

THE

SUMMER 2014



# BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL



## PRESIDENTIAL PROJECT

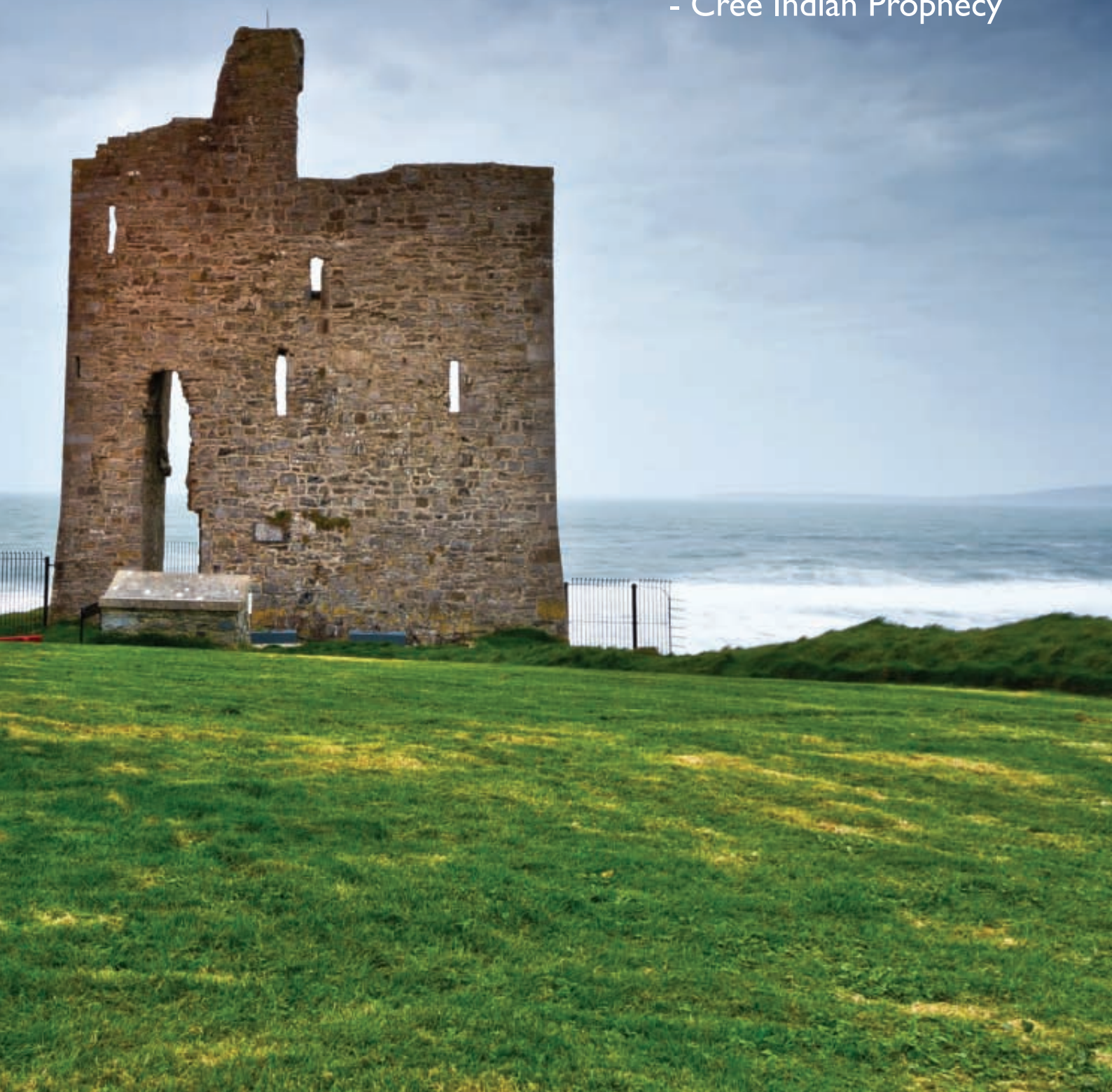
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THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

