But the use of the private rented sector to meet social housing needs means that legislative and policy reform is required for an adequate supply of good quality accommodation. Cases of extremely poor physical standards in parts of the private rented sector are many and these units are often occupied by people on low incomes. Physical and energy standards must be improved through legislation using the same 2020 timeline. The Home Renovation incentive tax relief helps landlords to fulfil such obligations.

An enhanced role for voluntary providers (also known as Approved Housing Bodies) in delivering social housing is also welcome- however it is accepted that this sector needs to scale up in capacity and where necessary share back-office services in order to have the size and structure required to meet the level of demand for housing among those on lower incomes.

**- SVP SOCIAL JUSTICE TEAM**

# LACK OF SOCKS SAVED A VINCENTIAN FROM THE TITANIC

BY SARAH EUSTACE

A dedicated Vincentian's good deeds may never have materialised if it hadn't been for his mother who prevented him from travelling on the ill-fated Titanic's maiden voyage as she hadn't finished knitting his socks in time!

That is one of the stories told in the new book 'The Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland - 170 years of fighting poverty', published by New Island Books

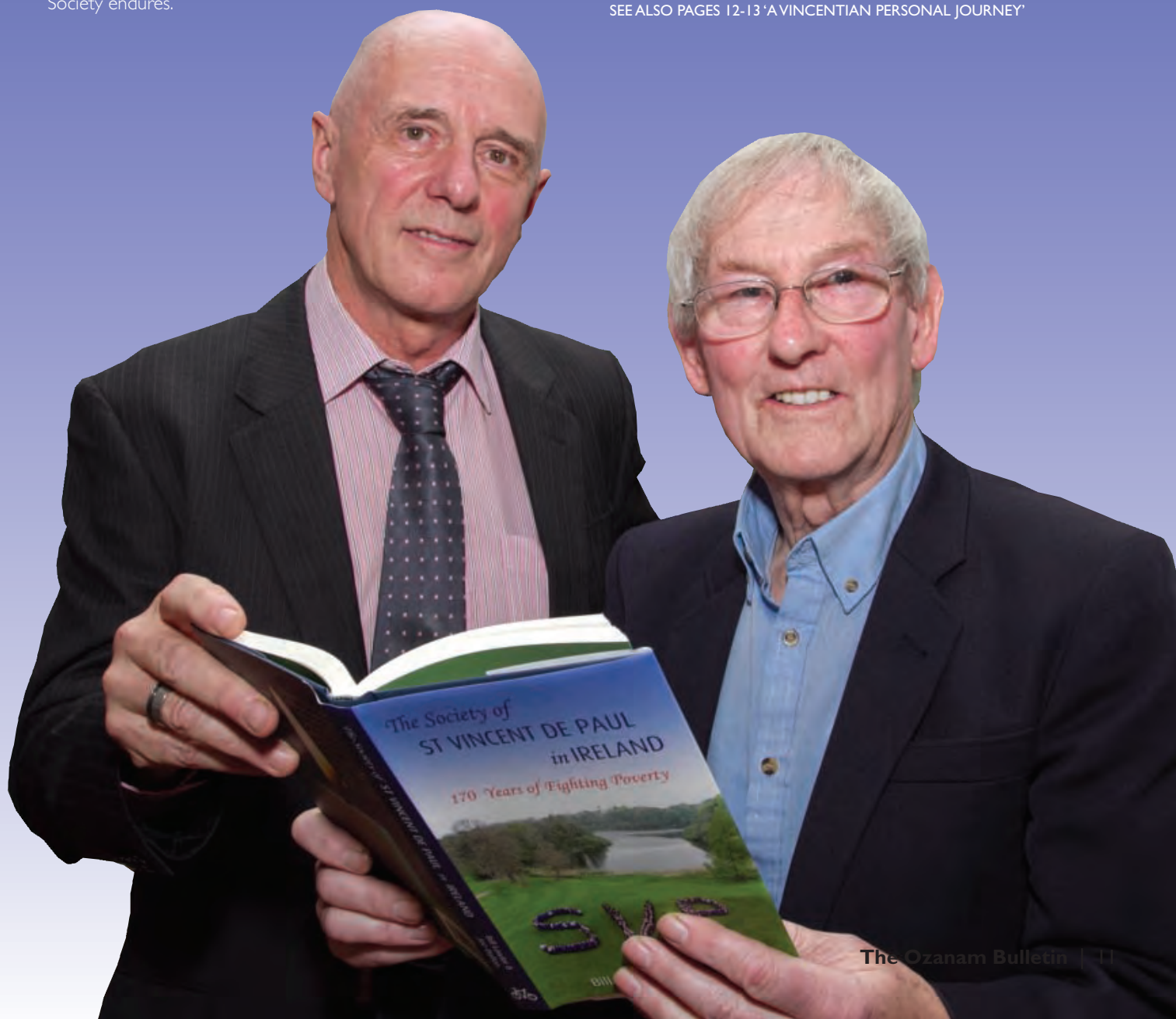
The book, which celebrates 170 years of the SVP in Ireland provides a gateway into the lives and minds of people involved with SVP throughout its history in Ireland. It illustrates not only the Society's innovative and tenacious response to the changing needs of those in poverty, but also highlights the actions of ordinary people through which the vision and ethos of the Society endures.

Part historical account, part personal recollections, the book explains how the SVP came to play such a major part in Irish life and how, through many turbulent periods and change, it has remained true to its ethos and values while providing practical help to those most in need, and at the same time driving the fight for social justice.

The cover of the book shows the letters SVP formed by pupils from schools engaged in an SVP North East Youth for Justice programme.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland - 170 years of fighting poverty", is published by New Island Books. And available online at [www.newisland.ie](http://www.newisland.ie) or at book stores.

SEE ALSO PAGES 12-13 'A VINCENTIAN PERSONAL JOURNEY'



# A VINCENTIAN PERSONAL JOURNEY

By *Liam Fitzpatrick*

I joined the SVP early in 1962, a job transfer having taken me to Cork. It wasn't Vincentian idealism that motivated me. It was a work colleague who suggested that it was a night out each week and, with money being scarce, it seemed a prospect. I knew nothing about the St. Vincent de Paul Society at that stage. However, in the 51 years which have elapsed since then, that knowledge deficit has been much reduced, not just about the Society, but also about life generally and especially about a sector of society whose lifestyle and attendant issues are far different from those faced by those of us who are comfortable.

In the course of my membership, I have been fortunate to experience many facets of SVP work, ranging from Home Visitation, Mental Hospital Visitation, Children's Holiday Home, Job Creation, Men's Hostel and Clothes collection and distribution, which was the forerunner to Vincentian shops in which I also served. My membership has also been enhanced by the fact that I have had roles at different levels, including Conference, Area and Regional Presidency, National Board and national sub-committee membership. In particular, I regard it as a privilege to have been asked to serve as International Treasurer.

My first experience was in a Home Visitation Conference which, like all Conferences at that time, was made up entirely of male members. It may be hard to believe now but females were not allowed to join the Society until around the mid-1960's. Our visitation area was in a relatively new Corporation housing estate of 40/50 houses in the northside of Cork City in which the majority of the residents were either permanently out of work or were casual dockers. We called to most of the houses in the estate with food vouchers, supplemented by the occasional voucher for fuel, clothes and shoes (redeemable at City shops). I can still recall the sense of real poverty which we met – very little furniture in the kitchen, a mother and kids huddled around a very poor fire, a diet consisting in many cases of little more than tea and fried bread and the anxiety of the mother that she and her family might be dropped from our visitation list. In most instances, it was the mother who carried the burden, very often with little or no support from the father.

**The story of 170 years of fighting poverty in Ireland, which is the story of the Society of St. Vincent De Paul in Ireland, told through the words of Society volunteers is the first published historical review of the activities of the organisation in Ireland. It has been published by New Island Books with assistance from the Society and is on sale in book shops around the nation. It can also be downloaded as an eBook in digital version.**

**This is an edited extract from one of the chapters in the book. Liam Fitzpatrick is a former Cork Regional President, currently International Treasurer of the SVP and a volunteer in one of the Society's hostels in Cork.**

Simultaneously with our Home Visitation, we visited male patients in a large local mental hospital. Mainly, we called to men who were long-term residents and whose condition was relatively mild. Very often they had been abandoned by their families and faced the prospect of spending the rest of their lives there. It is sad to think of so many who were committed to and left in mental institutions when they could have been cared for outside.

Towards the end of the 1960's, we commenced a used clothes operation which involved the collection of clothes from donors, sorting them and distributing them to callers to the Cork office or through Conferences. I still have memories of driving into residential parks, in response to telephone calls from donors offering clothes and trying to locate houses armed only with the surname and the name of the house. Having found the right house eventually, the frustration could well be exacerbated when you arrived back with your load to find that it was mostly rubbish!! The business-like way in which the shops now operate is a far from that initial venture.

Since those long bygone days, Ireland has changed immeasurably and the SVP has also changed enormously.

In the Ireland of to-day, the SVP is needed more than ever. Fifty years ago, the Society provided material aid to those in need through home visitation, homeless hostels etc. Now, however, the need is for much more than material aid. Many of the people we visit in their homes or who live in our hostels have other complications in their lives including broken relationships, addiction problems and counselling/psychiatric needs. These call for different skills on the part of our members who need to be able to recognise the symptoms and to know the extent to which they can help and, more importantly, when to stand back and refer the situation to professionals.

Also, 50 years ago, the SVP was not as much involved in advocacy as it is now. In the current climate, being a voice for the poor is a very important part of our activities. Without

a well-informed and professional input on their behalf, there is a grave danger that the interests of the less well-off will be neglected and our Society has sufficient standing that its views carry weight. Our exhortations do not always yield the desired results but, without our voice, it can be safely assumed that the assistance provided to the poor by National Government would be considerably less than it is.