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

- Cree Indian Prophecy





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

SUMMER 2014

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## EDITORIAL

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in its 170th year in Ireland, remains dedicated to the concept of social equality. It has continued to work, under different governmental and political administrations, through two World Wars, a Civil War and several periods of economic recession, to help those in need and intends to continue to do so in the future. Having suffered from the harshness of austerity enforced because of the avarice of greed, the people of Ireland who has suffered heavily deserve a better future. Those who have suffered are not given equal consideration by those who have not been as seriously affected by the financial crisis and the economic recession. The SVP says in this issue that the EU, which has overseen Ireland, does not understand the suffering of families and individuals and the SVP has therefore, challenged its insistence on more austerity. Our articles in this quarterly edition ask if the term "humanity" is understood and why some should benefit on the backs of those on whom their policies enforce a less standard of living. That is not what 'community' or 'humanity' means.

In its role of seeking social justice, the SVP analysis of the Government's attitude towards people is reflected in the on-going controversy over Irish Water, where as our assessment shows, figures quoted by the Government are not accurate and households will be faced with far higher costs, particularly post-2016 when, surprise, surprise, a General Election is scheduled. Does this indicate genuine concern for all the people of the nation, reflected in the Proclamation of the Easter Rising, the centenary of which will be celebrated in 2016?

Regrettably, Ireland is a nation of inequality. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is campaigning to change this as our National President outlines on page 4 when he says that Ireland needs "Government leadership and policies that focus on people as much as on strategy and economic issues



President Michael D.Higgins has agreed to give the keynote speech at an SVP public event in Dublin on September 22 which is being organised to develop national debate about the future of Irish society, an initiative launched by SVP President, Geoff Meagher.

An SVP group, led by Mr.Meagher, was invited by President Higgins to Áras an Úachtaráin. The purpose was to discuss President Higgins' public initiative this year around ethics and Irish society, an initiative aimed to "enable us to build a sustainable social economy and a society which is profoundly ethical and inclusive". The invitation was a response to the Society's contact asking for his input to our September event.

Mr.Meagher was accompanied by SVP Vice-President, Tom MacSweeney; John Monaghan, former Vice President and John-Mark McCafferty, Head of Social Justice. The purpose of the meeting over lunch was to hear about President Higgins' ethics initiative so far and to discuss how best SVP could become involved with the President on these issues, starting at our event in September 20. Mrs. Sabina Higgins, wife of the President and members of his staff were also present. Discussion centred on the common themes of the President's initiative and SVP values as a volunteer-led charity which both assists people in need and advocates for social justice. We talked of the social concerns facing SVP and that the Presidents' ethics initiative resonates strongly with us.

President Higgins warmly accepted our invitation to be keynote speaker at our event and we discussed with President Higgins how the SVP might contribute towards the longer-term legacy of the ethics initiative, through a deep and wide consultation with people and groups from various walks of life, including those affected by poverty and exclusion. We talked about the kind of vision required to set out and underpin a fairer, more just society that enables all children in Ireland to grow up free from poverty.

SVP wished to engage with the President's initiative this year because Ireland is becoming a more and more unequal place, with decreasing opportunities for people who are disadvantaged to reach their full potential. Without a change in public attitudes towards tackling the underlying causes of social exclusion and inequality, the problems SVP sees will continue to get worse.

We were very glad to hear that President Higgins fully endorses, in principle, our process of consulting various groups in civil society, starting with our September event. Our aim is to develop a vision and values upon which a more ethical Irish society can be based; one that provides genuine social and economic opportunities for all.

- Johnmark McCafferty

# “We need Government leadership and policies that focus on people as much as on strategy and economic issues.”

You can almost feel the division creeping out of the shadows as Ireland begins to emerge from the economic darkness of the past few years. It concerns me that any element of solidarity which seemed to have developed as a result of the shared pain of so many in this nation, is dissipating.

Increasing house prices, particularly in urban areas which are benefiting some sections of society are hurting others by putting the possibility of home ownership out of the reach of many once again. Higher rents and the lack of supply of both private rented and social housing are resulting in more and more homelessness. Increasing numbers of homeless families in Dublin are being accommodated in hotels because there is no suitable housing available for them.

The gap between those who are positioned to benefit most from any recovery and those still struggling on fixed incomes from the State or in low-paid employment is striking.

The urban/rural divide is growing with continuously diminishing services in rural areas leaving more and more people isolated from the most basic of facilities.

Unless Ireland tackles these divisions and creates a more inclusive society there is a great risk that a generation of children will be left behind, creating a future population of older people who live in poverty. Ireland risks being unable to deal with future crises and of missing the opportunity to develop the nation into a fairer, more equal society.

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul has a unique insight into the lives of people who are struggling, SVP members are invited into the homes of the people who seek the Society's help. We provide support, friendship and assistance and our volunteer members see at first-hand the impact that the financial crisis and the austerity programme has had on struggling households across Ireland.

Behind the stark statistics there are the personal struggles, with mental anguish and stressed relationships.

While signs of economic recovery are welcome, the reality is that – despite the ecstatic expressions of some commentators – recovery will only benefit everyone if Ireland achieves the right kind of recovery.

That is not just an economic recovery, but a social one as well.

This is a time of risk and opportunity for our country. We are asking the Government to set out a roadmap for the right kind of recovery, which will tackle the inequalities that are storing up human, economic and social costs for the future.

Ireland needs a plan that outlines what the Government will do to ensure that increasing growth and employment means that quality jobs are available to all, including those who are distant from the labour market and who have been scarred by the experience of long-term unemployment and poverty.

The Government should allocate resources which will allow all Irish children to grow up free from poverty.

As Irish people we all need to ask ourselves how we can work together to ensure the full participation of every citizen in the recovery.

More public debate is needed on these issues.

The SVP welcomes the progress achieved to date in Ireland's recovery but this Society is still dealing with the impact on many vulnerable families during the past years of austerity and recession. People who were least well-off before the economic crisis remain so and their difficulties have been worsened due to cutbacks to the supports and services on which they rely.

Those who have lost jobs, had business failures, seen significant falls in their incomes or been affected by over-indebtedness require supports in the short, medium and longer-term to ensure that they are prevented from falling into long-term unemployment and poverty.

The reality of life in Ireland, as witnessed by the Society of St.Vincent de Paul, cannot and should not be ignored in any assessment of the impact of the recession.

Ireland needs Government leadership and policies that focus on people as much as on strategy and economic issues.



Geoff Meagher,  
**National President  
SVP Ireland**



# Abstracts

## Of Developments in Social Justice

### **POLITICAL STANDARDS**

The Standards in Public Office Commission, reporting on State funding paid to political parties last year, has drawn attention to the "limited nature" of information which the parties are required to provide about how the money they receive is used.

### **PENSION RISKS**

Pension trustees in Ireland take greater risks when investing workers' retirement savings than any of their European counterparts according to research statistics.. Irish schemes hold an average 44% of their assets in equities. The European average is 34%

### **BRITISH POPULATION CHANGE**

Based on current social research projections, one-fifth of the population of Britain will be foreign-born by 2020. A book by author David Goodhart, *The British Dream*, has also predicted that by then the majority populations of major UK cities, including London, Birmingham and Leicester as examples, will be non-white.

### **MIDDLE CLASSES TURNING TO MONEYLENDERS**

An extra 60,000 people have used licensed moneylenders as middleclass homeowners turned to them after being refused loans from banks and credit unions. A Central Bank report has revealed that more people are using moneylenders.

### **FUTURE OF POST OFFICES**

The Irish Postmasters' Union has called for a Government plan for the Post Office network. They have pointed out that the Fine Gael/ Labour 'Programme for Government' promised to "ensure that the network of posts offices around the country is maintained and that communities have access to adequate postal services in their locality." They claim that this has not been honoured.

### **SOCIAL HOUSING**

There are 90,000 households on local authority housing waiting lists which have increased in number by 30% since the start of the economic downturn.