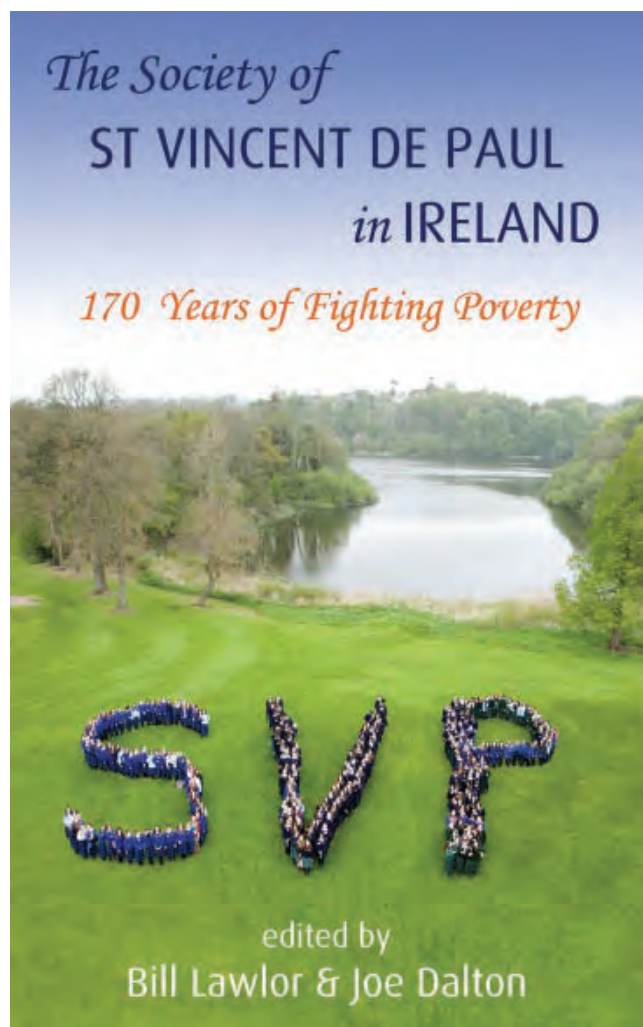
The question is raised occasionally as to whether the work which the SVP does should be done by Government or Public Bodies. In a perfect world, the answer is probably yes. However, visiting people in their homes builds up a relationship which could never be matched by the public service. The bond which is created between our members and those we visit is something which can be unique both to the visitors and those visited and becomes much more than just a call and a voucher. Similarly, in our hostels, each resident is linked with a Case Worker and a programme is drawn up to meet the particular needs of the individual resident. Obviously, these programmes don't all work perfectly but at least they provide a platform in which progress can be made. Another aspect of our Hostels which cannot be disregarded is cost – in St. Vincent's Hostel, Cork, which houses 75 men and of which I am a Conference member, the cost to the public purse of providing full board, accommodation and care works out at about €12,800 per person p.a. (2012 figures). This is only a fraction of what it would cost in a public institution.

On a national basis, one can only imagine what the cost would be if the many hours of voluntary work put in by our members in different areas had to be done by public servants.

The make-up of SVP in Ireland has changed radically over the years. When I joined, there were very few employees and all our administration expenses were met by our members through the secret bag collections taken up at meetings. While the Society is still volunteer-led, we could not function in today's world without professional support. It is just not possible for volunteers in Conferences all over the country to deal with current requirements under such headings as finance, health and safety, child and vulnerable adult protection, charities legislation etc.

A large proportion of our membership see their involvement as confined to their particular Conference and, with so many other demands on their time, this is perfectly understandable. It is necessary, however, that a sufficient number take on roles outside the Conference. Otherwise, the various Councils and different functions that arise at all levels of the Society could not be catered for.

The SVP has 45,000 Conferences in almost 150 countries but only a small percentage of these countries could be termed 'first-world.' The depth of poverty in many of the others is ap-



palling. I fully appreciate that there is poverty in this country but it is at a different level to that experienced in many others. I also realise that members in Ireland give support through twinning and through the SVP's international aid system. The need however is huge and sharing some of our resources could make a significant difference in relieving very severe conditions in different places abroad. If we are isolationist in this regard, we are not being faithful to the spirit of our founder, Frederic Ozanam.

I am glad that I accepted the invitation to join the SVP in 1962. My Vincentian experience has given me many friends, has provided me with a life-balance that I wouldn't otherwise have had and has enabled me to give something back in return for many blessings which it has been my good fortune to enjoy in my life.

*(‘Conference’ as referred to in this article is the SVP title for the parish-based unit of the Society.)*

# “WE MUST SERVE EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY”

**A personal view by the Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive, Martin McGuinness.**

It is a great personal honour for me to provide a contribution to the SVP Bulletin, an organisation which I have always held in the highest regard.

We continue to face considerable challenges within a very tough economic, social and political environment particularly as a result of severe real terms cuts to the Block Grant by the Westminster Government.

With finite resources and infinite demands tough decisions have to be taken which impact directly on people's lives. We must address the needs of all of our citizens, in particular those suffering disadvantage and those who have been left on the margins of society.

Through devolution we are much better placed to listen to the needs of people and work towards building a better future. I know many families are dealing with unemployment, rising living costs, and for some, emigration again sees our brothers, sisters, sons and daughters dotted across the globe.



It's too easy to blame people for being unemployed, for not trying hard enough to pay their bills and for struggling financially. All too often society thinks of what people should have done rather than what we could do to help. This can't be said for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The St. Vincent de Paul has consistently supported people and families in their time of need. This need may not always be visible. It may be the elderly couple who are trying to heat their home this winter or the young parents trying to feed their children. Groups of people can be wrongly stereotyped as vulnerable. We must not forget we are all potentially vulnerable. If the last few years have taught us anything it must be that we should take nothing for granted. Many people who used to contribute to support organisations like St. Vincent de Paul are now looking for assistance themselves.

That can be a difficult road to travel and an uncomfortable period of adjustment, however, there isn't a family in the country that hasn't needed help and support at some stage in their lives. St. Vincent de Paul through their efforts make a difference to as many people as possible. This is challenging because with shrinking incomes they are facing a growing demand for their support. The Executive is determined to do everything it can to help all our people especially those who are in pressing need. We must lay the foundations for sustained social improvement and economic growth longer term.

Through the OFMDFM Delivering Social Change programme and Social Investment Fund we are determined to empower the local community to tackle the issues of poverty, deprivation and unemployment which have crippled communities for generations.

For too long, decisions have been made in isolation by Government, funding schemes which they believe to be in the best interests of these local communities.

While acting with the best of intentions, this 'big Government' approach is not how we want to operate. This innovative and inclusive approach has taken longer than anyone would have hoped. I share the genuine frustrations voiced in the local community in the time it has taken to translate vision into reality. However, if we are serious about helping to transform deprived communities, we need to get it right, rather than simply be quick.

In September the First Minister Peter Robinson and I announced a £58million investment to deliver improved services for parents, shared education and support for people with dementia and their carers.

The total value of the three programmes is £58.45million, with over £33million provided by the Northern Ireland Executive and £24.65million by Atlantic Philanthropies. The programmes

will be led by DHSSPS and the Department of Education as part of the Delivering Social Change initiative.

This £58million package of services, under the Delivering Social Change initiative, will result in a real and positive change in the lives of people in genuine need. It is a clear and strong signal of the Executive's determination to improve the lives of everyone.

These three new projects will help provide support for people with dementia and their carers. They will help deliver improved services for parents facing difficulties and provide schools with the resources that they need to increase shared education among our young people.

Saint Vincent de Paul is acutely aware of the needs and the pressures people are facing because they are walking with them every step of the way.

Government is working hard to do more for people and the organisations that support them. Rest assured we will continue to do everything we can to help and assist all supporting organisations and people.

I remain committed to rebuilding our economy, tackling deprivation, delivering the health and social care people need, improving quality of life and delivering real social change.

Saint Vincent de Paul has been unstinting in their service to everyone in the community regardless of their circumstance. Saint Vincent de Paul is a beacon of hope for all of us.

As Ghandi said, "The True measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

I thank everyone involved with St. Vincent de Paul for their unwavering help and constant support for those in need.



IN THE WINTER 2013 EDITION OF THE BULLETIN OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL WE PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE BY THE FIRST MINISTER OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE, RT. HON., PETER D. ROBINSON, MLA, ENTITLED "WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER."



## **WATERFORD SCHOOL PUPILS GO CRACKERS!**

# **'CHRISTMAS CRACKER' WORLD RECORD SET**

*Report and Photos Joe Dalton*

Pupils from Waterford Secondary Schools joined together in the People's Park, Waterford, in an attempt to break the Christmas Cracker World Record. The event was organised by Debbie O'Halloran, Youth Development Officer for SVP South-East Region.

School pupils took part from De la Salle College, St. Angela's Secondary School, Waterpark College, Presentation Secondary School, Our Lady of Mercy Secondary, Newtown College, Abbey Community College and WIT joining forces to break the world record for the longest Christmas cracker chain. The record stood at 749 on the day and due to the efforts of all involved some 798 cracker pullers came together in the People's Park and smashed the record!

The event generated €700 which was donated 50/50 between the SVP education grants and the SVP Toy Appeal.

Debbie said "It was an amazing day from start to finish. The students and teachers were so patient and after a bit of panic and running around getting people off the street, De la Salle College came to the rescue and we smashed the record! I was so delighted for everyone involved." She also had glowing praise for all who took part from the schools along with the volunteers and those who so generously donated their time and money this event.







# DEBT IS EXPERIENCED BY TOO MANY PEOPLE

## *A Personal View on Social Justice*

**Johnmark McCafferty, Head of SVP Social Justice and Policy, reflects on what research shows about the problems of living with debt and says that, in order to end energy poverty, it must first be understood.**



**By Johnmark McCafferty,  
Head of SVP Social  
Justice and Policy Team**

Debt is central to the experience of so many of the people we assist. To respond and to advocate effectively, we need good data and research. I want to offer a number of insights from a Europe-wide survey on debt, just published online by the European Commission.

'The over-indebtedness of European households' by Civic Consulting on behalf of the European Commission, is in two parts: A synthesis of Europe-wide findings, and country specific reports. While only recently launched, much of the data – and the resulting analysis – is out-of-date; some significantly so as a result of the recent upturn in the economy, job growth and house price increases around Dublin. Equally, it was conducted before the full impact of measures such as eligibility changes to the one-parent family payment; property tax for home owners; increases in the third level student contribution fee or of course water charges – in whatever shape or form they arise in 2015. That said, there are very relevant observations.

The research identified various groupings of EU States with similar debt characteristics. Ireland was found to be in a cluster of Member States with high levels of household arrears combined with a mostly very high to moderate inability to make ends meet, alongside Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Estonia. Risk of over-indebtedness in Ireland related strongly to the following factors: income, employment status, housing tenure and education. In Ireland other issues of significance included Health care costs, child-related and childcare costs, failure of small businesses, energy arrears and exclusion from banking.

Part of this research – the country specific report for Ireland – cites that there are no national definitions of 'over-indebtedness' or 'at risk of over-indebtedness' in Ireland. Consequences for households affected by indebtedness in the report included reduced standard of living, deteriorating well-being and mental health, financial exclusion, utility disconnection, family breakdown/divorce and reduced labour market activity.

### **ENERGY POVERTY: TO END IT, WE MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND IT**

In early December, the SVP launched research regarding how much it costs to heat a home, carried out by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ). More precisely, the research looked at the expenditure required to consume the minimum energy needed to ensure adequate warmth throughout the year, and the minimum energy required for other needs, in housing of various levels of efficiency. Research on the income and accommodation of a sample group of household types supported by SVP has found that the inability for people to afford adequate warmth (energy poverty) is caused by various factors, including inadequate income and living in homes with poor energy efficiency. The research shows that while improved energy efficiency will not take those families with inadequate

incomes out of energy poverty it will make a big difference to their budgets, comfort levels in their home and enhanced health and wellbeing.

A total of 18 scenarios were examined in the above research. They were representative of the households visited and assisted by SVP, the type of housing, the BER rating, and fuel used as well as the income levels of the household. Taking a family of four with gas fired central heating, by improving the energy efficiency of the home from a BER rating of G to B the energy costs would reduce from €4000 to €2000. A one-parent family with one child in an apartment, with a same level of energy efficiency improvement, will save €2,200 bringing their energy bills to €1600 a year. The case for radically improved housing and thermal efficiency standards in the private rented sector speaks for itself.