# My Last Words....

From Kieran Murphy,  
National Director, SVP

I came across a poem recently which I loved. It was written after a party where all the chat had been about where people worked, lived, holidayed, who they knew and the schools they went to. The poet, Oriah Mountain Dreamer, was disillusioned about the lack of depth to the conversations and wrote 'The Invitation'. It was the first line that hooked me: 'It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for and if you dare to dream to meet your heart's longing'. Everyone has some kind of 'ache'. I imagine they are the kind of things, at the end of life, you wish you did more of. They are unlikely to be about wealth or status and more likely to be love, belonging, and being true to yourself and your story.

I met once, the campaigner, Christine Buckley. It was at a Volunteer Ireland event, in 2009, where she was presented with 'Volunteer of the Year' Award. Wow, she was a person with an 'ache'; an 'ache' to tell her story of being a child in Goldenbridge Orphanage and the physical and mental abuse that she experienced there. Her story echoed thousands of others who experienced abuse in orphanages, reformatories, industrial schools, Magdalene Laundries and mother and baby homes. She became a strong advocate for all victims of abuse, and through her extraordinary courage broke the silence on this dark part of our country's history. In 2014 when I saw the coverage of her funeral I was very struck by the contrast of the circumstances of her birth and of her passing. Christine was born to a 31-year-old married woman and a 20 year old Nigerian medical student in Dublin in 1946. At the age of three weeks she was given up for adoption and at four was sent to Goldenbridge Orphanage. In 2014 the Irish President, Michael D Higgins, attended her funeral. This illustrates for me the way society's values can shift over time and it is often the 'ache' that people on the margins have to be heard, to be treated fairly and justly that brings about these shifts.

It is not only individuals but organisations too that can have an 'ache'. These are often described in organisations' vision and mission statements. The Society of St Vincent De Paul 'aches' for a world that is fairer, equal, more just, with less suffering and more compassion. All our members, volunteers and employees share in and express this through their work.

One of the things about 'aches' is that they can be disturbing, unsettling for ourselves and others, challenge the way we see ourselves and the world and compel us to move beyond what is familiar and comfortable. That's why Oriah Mountain Dreamer wonders 'if you dare to dream to meet your heart's longing'. This applies to both people and organisations.

I am writing this as the mother and baby homes scandal unfolds and Government have committed to a statutory enquiry. I sometimes wonder what choices I would have made if I lived in the 40's and my unmarried teenage daughter became pregnant. I'd like to think that I would have opposed the prevailing values which would have required me to conceal my daughter, her pregnancy and her child from public view. I'm not so sure. Don't misunderstand me. I am not making an excuse for the organisations

who ran these homes, the State, or the families and communities from which these women came. It is just that without the benefit of hindsight it is often difficult to see the prevailing values which shape the choices we make as individuals and society. And it begs the question. What is happening today that future generations will be appalled at and seek to hold us to account? My money is on 'Direct Provision Centres' for Asylum Seekers. Since 2000 Ireland has operated these centres. There are currently around 5,000 people, adults and children living in these centres, of which there are over 20 around the country. The problems with these centres are many: lack of privacy, overcrowding, insufficient facilities especially for children, lack of autonomy and many live there for several years. There is a strong prevailing attitude that treating asylum seekers like this is acceptable, otherwise they would still not be operating. It is not uncommon to hear views expressed that 'asylum seekers are not Irish', 'they are not genuine asylum seekers but economic migrants', 'if we don't make it hard for them the flood gates will open'. Therefore, the challenge I see is for organisations and individuals to remain open and faithful to the pursuit of their 'ache' for it is in doing that that we can see and reimagine the beliefs we hold true, the values we live by and the actions we take.

This is my last contribution to the Bulletin as National Director. After 11 years I am moving on to follow my own 'ache', to work in a different way with people and organisations, as they strive to release their full creative potential. When I think of the 100's of people I have met; those I have agreed and disagreed with, those who have inspired, challenged and frustrated me, those who have encouraged and supported me, the words of author Judy Cannato come to mind: 'There is a significance and magnificence at the heart of even the most ordinary aspects of life'. As I leave I am grateful that my story and SVP's have intertwined these last 11 years.



# DWELLING IN POSSIBILITIES....

By Audry Deane,  
SVP Social Justice & Policy Officer

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SVP members who give educational support to families and individuals intuitively know that where you start out in life need not be where you end up. They understand the transformative power and potential of education. Their aim is to get people to think that education may be for them. They do this in practical low key ways but their efforts are all about getting people into, and keeping them attached, to education or training. They know the difference it can make in the long run to a person's life chances.

SVP is very concerned about the adult learners who are not reaching their educational potential. These are the adults who had a negative educational experience in their own school days, the lone parents with low or low qualifications, the long term unemployed people with low literacy and numeracy skills. These are the people who do not consider that they have a chance to progress and make something of their own lives. They do not see further training/ upskilling, or third level education, as relevant to their lives. Yet these are the people who struggle with reading and

numbers. The most recent PIAAC survey showed that 25% of Irish adults cannot read sufficiently to be able to carry out day to day activities while 18% have numeracy problems which hinder them doing basic calculations and following instructions. To those of us who do not have these problems it is difficult to imagine what it feels like to not be able to follow written medical advice, understand a manual or calculate basic arithmetic while doing the shopping, or help a child with his or her homework.

This lack of basic skills becomes a bigger problem for those who are referred for training (called activation) by the Department of Social Protection. Currently there is a lack of the right type of training for this group who need an intense immersion course to bring their skills, and just as importantly their confidence, to a level from which they can progress to qualifications which employers want. If this group of people do not get matched with the right level of training to bring their skills up to a level from which they can sign up for FETACS, 6 and beyond, they cannot become job ready.

Just two weeks ago the SVP Social Justice & Policy team had its pre-Budget meeting with Minister Burton and pointed out this training mis-match to her and the negative impact it has. We were relieved to hear that the Minister understood the problem and told us that she was working jointly with the Minister for Education and Skills to apply pressure on the new Further Education and Training Authority, called SOLAS, to prioritise funding for this level of training. This vulnerable group must be offered training which suits their ability and gives them the foundation they need to move on and meet their potential. It is hard enough to navigate a pathway through the INTREO service (this is the income support and training service for people of working age) without being pushed into training pitched at the wrong level which can only demotivate vulnerable learners and waste time and money. This is a very poor use of scarce resources and we want it to stop.

In 2014 the Government will spend €1.6 billion on activation places in education, training and work experience. Out of the 300,000 places in work, education and training programmes allocated across the Departments of Social Protection and Education and Skills, 94,000 places are reserved for those out of work for more than twelve months. This is good news but only if people are matched with the right course at the right level. Then SVP members can use the very privileged position of trust they have in the homes of potential learners to offer support and encouragement. At that point, we might, as that celebrated American poet Emily Dickinson says, be "dwelling in possibilities....."







## THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IS NOT LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE,

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has told the European Commission that it is not listening to the views of the people of Ireland who are tired, frustrated and demoralised by continued austerity.

The SVP issued its comments following an analysis of the report from the European Commission which called on the Irish Government to continue its austerity programme.

“The Commission’s insistence on a continuation of harsh austerity measures will shock the many thousands of people who continue to struggle across Ireland and throughout Europe. These people democratically showed that austerity is not acceptable any longer.

“The Commission’s recommendation on austerity demonstrates a lack of understanding of the impact of the measures on struggling households across Ireland. There is a need to retain flexibility in the approach to tackling Ireland’s budget deficit, to allow for national responses to issues such as increasing poverty and deprivation and to prevent austerity measures from worsening the situation of struggling households and slowing down Ireland’s eventual recovery,” says the SVP.

The Society goes on to say that it shares a number of the concerns which are highlighted by the Commission, particularly in the areas of long term unemployment and low skill levels; child poverty and exclusion; the need for greater access to quality, affordable childcare and the need to address unemployment traps.

“However we are disappointed that there is no recommendation from the European Commission on tackling poverty. We believe that the Commission’s recommendation on Ireland’s fiscal deficit and budgetary strategy will instead undermine the Government target of lifting at least 200,000 people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. SVP would have welcomed recommendations from the European Commission which support this target.

While the SVP welcomes the progress achieved to-date in Ireland’s

recovery it says that progress has not been experienced uniformly throughout the country.