So the physical standards of a home, and specifically the energy efficiency levels of a home, are crucially important to the quality of life of us all – and poor efficiency levels can have a very negative impact on the ability of low income households to meet their various basic needs. Home owners with enough means can decide to improve the energy efficiency of their own homes, and social housing tenants can expect to have energy efficiency levels improved as part of Government retrofit programmes. However, the private rented sector is the tenure where policy fails in respect of energy efficiency. Private rented tenants are not responsible for the thermal efficiency of their housing and landlords are far less incentivised – and therefore very unlikely – to invest in energy efficiency upgrades in housing that they own but do not live in. Even if tenants were allowed to, low income tenants, who make up a very significant part of the sector, don't have the resources to improve the energy efficiency of such dwellings.

We believe that a co-ordinated policy response is required to this problem, including supports for landlords and also legislation requiring certain physical standards and energy efficiency measures to be in place in private rented dwellings over a reasonable timeframe. With this in mind, we need to map out what legislation is currently in place in respect of the private rented sector, drawing on all relevant sectors: housing regulations; building standards and EU directives related to same. Early in 2015 we hope to launch a mapping project of relevant existing legislation in this area. This will assist us in our advocacy work, not just in terms of energy poverty but also housing policy. The timing couldn't be better as we interact with two Government strategies this year: energy affordability and social housing. And SVP inputs to these will hopefully make positive changes to the lives of the people we assist – not immediately - but in the medium and longer term.

- See also JUST NOW pages 30-31

# Abstracts

## of developments in Social Justice

### **GOVERNMENT DENIAL**

The Government has denied that it plans to cut old age pensions, free travel for the elderly and other non-contributory benefits. However, proposals to do this in order to save €200m. a year in expenditure have been suggested by officials at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **ECUADOR THE BEST**

Ecuador has been named the best country in the world in which to retire by an international website which looked at eight criteria to determine the best nation. International-Living.com adduced that Ecuador in South America, bordered Colombia and Peru, was the best. It scored highest for its warm climate, affordable housing and other generous State benefits which made the cost-of-living there quite affordable.

### **MEN AND WOMEN BOTH CULPABLE**

Men are twice as likely as women to put the wrong type of fuel in their car, according to an AA breakdown survey. But women are worse at losing their car keys. The AA described its survey as somewhat of a sociological exercise which also showed that men were less likely to call for help if they had a puncture, but women were more likely to damage the car tyres.

### **IRISH WORKERS GET LESS HOLIDAYS**

Irish workers get five less holiday days than their European counterparts according to the Expedia Vacation Deprivation Study. This is an annual review of holiday habits across 25 countries and includes Asia, North and South America and the Pacific area. It reported that Irish workers get an average 22 days per year leave, compared with 28 days being the European average.

### **VICTIMS OF CRIME NEED MORE INFORMATION**

The Irish Victims' Rights Alliance says there are "serious deficiencies" in the system relating to the provision of updates, supports and protection to those affected by crime, even to the extent of not being notified properly of Court hearing dates and only becoming aware of the outcome of prosecutions in media reports. A European Directive must be included in Irish laws by November of this year which includes obligations to protect victims of crime from harm and intimidation and provide access to information, services and compensation.

### **NUNS NEEDED**

Celebrating the centenary of their establishment, the community of Poor Clare Sisters at College Road in Cork said that they need vocations. There are just eight Sisters in the community at present and no Novitiates.

### **ASYLUM CLAIMS INCREASE BY 50%**

The number of foreign nationals making asylum claims after arriving in Ireland increased by almost 50 per cent last year. There had been a decrease in numbers arriving for the previous 11 years according to Department of Justice information.

### **TAXPAYERS PAYING BANKERS €58M.**

Taxpayers are paying almost half of the €128m. bill for regulating the banks and financial institutions which are failing to fund their own oversight costs. The banks and financial businesses are only meeting €70m. of the costs according to information provided to the Dáil Finance Committee.



# NEW RENT SUPPLEMENT GUIDELINES FALL SHORT OF WHAT IS NEEDED, SAYS SVP

New guidelines for Social Welfare representatives who administer rent supplement are unlikely to make a significant difference, according to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The SVP says that Social Welfare representatives dealing with rent increases “don’t appear to have the authority to make a significant difference regarding needed increases to rent supplement.” Changes are made only in very restricted circumstances - for example - if a person has profound disabilities or is seriously ill and at risk of being made homeless.

“As rents increase, without extra housing in the short term, this situation will continue to get worse and more families will face homelessness without changes to rent caps in Dublin; the counties immediately outside Dublin and elsewhere,” said John-Mark McCafferty, SVP Head of Social Justice and Policy.

He also said that families with extreme difficulties paying increased rent can phone a number or e-mail, but in some areas there are no facilities for people to call in to in person. While SVP and other organisations can make a case on behalf of clients, this is very labour intensive. The SVP is working with Threshold in supporting tenants to try to avoid eviction on the basis of rent hikes. SVP’s interaction with the Private Residential Tenancies Board has increased dramatically in the last year.

“The ‘Rent Supplement Protocol’ – guidelines on flexibility for frontline staff assessing rent supplement for families at risk of losing their homes – are being extended to the south-west of the country in January 2015 but is not being extended to the areas where we see big rent increases and tenants at risk of homelessness in Wicklow, Kildare or Meath which border on the greater Dublin area.” said Mr McCafferty.



# BUDGET

THE WORD IS OUT:

## BUDGET 2015 WILL INCREASE POVERTY AND INCOME INEQUALITY

It seems that the only people being squeezed by Government policy right now are those with little or nothing to give. When the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) issued its assessment of the impact of Budget 2015 on the money in people's pockets and the distribution of income gains and losses amongst households with different incomes levels in Ireland, it used a sample of Irish households that is representative of the population as a whole to analyse the impact of the Budget. They are a trusted source of information for policymaking and policy evaluation in Ireland.

Despite the Government's Budget-day spin to the contrary, the ESRI found that incomes after tax, PRSI, USC, and next year's water charges for the 10% of households with the highest incomes in Ireland will increase by 0.6%, while the 10% of households with the lowest incomes will lose 1% of their income. Those households in the middle, 'the squeezed middle' as the media have called this income group, will see little change in their incomes.

The losses are what the ESRI call "policy induced losses", i.e., they are not due to becoming unemployed, reduced working hours, or lower wages/self-employed incomes. In other words, the gains and losses due to Budget 2015 are the direct result of the Government's policy choices.

And the ESRI's analysis only relates to changes in household income; the impact of the severe cuts to public services under austerity is not included. These cuts tend to affect those on lower incomes more as they cannot purchase services privately. The analysis also does not include recent increases in VAT, which everyone pays regardless of their employment and income status, and is a disproportionate burden on people with lower incomes.

So it's definitive: Budget 2015, when fully implemented, will increase poverty and income inequality for those with little to give. It is those at the very bottom of our income distribution that are being squeezed. Wasn't Budget 2015 hailed by Government Ministers as the one that ended the years of austerity Budgets?

This was the Budget that, according to spin, contained a little bit for everyone in the audience, including: an increase in Child Benefit, a reduction in the lowest-rate of USC, a partial restoration of the Christmas Bonus, and increased funding for social housing. These measures were welcomed by SVP as Government policy needs to start addressing previous austerity measures. However, SVP argued that decreasing the 41% marginal tax rate to 40% for higher income earners was a mistake.

SVP argued in our post-Budget commentary that the people we assist are still suffering due to previous Budgets: social welfare rates remain static; the introduction of water and medical prescription charges; reduced capitation for schools; cuts in community health services. Pre-2009, SVP was spending around €23m per year on direct assistance to households; the total sum dispensed by SVP in 2013 was €43m. Our members see the real impact of austerity every day in the homes they visit.

Surely, at very least, Irish people can demand and expect that the annual Budget, the main instrument in the Irish Government's policy toolbox, does not create or increase poverty and deprivation for the lowest income households and does not make Ireland a country of social and economic inequality. Is this not the bottom line for any Government policy?

- SVP SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY TEAM



## SVP SAYS INADEQUATE INCOME IS MAIN CAUSE OF FUEL POVERTY

Research on the income and accommodation of a sample group of household types supported by the Society of St Vincent de Paul has found that inadequate income is the main cause of energy poverty. The research findings also showed that making homes more energy efficient can bring benefits.

The research showed that while improved energy efficiency will not take families with inadequate incomes out of energy poverty it can make a considerable difference - a pensioner living alone using oil central heating could save €2,524 with a BER rating change from E1 to B2.

The research also highlights the loss in purchasing power of social welfare energy supports in recent years. While home energy prices have increased by an average of 25% since 2009 the current Fuel Allowance and the energy allowances in the Households Benefit Package have decreased in value by €120 and €68.40 respectively.

The degree to which the cost of household energy is a burden on a household is the product of multiple factors: the price of energy, the income of the household, and the energy efficiency of the dwelling. "Households without employment do not have an adequate income from social welfare supports, and therefore

cannot afford all the elements required for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. Consequently, a household in such a scenario will have to choose to do without essential items and live below a socially acceptable minimum level."

The research entitled "Minimum Household Energy Need" was carried out on behalf of SVP by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) and based on the statistics for household types used by VPSJ to determine a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. A total of 18 scenarios were examined in the research. They were representative of the households visited and assisted by SVP, the type of housing, the BER rating, and fuel used as well as the income levels of the household.

The types of household studied included: two parent and two children in an urban area; one parent and one child also in an urban area and a pensioner living alone in a rural area.

The research calculated the minimum energy needed to ensure adequate warmth throughout the year, and the minimum energy required for other needs e.g. light, cooking, clothes washing, etc., for three household types, each in a specific dwelling type.

# IRISH WATER

The process of introducing water charges, the creation of Irish Water and the installation of domestic water meters was rushed, politically mishandled and has proven hugely unpopular with the Irish people.

The concern of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) continues to be the protection and care of households in financial need and crisis. Many of the households SVP assists are no longer in a position to afford large bills, be that the single person bill of €160 or the multi-adult charge of €260 for water and waste water services.

For some the quarterly Irish Water bills of €40 or €65 will prove too much, even when budgeted for on a weekly basis. Yes, a universal 'water conservation grant' of €100 has been promised by Government to help with those bills. But in our experience such cash transfers often pay for the most pressing expense, not necessarily the one they are intended to meet. It is therefore of significant concern to the SVP that the introduction of domestic water charges does not explicitly take account of income.

Prior to and following the initial water charging plan SVP set out to convince the Government and the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER, the regulator of Ireland's public water system) of this deficiency. The initial response of Government to this concern and wider public discontent had been the provision

of a water benefit payment to certain households in receipt of long-term social welfare benefits as well as the introduction of tax credits for households in employment. Government's latest proposals are presented as long-term low-cost capped charges and are to remain in place till end 2018. SVP's immediate concern with this latest charging structure is that explicit provisions for low-income households remain absent. While it could be argued that the reduction in charges and the provision of the water conservation grant meet such criteria, the regressive flat-rate nature of the charges and the universal provision of the water conservation grant dispel that notion.

An analysis undertaken by the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) shows that even with the water conservation grant added to a household's net income a multi-adult household in the lower income deciles could be paying up to 1.7% of their disposable income to meet the capped charges. On the same basis those in the top decile will pay 0.2% of their disposable income. This is exactly the reason the SVP sees the charging structure as regressive. Of further concern to the SVP is that the extension of the period of capped charging from 2015 to 2018 has the potential to embed this regressive charging structure into the culture of domestic water charging which will limit the options of getting the structure right for the future. We cannot afford to take our eye off the long-term implications of these proposals which are dependent on both large Government subsidies to Irish Water and the significant cost of



# DON'T BE FOOLED - THE SIMPLIFICATION OF CHARGING IS NOT SO SIMPLE !

**Brendan Hennessy has been leading the SVP response to the Irish Water controversy and points out here that there are still major issues to be dealt with, despite the recent Government concessions.**



**By Brendan Hennessy  
SVP Social Justice and  
Policy Team**



the water conservation grant to the Exchequer. Neither the Government subsidy nor the water conservation grant can be guaranteed in the long term.

A different approach?

A political solution to the issue of water charging is taking precedent over long-term sustainable solutions, regulatory processes and professional and public consultation. It is clear that to date the options on water charging that have been put to the Irish public through the regulatory processes have been quickly overtaken by political expedience and that what expertise exists on the topic has not had sufficient public airing. Any future solutions need to take into account ability to pay, infrastructure, conservation and increasingly the need to address the deficit in public confidence. The inability of Government and Irish Water to accomplish this challenge is noteworthy.

Likewise the water regulator. According to the CER strategic plan their "primary aim is to protect the interests of the customers of Irish Water". In fact, the role of the regulator and credibility of the regulatory processes, especially the public consultation process, is now in question. Government has by-passed the consultation process, reversed the regulator's decisions and turned the regulatory process into a rubber-stamping exercise

The SVP believes there is both sufficient need and sufficient

time to address the inadequacies of the present proposals.

In the first instance more time is required for proper consideration of the impact of water charging for the Irish domestic market.

Second, water meters have a pivotal role in establishing water consumption patterns and unearthing water leakage. We need this information to be put into the public domain in order to assist the public's knowledge of their present bills and to consider the potential costs of water charging post-2018.

Third, water charging options should be presented to the Irish public through a consultation process that provides sufficient safeguards for the key criteria of affordability, infrastructure and conservation. To this end, NERI has published a considered position paper which endeavours to establish such a water charging model proposing a payment structure based on ability to pay and promoting conservation.

Such proposals deserve wider public, regulatory and political consideration and can be found at [www.neriinstitute.net](http://www.neriinstitute.net).

## SVP NATIONAL MANAGER FOR HOMELESS SERVICES

# DUNIA HUTCHINSON

**Dunia Hutchinson joined The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in November as the new National Manager for Homeless Services. She is responsible for line management and supervision of the current managers of individual homeless services as well as representing the services collectively on behalf of the Society in national policy and funding discussions.**

**Dunia is a Social Care Practitioner with a BA Honours in Applied Social Studies from NUIM and a Master of Philosophy in Gender Studies from TCD. She has over 20 years' experience in residential care for young people, both in voluntary services (with the Sisters of Mercy in Cork) and the statutory sector with the HSE and most recently, TUSLA: The Child and Family Agency.**

**Interviewed here by Sarah Eustace, SVP Bulletin Assistant Editor, Dunia discusses her role in the Society.**

"With the Government's National Policy increasingly focusing on housing solutions to homelessness and the corresponding moves in funding priorities which accompanies this, it is a crucial time for SVP homeless services.

"There are 12 emergency accommodation services run by the Society across the country – all different in size and structure but all providing support to homeless people and working with other local services and the State agencies to meet complex needs. Currently each hostel is set up and run by a Conference which carries the full responsibility of both an employer to the staff and a service provider to the residents. In future, each Hostel Manager will be employed by the SVP National Office and line-managed by myself as the National Manager of Homeless Services, with the Conferences offering support in a pastoral role.

"This new line-management structure will allow the Society to meet its obligations to protect vulnerable people, to support and have accountability of the staff it has employed. It will also ensure that it is delivering safe and effective services in line with national standards in social care work.  
Why this change in structure?

"The landscape of social care services for vulnerable and marginalised people has changed significantly over the course of my 20 years in practice. When I started my career, standards in residential services in children's homes were very similar to

the current standards in adult homeless services – good people were doing their best to do right, but there was little clear governance, no national standards to adhere to, and no independent external inspection service to ensure compliance. Services were driven by best intentions rather than best practice.

"Residential services for young people, the elderly and for people with disabilities have gradually become more regulated with clear, structured lines of governance and accountability. Services in those sectors are now subject to external inspection by the Health Information and Quality Authority to national standards and even though the standards for homeless services haven't been agreed yet, there is an expectation that we should aspire to similar standards and governance measures. In addition statutory registration for Social Care Workers and a range of other Health and Social Care Professionals is expected in the coming years. This is another development which is aimed at promoting higher standards of professional conduct and competence in the sector and will have implications for the Society as anyone working under the 'protected title' will be required to register annually to practice and to engage in continuing professional development throughout their career. All of these developments point to rising public expectations in services delivering social care and support.

So the SVP is responding to this new situation?

"The Society has recognised this change in expectations and the programme of restructuring is being implemented in order to meet contemporary governance and accountability standards. External regulation of practice through legislation, policy, and inspection functions/services can go far to safeguard the people who access our services. However, we need to know that our internal governance and line management structures continue to promote best practice and safe care work

"My experience in residential services for young people during a period of change from unregulated and ad hoc, to highly regulated and subject to external inspection, will be useful in this context of this restructuring. I have personal experience of meeting new standards while still keeping vulnerable people at the centre of our work and I hope that insight will help us to avoid some of the pitfalls and make the most of the resources we have in each service. Already, I can see that the Conferences and the staff teams have a huge amount of knowledge and experience of the homeless sector, national policy and local funding environments. I hope what I bring to the Society will complement the skills we already have and together we can continue to build safe services and effectively meet the rising standards."



# CRUEL DEMENTIA HAS TAKEN MY LIL BUT I KEEP COUNTING MY BLESSINGS

**An estimated 35,000 people in Ireland have dementia, and the ageing population will see this figure rise. TP O'MAHONY reveals his personal experience of how the illness has affected his wife.**



**TP O'Mahony**

It is the little things at first, but their significance can and often does remain unrecognised.

Like isolated pieces of a jigsaw, their unconnectedness means their messages are inchoate.

For us, that changed in Sydney eight years ago.

Lil and myself were on our sixth visit since the mid-1990s to this beautiful Australian city where our daughter, Veronica, has lived for more than 20 years.

By 2007 we were enchanted by the place. Veronica had moved from Balmain to join her partner, Bill Agelidis, in a splendid house in Rose Bay.

We would travel into Circular Quay on the ferry, an experience Lil always enjoyed. At this stage we both knew the city – at least the inner city – very well. Little did we suspect what was to befall Lil.

The early signs didn't register. Repetitiveness – that was an early sign but it went unheeded for some time.



Lil would tell of a mundane encounter with a neighbour or friend on the street or in a supermarket, and then repeat the story and tell it again the next day as though relating it for the very first time.

Or a question that had been answered would be asked, and then asked again and again.

It was not until she went missing one day in Sydney for four hours – and had no recollection whatsoever of those hours – that the alarm bells started to go off. Back home, the dreaded diagnosis followed – Dementia. Lil can no longer speak; she has an unusual form of dementia which afflicts that part of her brain in command of the speech faculty.

Surprisingly, though, and joyfully, she will occasionally burst forth with a verse of a song that used to be one of her father's favourites – The Old Refrain.

*"I often think of home Dee-ol-ee-ay  
When I am all alone and far away;  
I sing an old refrain, dee-ol-ee-ay  
For it recalls to me a bygone day"*

The puzzling thing is that it was never one of Lil's favourites – her party piece was always Patsy Cline's 'Crazy.'

Still, I'm counting my blessings, especially given that Lil's condition has been remarkably stable for the past two years.

Despite her inability to articulate, the external evidence suggests that Lil is experiencing a degree of contentment within the contours of her own universe, a universe that will almost inevitably shrink.

The awful phase of frustration, agitation and anger that once so distressed her is hopefully behind her for good. Her smile continues to brighten our lives, and her hugs – which are generously dispensed – tell me what words cannot, that, come what may, of Lil it can be said (to borrow a line from the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám): "You are today what yesterday you were – tomorrow you shall not be less".

Meanwhile, we give thanks for all that has gone before, and now take things a day at a time, knowing that tomorrow isn't promised to anyone.

But we are blessed in having the help and support of very good people, apart from our children, Veronica and John, especially from the Alzheimer's Society, the Cork Alzheimer's Home Support organisation, and the staff of the Day Care Centre in Mayfield.

The intervention of our marvellous GP, Dr Mary Favier of Parklands Surgery, and, through her, of Professor William Molloy, was of critical importance.

But the central figures in our support system on a day-to-day basis are Lil's three sisters. Marie, Doreen and Patricia have demonstrated again and again what sisterly love is all about, and I console myself by hoping that a little bit of that love is for me also.

We simply couldn't manage without them.

• *T.P.O'Mahony is a journalist, formerly Religious Affairs Correspondent and reporter with The Irish Press, The Irish Examiner and Cork Evening Echo.*

**THIS ARTICLE IS REPRINTED, WITH THANKS, FROM THE CORK EVENING ECHO**

## Lil:

A poem by TP O'Mahony

She came to me in the semi-darkness,  
searching for my hand.  
What support or solace could I offer?  
The press of her fingers gave me my answer:  
she was home, warm and secure.

It started in faraway Sydney,  
but I didn't know it then.  
I didn't know that the old Lil,  
The Lil I knew and loved  
was starting to disappear:

It was written on her face as she stepped  
off the ferry in Rose Bay — but I,  
stubborn, frightened and arrogant,  
didn't recognise the look.  
A stranger; sly, corrosive, and relentless,  
bearing the goddess-like name of DEMENTIA,  
had inhabited her body.  
She was no longer mine.

And yet, and yet — over cornflakes one morning  
she reached across the table and touched my face.  
It might have been the touch of Cleopatra,  
so enthralled was I.  
But it was Lil's touch, and not even  
Cleopatra's  
could match that.  
For a brief, heartachingly fleeting moment,  
the old Lil was mine again

## HOUSEHOLD ENERGY

Just as the earth goes through the seasons so do families in the course of the year experience and enjoy the different seasons. However, Winter for many families struggling with poverty is a severe endurance task. Unlike much of animal and plant life human beings can't hibernate and sleep through the coldest months of the year!

The current spell of cold winds, heavy rain and storms makes us grateful for the warmth of our houses. Organisations concerned with the welfare of older people remind us of the need to keep in touch with elderly neighbours who may be at the risk of hypothermia.

The SVP pays out 10 million Euro each year to households throughout the country that cannot pay their fuel bills or afford to keep their homes adequately heated. Fuel poverty is described as having to pay more than 10% of one's income to keep the house adequately heated.

In its work with low income households the VPSJ has been made vividly aware of the plight of elderly people living alone and of households with children that cannot afford the weekly costs of keeping their homes warm. Older people try to respond to the situation by living in one room and by going to bed around 6.00pm. The families cope by not paying other bills or by adding to their already existing debts or by choosing between food and heat. While the price of household energy may be decreasing the reality is that energy prices have increased by an average of 25% in the last five years. In the same period the limited social welfare payments available to assist some low income households have been reduced. The focus of the current Just.Now is on the cost of Household Energy needs with particular emphasis on the low income households.

### THE COST OF HOUSEHOLD ENERGY NEEDS

Over the last number of years the cost of energy has increased greatly and the numbers of people experiencing difficulty in paying their energy bills has gone up dramatically.

Home energy prices have increased by an average of 25% in the last five years (2009 to 2014)1. In the same period, the limited social welfare supports available to assist some vulnerable household types afford energy have been reduced.

As part of measuring the rate of poverty in Ireland, the CSO measures a series of 'Deprivation Indicators', these record the rate at which people go without certain things because they cannot afford them. According to the latest data (2012), almost 600,000 people were without heating at some stage in the last year and almost 400,000 were unable to afford to keep their home adequately warm. This is a doubling of the rate from 2006 to 2012.

The assistance given by the Society of St Vincent de Paul has been vital in helping households in need, afford their energy bills. The level of assistance given has almost doubled since 2008, and the SVP now spends over €10 million a year on helping people pay their energy bills.

The VPSJ was asked by the SVP to carry out research into the costs of household energy. We have looked at the cost of the energy needed by three household types which represent the households most frequently assisted by the SVP.

We examined what the weekly cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) is for each of these household types, and how the cost of the household types' minimum energy need changes when the efficiency of the home they live in changes.

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The Energy Efficiency of a home reflects how well it uses energy. An efficient home will have a more modern heating system, perhaps a newer boiler which uses less fuel, insulation to keep heat in, better windows to reduce drafts, and other measures like energy saving light bulbs.

All of these things together mean that it costs less to heat an efficient home, than it would to heat an inefficient home. The BER (Building Energy Rating) of a home grades how much energy is needed to keep a house adequately warm throughout the year. The ratings are from A to G, with A being the most efficient and G the least efficient.

Families living in privately rented housing are amongst those most frequently assisted with their energy bills by the SVP. And these homes tend to have the lowest energy efficiency ratings.

## ENERGY POVERTY

“A household is considered to be energy-poor if it is unable to attain an acceptable standard of warmth and energy services in the home at an affordable cost”

Warmer Homes Strategy,  
Dept of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

## ACCEPTABLE WARMTH

The idea of an acceptable standard of warmth means keeping the home adequately warm, and it follows the international guidelines set out by the World Health Organisation. These specify that the home should be heated to:

- > 21°C in the main living area
- > 18°C in the rest of the home

The cost of the energy for maintaining this standard of warmth will be affected by the price of fuel and efficiency of the home. In this research we examined homes with central heating fuelled by Gas or Oil, and calculated the average weekly cost over the entire year.

## OTHER ENERGY NEEDS

In addition to staying warm, there are other energy needs in the home. These include energy for cooking, electricity for light and household appliances (e.g. fridge-freezer, washing machine), and social applications such as watching television or using a computer.

## ACCEPTABLE COST

A household is said to be in Energy Poverty if they need to spend more than a tenth (10%) of their net income (income after tax and any including social welfare), on meeting their minimum energy needs.

## THE FINDINGS

The research examines the cost of the Minimum Energy Need for households living in inefficient homes, and how the costs would reduce if they were in moderately efficient homes (a C3 rating) and efficient homes (a B2 rating). The findings for three household types, dependent on social welfare are summarised, above. The research puts the cost of energy in the context of the overall cost of a MESL. The adequacy of household income from Social Welfare is examined, and the vulnerability of each household to Energy Poverty is also tested.

A household of Two Parents and Two Children, needs to spend over €432 per week (excluding energy costs) for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL). The weekly cost of the household's energy needs range from €78.34 in an inefficient home (BER E1) to €39.76 in an efficient home (BER B2). The total weekly cost for this household type (MESL + Energy) are from €510.61 to €472.03, in each case the expenditure need is notably greater than income from social welfare of €434.32 per week.

Furthermore, the cost of the minimum energy need for this household is well in excess of 10% of income when in an inefficient home (BER E1 & C3), indicating the vulnerability of the household to Energy Poverty.

Overall, the research found that the cost of the minimum energy need in an efficient home was half that of the most inefficient homes. In the scenarios above, households without employment do not have an adequate income from social welfare supports, and therefore cannot afford all the elements required for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. Consequently, a household in such a scenario will have to choose to do without essential items and live below a socially acceptable minimum level. The findings of the paper demonstrate the inadequacy of social welfare supports, and the vulnerability of household types solely reliant on social welfare supports to meet their minimum expenditure needs. Even at the highest efficiency level examined, social welfare dependent households tended to remain in energy poverty and all faced inadequate income.

The full paper presents the findings in more detail, and examines additional employed scenarios. It is available online at [www.budgeting.ie](http://www.budgeting.ie)



By Liz Kerrins  
SVP Social Justice Team

## Putting SVP's research to work

# USING SVP RESEARCH WITH ONE-PARENT FAMILIES TO CHANGE IRISH ENERGY POVERTY

So much social research undertaken by voluntary agencies, governments and academics ends up sitting on shelves, unread and gathering dust. After all the energy and money that is spent, the research findings may not be well publicised and don't contribute to social change. I should know: I've been involved in some of that research!

This is not the approach that the Social Justice and Policy team in SVP's National Office is taking in using the Society's latest research report – "It's the hardest job in the world."

In September 2014, 'It's the hardest job in the world' was launched in the Davenport Hotel, alongside SVP's response to

President Higgins's Ethics Initiative. The research, conducted with 61 one-parent families assisted by SVP Conferences nationwide, found that despite their best efforts at budgeting, most of the families were unable to meet their basic living costs and that the impact of austerity made some very difficult and challenging situations even worse.

Energy (or fuel) poverty was a significant problem for almost all the parents interviewed - they cannot afford the costs of fuel for heating and cooking. This was partly due to the fact that their income was inadequate in meeting their bills, but also because some families live in poor quality (primarily rented) homes that were not energy efficient. Take these two parents as examples:



“When you are on such a tight budget you are going to get caught out somewhere. You have to get the groceries in and you have to pay the rent... You are going to fall behind somewhere... Even though you need to heat the house, the gas and the leccy (bills) will be a squeeze.”

“I sit out in the kitchen but [during] the cold spell... I couldn't light my fire because it was getting a back draft down the chimney, full of smoke... [son] has bronchitis and [daughter] has asthma so I'd get the heaters out and thank God only for the St. Vincent de Paul helped me out to get the heaters and [during] the very cold spell... that's all we had was those heaters... Oh my God the doors we had... there was a big gap. You could see out on the street. I went around the house ... put masking tape around the draft on the window... the snake thing for the door; hot water bottles for the kids to heat upstairs [and] the bedrooms”

For many of the families interviewed, this inability to meet their energy costs was the reason why they contacted their local SVP Conference initially. This finding won't surprise SVP members: SVP's Visitation Conferences expenditure on energy for 2013 was €10m, one-quarter of total money spent on Visitation. So what is SVP's Social Justice and Policy team doing to use SVP research to influence national energy poverty policy?

The research was already being put to work prior to its official launch, supporting SVP's bottom-up approach to developing policy on Budget 2015, as well as responding to the Budget itself. For example, SVP lobbied on the inadequacy of the Fuel Allowance and recommended that previous cuts to the payment be reversed. We didn't win that battle, but we successfully lobbied on extending the Home Renovation Scheme to the private rented sector to encourage better quality homes there. After all, 23% of the people living in the private rented sector are aged 0-17 years-of-age. Many of the families in the SVP research lived in the private rented sector and will remain so as they are unlikely to get local authority housing or be able to afford to own their own home.

We are also holding 6 policy 'roundtables' – meetings from November 2014 to May 2015, the first of which, on energy poverty experienced by lone parent families, was held in November. At that roundtable, we used SVP research and Conference experience alongside national and international data and research to make a case for policies that ultimately increase the quality and energy efficiency of Irish homes, particularly for the vulnerable, while ensuring income adequacy for families.

Enthusiasm and an appetite for change was evident amongst the select but diverse and influential attendees at the 'roundtables'

- SVP Conferences were represented and present also were senior officials in relevant Government Departments, colleagues in the voluntary sector; experts in energy research and policy, and private sector interests in energy and housing provision. We decided to get the right people into a room to thrash out solutions to energy poverty rather than the most amount of people.

You won't hear about these roundtables on the news or in the newspapers. We took a low-key approach, facilitating problem-solving and open discussion amongst the roundtable participants. We focused on action, rather than just talking about and around the issue of fuel poverty.

A central discussion topic was how to develop the correct balance between income support to prevent or alleviate energy poverty (Fuel Allowance and Household Budget Package) and retrofitting existing homes to make them more energy efficient. This sounds simple, but when a large amount of Exchequer funding is spent on income supports by one Government department and very little is spent on retrofitting by another Government department, the issue becomes a thorny one. We did agree on two important issues:

1. That a programme of retrofitting to create warm homes with smaller energy bills is required in the private rented sector; which is increasingly going to be the long-term housing for families, but we need to do so in a way that does not decrease housing supply for the families supported by SVP.
2. That even if we succeed in creating warmer homes and reducing energy bills, families will still require income support as they suffer from multiple poverty, not just energy poverty.

SVP's Social Justice and Policy team will use the outcomes from the first roundtable to develop a deeper and more coherent SVP energy poverty. We will continue to our lobby old and new energy policy friends.

Our next roundtable will be on what action needs to be taken by Government to support one-parent families into employment and to retain employment. You will hear more from me on subsequent roundtables.

By May 2015 'The Hardest Job in the World' report will be the hardest research report around.

The report is available via the SVP website [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie)



# THE PLIGHT OF MEN WHO LIVE ALONE

**Peg Hanafin, M.Sc., Psy.Rehab.Couns.; Dip. Pysch. is a Counsellor with 35 years' experience, writer and author on associated topics and a regular contributor to The SVP BULLETIN.**

Recently I was asked to look into the plight of a single man who lived alone. Over the years I have visited many of these men and their living conditions were always a concern for me. As I am unable to do visitation any more I had to ask two other St. Vincent de Paul members to do the needful which they duly did.

Even though this man was not the usual person being visited or had come to the notice of his community, when his circumstances were investigated I realised that circumstances for these men have not changed much over the years in fact some cases have got much worse..

Isn't it truly amazing that there is so little research or data available on younger men who live alone especially those on social welfare, have a disability or on low incomes. Many of these men are invisible in communities and if they are not in the public eye for drunkenness or public order offences they fade into the background and their lives never come under the spotlight.

Many men who live alone are often isolated, live in poor and dilapidated conditions and become reclusive about their lives. Many suffer depression as well as a range of other mental illnesses and find communication difficult as their health and living conditions deteriorate. Society often sees these men as "strange" and do not understand the difficult lives they lead. Alone and without the comforts of life that are taken for granted by society, these men, many with no coping skills for living, are struggling every day. Very little research has been carried out about this particular group of men and it is difficult to get a bigger picture as to how widespread their problems are. Anecdotal evidence and my own personal experiences all point to a real and disturbing marginalisation of these men.

Some may go to the local pub, which sometimes is a way of saving scarce fuel resources and to be in a warm environment. They are generally loners, poor shoppers and many live on a diet of bread, cheese, beans and fries. Over the years I have experienced the shocking conditions that men who live alone exist in. Washing bedclothes is a rarity and keeping the house in order is a chore too much for many to do. Men who live alone in rural communities may have no contact with the outside world except for the pub or mass and live lives of deprivation, desperation and loneliness. New laws have exasperated their loss of companionship and company.

Their homes are rarely decorated or necessities like blankets, sheets or essentials, seldom or never purchased. Cooking equipment is generally basic and often left in dire need of cleaning. Many alone men who live in rural areas, even on a farm, though they may have an adequate income, they have not the knowledge or the determination to maintain a house or even to cook a proper meal. They live in cold and damp houses especially if they were built before insulation was introduced. Windows and doors may be draughty and heating non-existent. Many of these men cared for elderly parents and sacrificed their own lives and the opportunities of getting married until it is too late. Their regrets are spoken about in a way that portrays their depressed spirits and their inadequate social skills to communicate their situation.

In the recent past men have been let out from mental health institutions to live in the community and are left without the proper resources and back up that they need being put in place. Even though they may be in the minority, their lives are extremely difficult and find living alone in a flat or in a sheltered house impossible. For these men trying to care for themselves is a challenge and is an indictment on our health services that these men are left to their own devices.



**Peg Hanafin**

Over many years visiting these men I realised that more should be done to highlight the difficult lives that these men endure and bring focus and attention to their needs. In every town in Ireland and in every rural area we have these men eking out a life deprived of the bare essentials and fading into the community. How many of these men die alone in squalor and malnourished? From my experience very many die young, be it from the result of alcohol addiction or malnourishment or a combination of both.

We have at this present time a furore about the homeless and that is right and proper; but why do we have to wait for a death on a street to happen before it becomes a matter of urgency? Those who care about those who are homeless have been shouting loud for many years about the plight of these men with no one in authority listening or caring. Decisions taken by government which included the closure of bedsits added to the problem of homelessness, when sometimes a bedsit is adequate for the needs of one person to heat and to sleep. A decision made by those who obviously do not understand.

Men who live alone in flats and unable to care for themselves also die young, their sense of hopelessness evident every day. But because society can turn a blind eye to their voiceless lives, the misery they suffer is pushed under the carpet and they become another statistic. Men do not usually visit the doctor when they are ill and have no one to encourage them to care for their health, hence an escalation of health problems that could have been dealt with earlier.

The reduction of the rent allowance paid to those living in private accommodation and the rent payable for social housing added to the huge pressure on the finances of those who live alone. Trying to live on £188.00 per week with close to 20% of that gone on paying rent, before heating, food and the basic necessities are paid for, is an indictment of how those in power expect the vulnerable to survive on their meagre income. For men who live alone with disabilities, poor health and often suffering addictions, society appears to have turned their backs on this very vulnerable and deprived group of our citizens.

# TEXT ALERTING IS A VITAL TOOL IN PREVENTING RURAL CRIME



Over one million text messages alerting people to potential criminal activity in their local area have been sent under the Text Alert system, according to new figures from An Garda Síochána.

The figures also show that there are more than 100,000 people signed-up to the scheme from 550 groups in towns and villages across the country.

The Text Alert system was officially launched in September 2013 and is operated by An Garda Síochána with Muintir na Tíre, Neighbourhood Watch and the Irish Farmers Association (IFA).



## What is Text Alert?

Text Alert enables communities to set up a Group to receive alerts advising them of suspicious or criminal activity in their area. As well as ensuring awareness among users of the service, it can also lead to them reporting suspicious activity to Gardaí. Sending the information by text means that it can be disseminated rapidly to a large amount of people in a cost-effective way.

**Text Alert is a one-way system, and operates on the following principles:**

- Member(s) of the public reports incident to the Gardaí (24 hour Garda District -Telephone number which is widely advertised).
- The reporting Garda verifies details and determines that the "Text Alert" system should be utilised
- Garda sends text or e-mail out to each registered "Community Contact" in their Garda District
- Each "Community Contact" forwards the text to their "Community Group" to advise the public to watch out and report any developments
- If the information is received by e-mail the Community Contact may forward the e-mail or convert the content to SMS Text and send to their Community Group

An example of its effectiveness can be seen in a case of theft in the Midlands:

A male reported the theft of his vehicle to Gardaí and identified a suspect vehicle involved in this theft. It was also believed that this suspect vehicle had been involved in the theft of another vehicle the day before. A text alert was sent out to targeted areas regarding the suspicious vehicle. Acting on information received back, Gardaí were able to intercept the vehicle. As a result, four males were arrested for theft of items and a file is being prepared for the Director of Public Prosecutions in relation to the taking of the vehicles.

Assistant Garda Commissioner Jack Nolan said: "We have found that as an immediate, cost effective method of engagement with the communities we serve, Text Alert is invaluable. It would appear from these levels of usage the public also feel it is a valuable way to help prevent and tackle crime."

The President of the Irish Farmers' Association, Eddie Downey, stressed the scheme's importance in preventing rural crime. "The IFA continues to support Community Text Alert as a vital tool in preventing rural crime. We recognise the significant impact this service can have in supporting the safety of rural communities. The IFA is working closely with An Garda Síochána to continue to roll out text alert initiatives across our branch structure and further strengthen our Community Text Alert network."

"Communities have experienced a reduction in burglaries since we engaged with Text Alert, and the scheme will help to sustain the continued effort by both the Gardaí and Neighbourhood Watch members," Patrick Walsh from Neighbourhood Watch commented.

John Hogan, President of Muintir na Tíre says that the scheme "has allowed communities to rapidly exchange information, and gives communities a say in policing in their own areas."

## Note from An Garda Síochána:

Text Alert was developed by Garda Community Relations Bureau in conjunction with Muintir na Tíre in 2007 and was piloted successfully in the Garda Division of Kerry in 2008. Each Text Alert group must satisfy certain scheme protocols before they can formally register with An Garda Síochána, and they may also have to raise finance to allow for dissemination of the received Garda Text through the employment of a Service Provider, if they so choose. This means that each of the Text Alert groups must be well organised and is indicative of the demand for the service from An Garda Síochána.

See Irish Rural Link article pages 40-41

# PARENTS SET THEIR CHILDREN'S PATTERNS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

## Teenage Research Project Discovers the Link and Wins National Scientist Award



Parental drinking habits, particularly those of the father of a family, have a major impact on the drinking habits of their teenage children.

That finding, indicating that the way in which young people may consume alcohol in the future and their attitude to patterns of consumption, was adduced by two Transition Year students of a North Cork school when they researched a social & behavioural sciences project - "Alcohol Consumption: Does the apple fall far from the tree?"

The research work of 16-year-olds Ian O'Sullivan and Eimear Murphy of Kanturk's Coláiste Treasa was so impressive that it won the national BT Young Scientist award.

Their project looked at whether parental alcohol consumption has an impact on the drinking habits of their teenage children.

"We wanted to see if there was a parental effect on their kids' consumption of alcohol," said Eimear Murphy.

The two put together a survey and distributed it to fifth and sixth year students from schools around the North Cork area

"We wanted to assess hazardous drinking habits," Ian O'Sullivan said. "This involves consuming too much alcohol or drinking too frequently, habits that have an impact on health."

They found that parental drinking habits, particularly that of the father, have a major impact on their children's drinking. They also discovered that parents who believe it is acceptable for their children to drink alcohol on special occasions were up to four times more likely to engage in hazardous drinking than other adolescents.

For their winning project they were awarded the BT young Scientist Perpetual Trophy, a cheque for €5,000 and will represent Ireland at the European Union's Young Scientist Competition.

"We are thrilled to see the BT Young Scientist Award coming back again to Cork. This award recognises the high standards of education, commitment to STEM subjects, dedication of the teachers as well as the enthusiasm of our students in Cork and showcases the region as the hotbed for talent that it is, with a culture for excellence and winning", said Ted Owens, CEO of Cork ETB at a reception to honour the students held in their school in Kanturk. "Cork Education and Training Board schools have the winning formula."

Established in July 2013, when the Cork City and County Vocational Education Committees were amalgamated, CETB also has responsibility for all former FÁS Training Services in Cork.

*Top students Ian O'Sullivan and Eimear Murphy with teacher Derry O'Sullivan*





# SVP MUSICAL YOUTH CLUB IN DUBLIN

Tony Rock tells the story of what has been achieved at a unique musical youth club at Ozanam House in Dublin, now heading for its first birthday.



In February of last year Ozanam House opened a new 'Musical Youth Club' on a Saturday to children aged 6 to 14 years from Dublin's north inner city. The centre now opens from 10am to 3pm every Saturday and provides classes in Guitar, Piano, Violin, Dance and singing & song writing.

Responding to an identified need in the community, where there was little or no music classes for children, these classes now offer the children the opportunity for recreation and for skills development in a supportive and encouraging environment. At the same time the classes focus on their holistic development and on building each child's self-esteem and sense of identity.

We now have 115 children that take part in the music classes. By attending the lessons the children are given an opportunity to express themselves musically, whilst learning the skills and discipline necessary to play a musical instrument in an informal way. Having the music club running on Saturdays also gives the children something to do at the weekends, in a safe place.

Since we have opened the music club, the children's confidence has grown in so many ways. In the dance club, they experience different styles of dance, while expressing themselves, having fun, building confidence and making friends. Lauren our Dance teacher gives us an insight into the classes, 'Each class runs for 45 minutes. During that time, the children have a fun warm up, learn new techniques and steps for each style of dance and learn choreography. This year they have learned hip hop and tap, and in the summer term they will learn ballet and jazz. At the end of each class they have an opportunity to perform what they have learned for the teacher and for each other'.

This Christmas, all of the children came together for a big Music Club Christmas concert in the centre with all of the children and parents, families and friends together for what was an amazing musical celebration. 'The Christmas Concert was a brilliant experience for all involved, from the children, to teachers and parents', says Catriona Doyle our youth programme coordinator. 'The children love to see their parents in the audience. I love seeing the children perform whilst also trying to spot their parents in the crowd! There was definitely a feeling of Christmas spirit as the children wore Santa hats and some even dressed in



red – it was such a magical experience!'. Our dance teacher Lauren was equally impressed 'It was a great opportunity for the children to show off what they have learned and it was wonderful for teachers, parents and friends to see just how much talent we have in the club, and how much the children have grown in confidence in their talent over the past few months, in music, singing and dance.

The children gain so much from the classes. Pia Dunne our Piano teacher sums it up, 'they discover music is fun, making friends, group participation, confidence building and expression through music. They play theory/music quiz games. They learn to read music. Learn to play pieces, tunes and songs, rhythm games and training games. They engage in free play, composition, improvisation, storytelling through music and musical expression. It's great fun for all of the children and seeing them develop and grow in confidence is the most rewarding thing'.

Overall, these classes give the children an opportunity to find their hidden, sometimes buried talents and a chance to develop the habit of engagement, thereby reducing the potential for anti-social behaviour in the community. They develop their own sense of worth and wellbeing, of self-respect as well as respect for other people and other things and of course having lots of fun and making new friends along the way.



# RURAL SECURITY

Home heating oil may have gone down in price, but in rural areas, it is still attractive to thieves who get very busy at this time of year. Oil tanks in farmyards, schools, halls and churches are particularly vulnerable especially if they are unattended at particular time, day or night. Most of the oil stolen is done without anyone present, which at least means that people are not assaulted or left for dead. The next popular target is homes where there is a sole occupant or perhaps an elderly couple. Sadly as we know, such incidents can lead to horrible consequences. One of the ways of preventing this and other types of robbery in rural areas communities in partnership with the Gardai are operating a Community Text alert System. In simple terms it is designed as a communication system between the Gardai and the public.

It is dependent on community volunteers, who may notify the Gardai if anything suspicious is happening in their locality. They in turn will verify the notification and text or email their concern to registered contacts who will forward their warning to all those signed up as part of the local community group. In a well organised community this system can mean the difference between being subject to a high incidence of, what is known as petty crime, which in some cases could mean injury or worse to the victims. It could mean that a community known to be a text alert area will be avoided by the likely thieves who will see the threat and move on. Organisations such as IFA, Muintir Na Tire and Neighbourhood Watch will act as partners with the Gardai and as long as local volunteers, willing to participate.



**By Seamus Boland**  
**CEO Irish Rural Link**





Suspicious activity to look out for includes strangers driving about with no apparent purpose, people selling merchandise that is cheap, without having available identification or verification as to who they are. Much of this may well have been stolen, often not too far away from the customer they now want to engage in. In this instance the ability of the text alert system to inform not just neighbours but those in neighbouring parishes takes away the opportunity from the criminals to dispose of their loot. From an Irish Rural Link perspective, we would ask commercial companies who employ sales staff to call to people without invitation to have clear ethical guidelines which ensure that vulnerable people are not pressured into unnecessary sales. It is our belief that such calling should be the exception rather than the rule.

Of course it's not just reliance on text alert systems as a means of ensuring the area is secure, communities will have to develop other practices of prevention. For example it is essential that neighbours keep an eye on households that can be vulnerable to attack. It is essential that people get into the habit of locking doors and windows, when not at home. Unbelievably, according to the Garda report most burglaries occur where the burglar simply walks in the front door or climbs in an open window. Houses with elderly inhabitants are particularly vulnerable and require constant vigilance. It often falls on the postman or someone else making a delivery to check in on the person.

All of this is happening because communities have realised that despite protests, Garda stations are closing or for some reason seen as outdated. Unfortunately the lack of an alternative proper community policing plan, means communities must seek more and more volunteers to become active in the protection of their own areas. The fact that as the census proves almost 40% of Ireland's national population live in rural areas means that we have an increasing aging population. This will mean huge demands on all services, crucially health and security. Older people do not want to end up in nursing homes if they can avoid it. Instead their desire to stay in their own community, in their own homes is very strong. And who has the right to deny them, especially if the reason for doing so is down to inability or worse still unwillingness to plan ahead.

Texting services works well, provided communities are willing to whole hearted support it and provide on a consistent basis the necessary volunteers. In a proper care plan supported by a modern community policing structure for rural areas it would be but one element in a more comprehensive set of actions, which would integrate a range of services necessary for rural communities and if properly designed would create real jobs. In the meantime we must hope that the volunteers get continued support by communities and all concerned with rural security.





**Michael Culloty**

# DO THE POOR PAY MORE? YES THEY DO AND ALL THE TIME

Michael Culloty, National Development Officer for Social Policy and Communications with MABS says that while Ireland's economic fortunes seem to be changing for the better, there are still many people struggling to make ends meet.

At last the economic fortunes of our country seem to be changing for the better and there are some positive indicators to say it is so. For a growing number of people this is reflected in their new found employment and general wellbeing. However there are many who are still living on a very low income, paying down debt and struggling to make ends meet. I am reminded of a speech given by our former President Mary McAleese during more prosperous times when reflecting on those who never experienced the so-called 'Celtic Tiger'. She said "We have the choice of roads that can continue the noble adventure of bringing about true social order, which I understand to mean full social inclusion and an end to poverty, or we can become so wrapped up in attachment to the indulgent self that we become indifferent to the completion of that journey and deaf to the voices of the excluded."

Are we now at a similar cross roads where choices have to be made as to what kind of economic path we follow?

This time of year, with the approaching spring and summer, when spirits are



increasing and new life is stirring, there is an opportunity of viewing our problems, be they financial or other, in a new and fresh light. Problems, for so long stuck in denial, can somehow be aired in a fresh light which makes their solution seem more possible now than in the darkness of winter.

Denial, in the MABS experience, is one of the greatest impediments that people in financial difficulty face when dealing with their overall financial situation. The 'putting your head in the sand' approach to dealing with debt more often than not leads to a worsening of the situation. This approach makes the achievement of a resolution that is affordable and sustainable very difficult if not impossible to achieve. It can also result in individuals and families living on a budget below a normal subsistence level in order to keep creditors at bay when in fact there is no need to do so. We in MABS often come across people living on a few euro a week, scarcely buying the most basic of food essentials, while still making every effort to repay creditors. This denial approach is unsustainable and often has serious mental and physical health implications.

People who are over-indebted or insolvent now have more options than before. It is therefore a very worrying feature of the present debt crisis that there are so many people who are still not engaging with their creditors, either directly, through MABS or another third party, about their debts and in particular their mortgage debt where the consequences of not engaging are so serious.

### New Debt Solutions are now available

The solutions now available for people who are over-indebted have changed considerably from the days when there were little or no options save voluntary repayment arrangements, creditors securing court judgments and an archaic bankruptcy regime. The debt resolution options that are now available include:

- a. **Voluntary Debt Settlement arrangements**- debts settled within a seven year timeframe for relevant unsecured debt under the MABS /BPMI Protocol for people who do not qualify or do not want to go the statutory resolution route
- b. **Debt Relief Notice (DRN)** - which is debt relief arrangements for debts under €20,000 for people on a low income with little or no assets
- c. **Debt Settlement Arrangement (DSA)** - which is debt relief arrangements for debts over €20,000
- d. **Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA)** for secured and unsecured debt.
- e. **Bankruptcy** – a now 'more fit for purpose' solution that is being availed of by growing numbers.

### A Debt Relief Notice

The Debt Relief notice (DRN) is a statutory debt relief option of up to €20,000 for people in debt who are on a low income and have little or no assets. In MABS we occasionally get queries from SVP members about how they might help people with large debts. We are of the view that potentially a DRN or another insolvency option could help more people regain control of their finances. However we have come across instances where help was given to someone with a large debt which resulted in them making a 'preference' for one creditor and so they were disqualified from a DRN. We believe that a DRN could help more people who have debts and arrears difficulties with creditors – be they with moneylenders, catalogue companies, utility companies and potentially rent, Revenue and social welfare. MABS welcomes queries where someone looking for assistance to deal with their financial situation might qualify for a DRN.

The MABS website [www.mabs.ie](http://www.mabs.ie) and the MABS helpline on 0761 07 2000, provide information and guidance on all aspects of dealing with personal debt. Information on statutory debt resolution options can be found on the Insolvency Service of Ireland's website [www.isi.gov.ie](http://www.isi.gov.ie).

While the insolvency options aren't for everyone we believe that there is merit in considering if they can assist in removing the heavy debt burden being carried by so many at such a great cost.

The Money Advice and Budgeting service is particularly well placed to assist people in over indebted situations. MABS as well as being a free service is independent, confidential and non-judgemental. MABS has over sixty offices nationwide staffed by experienced money advisers. MABS supports all kinds of people with all kinds of debt. MABS has, as a core principle, a holistic ethos i.e. the person and their full contemporary situation is central to the MABS process and the resolution of financial difficulties.

#### Poor Paying More for Energy

MABS has, along with the SVP, raised the issue of surcharging for the payment of basic services. We in MABS have concentrated recently on charges imposed by shopkeepers on customers who wish to top-up their energy meters. These charges vary from 20 cent to a euro. This is an unacceptable practice as it is being charged extra to pay your property tax, waste charges and for other essential services when your only crime is that you are, because of your low income, unable to or are excluded from using one of the more affordable payment options. Do the poor pay more? –Yes they do and all the time.



## ASYLUM SEMINAR Galway

SOLAS (Support, Orientation and Learning for Asylum Seekers), a pilot project set up to offer services to asylum seekers on a regional (Galway/Mayo) basis held a seminar in January entitled 'Moving Forward: Reform & Solutions in the Irish Asylum Process'. The purpose was to raise awareness on the issues faced by asylum seekers and to discuss solutions for reform of the current reception and legal framework for those seeking asylum in Ireland.

A decision was made at the seminar to send a submission to the Department of Justice and the government's Working Group on Asylum

Notable speakers included Sue Conlan (CEO of the Irish Refugee Council) and the Honourable Justice Catherine Mc Guinness who spoke on best practice in the reception and legal conditions for Asylum seekers.

The second half of the day saw those attending who included asylum seekers and members of the statutory and voluntary sector came together to work on solutions both short-term and long-term to improve the current asylum process in Ireland. Solutions gathered from the seminar will be submitted to the Department of Justice and the government's Working Group on Asylum, requesting immediate reform to the current system.



The SOLAS project is a partnership between Mayo Intercultural Action; Croí Na Gaillimhe, which is a Resource Centre of the St.Vincent de Paul Society and the Health Services Executive (HSE) West.

- Any queries regarding the seminar submission or other aspects of the project can be directed to Mayo Intercultural Action by telephone on 094-904451, by email to [miamayo@eircom.net](mailto:miamayo@eircom.net) or to Na Gaillimhe staff at 091-895203 or email at [Ineedhamsvp@eircom.net](mailto:Ineedhamsvp@eircom.net).

## OZANAM HOLIDAY CENTRE HALLOWEEN 'BASH' MORNINGTON



Above - PIRATE, BABY AND INDIAN AT THE MORNINGTON BASH



HAPPY HALLOWEENERS AT MORNINGTON

Left - ENJOYING THE MORNINGTON FUN - DESPITE THE GUY IN THE BACKGROUND

To round up our 50th Anniversary celebration year the Ozanam Holiday Centre at Mornington hosted its 2nd Annual Halloween Bash, a 3-day event. We had a full house with many of our guests returning from Ardee, Lurgan, Craigavon, Dundalk and Dublin to help us celebrate. This event has become the highlight of the year and culminates with a fancy dress party on Halloween night.

As always our guests' enthusiasm and joy of life is what make the Ozanam Holiday Centre such a special place to visit. As it is all through the Summer months the Centre echoed with great chats, music and laughter for the whole weekend.

The Centre is approximately 30 km from Dublin, 6km from Drogheda, and is within walking distance of the village of Bettystown. The Ozanam Holiday Centre has 31 twin rooms, all ensuite and the building is on ground level making it very accessible for those with mobility problems. Weekly full board is offered, which includes evening entertainment. The Centre

has a relaxing sun room with a library, an oratory and a TV lounge with widescreen TV. The bar is open for lunch and from 8.30pm to 11.30pm each evening. The in-house entertainment includes five and six piece bands with nightly dancing and singing. Amenities include a landscaped patio garden with a relaxing water feature, and all-weather bowling green and all weather golf putting surface. Other activities include pool and croquet. A kitchenette with tea and coffee facilities is available 24 hours a day.

- Our summer season runs between May and September / October however we are available for meetings, retreats or events throughout the winter.

- For any further information of if you would like a brochure please telephone 041-9827808 or email [ozanamhome@eircom.net](mailto:ozanamhome@eircom.net).

- Ozanam Centre Management



## 32 MARATHONS FOR THE SVP

Incredible fundraising efforts are carried out for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. 'Inspirational' is a description which can be applied to Joe Crowley who walked the equivalent of 32 marathons for SVP. He walked the distance of a marathon 32 times on 32 different days! His 1,782,000 steps took him through every County in Ireland, not only raising awareness of the SVP but also raising funds for each county he travelled through. Joe

raised an incredible €45,000 and inspired hundreds of people across the country. His philosophy is that, if he can do it at 62, so can anyone!

If you are inspired by Joe and would like to become one of our amazing fundraisers, please contact [fundraising@svp.ie](mailto:fundraising@svp.ie)

## SVP CAR DRAW NORTH EAST

The North East Region of the Society of the SVP held a car draw at the North-East Regional Office in Drogheda where the winner was Donal Farrell from Newtowncashel in County Longford. Tickets for the draw had been delivered through An Post to houses in Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Cavan, Westmeath & Longford.

"The support for the draw is a testament to the respect in which the Society is held," said Regional President, Liam Reilly, who thanked the organising committee, staff and volunteers who gave of their time to "plan, manage and see through this massive fundraising initiative".

The Chairman of Louth County Council, Cllr. Oliver Tully, was the Society's guest of honour and drew the first prize – the Nissan Qashqai. He commended the Society on its fundraising initiative and thanked the SVP for its "tireless work to combat poverty within our communities."  
[Ineedhamsvp@eircom.net](mailto:Ineedhamsvp@eircom.net)

Draw winners were:

- First Prize Donal Farrell, Newtowncashel, Co. Longford
- Second Prize Rita Mc Hugh, Drogheda;
- Third Prize Jacqui Downes, Drogheda;
- Fourth Prize Karen Downey, Crosskeys, Co. Cavan.



## APPOINTMENTS

Enda Breslin, former North Midlands Regional President, has been appointed National Training Co-ordinator. He replaces Ellmarie Spillane-Dowd who has been appointed Membership Officer in the new South/West Region.

Michael Kenny has been appointed Regional Twinning Officer in the North-East. He is a member of St. Patrick's Conference, Trim, Co. Meath.



## 60 YEARS IN ST VINCENT DE PAUL – AND SIGNING 400 CHEQUES A WEEK!

Jimmy Stenson from St. Mary's Conference in Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim has reached the milestone of serving as a member of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul for over sixty years. He joined St. Mary's Conference in November 1954 and has held the position of Conference President six times. The Conference members organised a surprise presentation for Jimmy, to mark this special event, in the Bush Hotel Carrick-on-Shannon, following Mass in St. Mary's Church for deceased SVP members and benefactors. Jimmy is well-known in the Carrick-on-Shannon and Leitrim area for his self-less SVP work.

He recalled some memories from the past:  
One of his proudest moments was the opening of the local SVP Shop in 1993 which is still going strong today. Another of his

memories was the Post Office Strike in 1979, when then Minister Charlie Haughey requested SVP Conferences to assist with the giving out of pensions and Social Welfare payments all over the country. Payments worth £84,000 were paid out in Carrick-on-Shannon with Jimmy having to sign 400 cheques a week for the duration of the strike. From checking old records, he found that in 1900 the Conference made 664 visits spending £60 that year assisting families. How times have changed! Jimmy's many years of involvement have brought a wealth of valuable experience to the Society of St.Vincent de Paul not alone at local level but also at national level.

## LONGFORD HOMELESS SERVICES IN FUNDING CRISIS

The Society of Saint Vincent Paul has expressed concern that their homeless services in Longford town, serving the entire Midlands region face closure.

St. Martha's Hostel and Bethany House, both based in Longford town provide over 30 emergency placements for Men, Woman and Children, who are homeless in the region. Over 120 people used the SVP Homeless Service in Longford last year, including over 25 children. The services have been running at a rising deficit in recent years following repeated cutbacks in funding from both the Health Service Executive and Local Authorities.

Commenting on the current crisis, Albert Perris, SVPs National Hostels and Homes Coordinator said: "Downward pressure on statutory funding over the past number of years, has left a number of our services vulnerable to closure and has contributed to a rising deficit in SVP Homeless Services which is no longer sustainable. I have a real concern around the future viability of our Services in Longford Town in particular. SVP nationally has had to supplement local budgets in Longford in the past 18 month by over 100K. This is no longer possible for the Society. If our services in Longford are to be sustainable, even in the short-term, we will need a significant injection of funds and a more realistic and sustainable funding arrangement for 2015 and beyond. The Society, if at all possible, is committed to sustaining our services to people out of home and in need of support

in the Midlands. However, we have reached the point where difficult decisions may need to be taken. We sincerely hope, and believe that this can be avoided. Our services in Longford provide emergency accommodation and support services to people from all over the four Counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath"

The SVP has in recent weeks met with Westmeath County Council as the lead agency for homeless services, the Health Service Executive and Longford County Council, to highlight the current position and to address the current crisis.

According to Mr. Perris all three agencies have acknowledged the importance of these services in the Midlands, have recognise that these services are of the highest standards, and that they represent excellent value for money.

"There is no question as to whether these services are absolutely essential. There is no question as to whether these service are of the highest standard. There is no question as to whether these services provide value for money. The only question is where the funding is going to come from," he said. "The Society needs an immediate commitment from both the Health Service Executive and Local Authority that funding shortfalls will be addressed."

### NAVAN

## SEDUCTION FILM NIGHT RAISES €2,000

Report: Bill Lalor

"The Seduction," starring Brendan Gleeson, lured a large audience to Navan's Diamond Cinema for a film night in aid of Navan St. Vincent de Paul Society. The occasion was generously sponsored by the Navan Rotary Club.

*Pictured is Navan Rotary Club President Maurice Harlin presenting a cheque for €2,000 to Catherine O'Connor of Navan SVP. Looking on are (from left): Brendan Smyth, Chairman, Navan Rotary Club Film Night Committee; Marcella Killeen, Navan SVP; Kathleen Doherty, Treasurer, Navan SVP Area Council and Stephen Flattery, President, St. Patrick's SVP Conference, Navan.*





## COME DANCING WITH OZANAM

DUBLIN *Report : Tony Rock*

Ozanam House is a community resource centre located in the heart of Dublin's North Inner city. In a building operated by the Society for over 100 years it has great history attached to it and it now hosts programmes and projects for over 600 people every week. Our youngest member is 2 and our eldest is 94! We run childcare, youth programme, a suite of adult education classes and community programmes for the elderly. All of this is achieved with only 7 full time staff but also with the help of 85 volunteers actively working in different areas each week, sharing not just their time but more importantly their individual skills and passions for the support and benefit of others. (visit our website [www.ozanamhouse.ie](http://www.ozanamhouse.ie) for more details)

For the last 2 years we have held a big annual fundraiser 'Ozanam Come Dancing', a Strictly Come Dancing style event in aid of the Centre. Having started in the Button Factory in 2013 with 300 people in attendance, last year it moved to a bigger venue in 'The Academy' Dublin. With the event recorded by the new Irish TV Channel Irish TV, it was a huge success. So much so it is back again this year...bigger and better than ever!



This year's 'Ozanam Come Dancing' will be held on Friday, March 6 at 8pm in the 400-seater venue of 'Liberty Hall'. The show will be hosted by Brendan Courtney and Geraldine O'Callaghan, a neighbour and friend of the centre, is just one famous face on the judging panel.

Ten enthusiastic volunteer couples have come on board and started their classes and rehearsals at the beginning of January. We have staff and volunteers in the centre involved again and this year we also have staff volunteering from some of the biggest companies in Dublin who are also supporters of the centre; Diageo and McCann FitzGerald, Abbey Capital and FK international. The dancers will have a weekly blog on the Ozanam House website, so be sure to follow their progress and share in the fun at [www.blog.ozanamhouse.ie](http://www.blog.ozanamhouse.ie).

This year 'Ozanam Come Dancing' will raise much needed funds for the centre's youth summer projects, offering 180 young people from our community a safe and fun place to spend their summer.

Tickets will go on sale soon so keep an eye out on the website for details for a great night's entertainment and of course all for a very good cause.



## CALLED TO ACT IRELAND TO SCOTLAND

Report: Grainne Lee, Northern Region Youth Representative

It is sometimes forgotten that SVP was built on the enthusiasm of young people who felt called to act - Blessed Frederic Ozanam was only 20 when he founded the Society

Twelve delegates from Ireland joined young Scottish SVP members for an SVP youth Conference at Coatbridge in Scotland. The theme of the weekend was 'Called to Act,' an appropriate theme for such an energised group of young people.

The Conference began with a thought-provoking workshop on Human Trafficking, led by Professor Stephen McKinney. This is a topic not often addressed and its prevalence in Western Europe shocked us all.

Our host, Clare Carr, then led a workshop on Catholic Social Teaching (CST), illustrating its relevance to the work of SVP and making us think about social justice issues in our own areas that need to be addressed. Key themes common to both Irish and Scottish communities included poverty, the impact of benefit cuts and education.

This was followed by a presentation from our keynote speaker; Julien Spiewak, international General Secretary for SSVV. Julien talked about the global Vincentian family, in particular the youth element of that family and highlighted to us that our work with SVP was part of something much larger than we ever realised. He spoke of youth conferences in the US, in Asia and in the Middle East, where members find it difficult to meet due to fear of persecution.

It wasn't all serious talks and 'change the world' conversations however. Saturday night saw us at loggerheads with one another, determined to win the quiz organised for us by Clare (and I am proud to say I was part of the winning team, snatching a last minute victory due to our ingenious team name; Agatha Quizty).

The weekend ended with Mass at Glasgow Cathedral, where the group was welcomed by Archbishop Tartaglia. However the overwhelming feeling was that this was only the beginning. Our eyes had been opened to the enormity of the wider Young SVP family worldwide and the potential to collaborate with them in the future. Plans are already in motion for a visit by our Scottish friends to Ireland and for further visits from Julien.

It is both inspiring and refreshing to see young people actively taking an interest in the issues that affect not only their local communities but the wider global community and to begin to consider the positive impact they may have on the lives of those less fortunate. By the end of the weekend I was exhausted from the combination of laughter, late nights (some of us stayed up later than others I must admit) and hard thinking. Yet this tiredness was purely physical; my mind was spinning with the wealth of issues I now feel called to act upon.





## SPEAKING TO STUDENTS DUBLIN

The SVP is very active in University College, Dublin, where its student members are engaged in a variety of work. The Society was invited to make a presentation about its work at the annual UCD Library Day which is an event for the information of all library staff in UCD.

Kate O' Donnell, Auditor, SVP Society in UCD, says that the Society in the College is putting increased focus on structural social justice issues.





Society of St. Vincent de Paul



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