“Those who were least well-off before the economic crisis remain so, and their difficulties have been worsened due to cutbacks to the supports and services on which they rely. Those who have lost jobs, had business failures, seen significant falls in their income or are affected by over-indebtedness require supports in the short, medium and longer term to ensure that they are prevented from falling into long-term unemployment and poverty.

“An adjustment of around €2 billion to be made in Budget 2015 must be reconsidered. We agree that the day-to-day Government deficit is too large. But further austerity measures have to be considered in a context where over 700,000 of our people, including more than 200,000 children, are living in poverty, where over 390,000 people are on the Live Register and more starkly where one-in-four children are now growing up in a home where no one has a job.

“The apparent recovery in the property market, with house price increases in particular in urban areas, benefit some sections of society. However for others, high rents in the private rented sector are pricing out low income tenants. This combined with the lack of availability of social housing units is leading to increasing numbers of families becoming homeless.

“Despite the best efforts of many families, of SVP members and other organisations, many people are caught in a cycle of disadvantage, becoming more dislocated from work and from society. Further austerity measures will make that cycle of disadvantage even more difficult to break.

“We need Government leadership and policies that focus on people as much as strategy and economic issues.

“Social Justice must be at the centre of a nation which cares for all of its people equally,” the SVP said.



# POLICY MAKERS, POLITICIANS, UTILITY COMPANIES, INSTITUTIONS DO NOT APPRECIATE THE COMPLEXITY AND STRESS OF PEOPLE'S LIVES

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**By Caroline Fahey and Brendan  
Hennessy of the SVP National  
Social Justice Team**

The families visited by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul throughout Ireland are not just those on social welfare. They include people in low-paid employment, the self-employed and people in good employment with debts they cannot handle. The profile of those seeking SVP assistance is radically changing.

It is estimated within the SVP that Society members are making about 400,000 visits per year.

Many of these visits would be returning to those who are being helped on several occasions, which is a sign of the need for assistance which is being brought to the Society. That is an indication of the extent of need and the quality of visitation which the Society carries out.

This is the core work of the SVP.

This level of dependence on the Society of St. Vincent de Paul indicates the need for help to meet requirements of families and individuals and the reliance on charity. It is hard to tell the impact on all those families that seek our assistance. As part of our pre-Budget Campaign in 2013 we decided not only to publicise what we do know, but to give a voice to the people we assist. The courage of people to tell their 'real life' stories is important. We believe that a huge amount of people are facing the effects of the recession in isolation, possibly in denial and many people are trying to get through without recourse to assistance. Not everyone in need approaches the SVP.

Being at a loss as to deal with what is happening when financial and other difficulties occur is very difficult and can be bewildering. So too are the array of bills, expenses, fees and arrears that appear on a weekly basis. An advertisement for An Post mentioned the '100 types of household bills' that can be paid through post offices.

## FAILING TO UNDERSTAND COMPLEXITY

It is that complexity; complexity of life; complexity of parenthood; complexity of caring; complexity of making and balancing budgets; complexity of welfare benefits and allowances that we must bear in mind if we are trying to truly assist people. Our fear is that policy-makers, politicians, utility companies, institutions do not appreciate the complexity and stress of people's lives, nor simply, the inadequate incomes of many households in Ireland.

Sometimes in the SVP we feel powerless in the face of the crushing demands placed on families we assist. As an organisation that so often is addressing immediate needs in the very short-term we can struggle to see the longer-term answers. We are so often sought to react to developments be that to a family in crisis or for an immediate response to the latest Government cut.

This is a comment from just one person who sought SVP assistance:

*"I had nowhere else to turn. And I'd nothing else that I could do. Credit card was kinda maxed...I'd nothing...I literally had nothing and I had nowhere else to go. I didn't know what I was going to do and I don't know why I rang (the Society). It took me months (to actually go ahead and contact the Society). I was like, 'oh I don't want to, too proud'...and 'don't want anyone knowing my business' and 'what will people think if they knew it was them (the Society) knocking on my door'. Stupid really when you think about it."*

One of the shared frustrations of the SVP and families whom we are assisting is the expectation of households to be able to pay upfront bills and often having to do so without access to affordable credit. Regularly the SVP finds itself in the space between the debtor and the creditor, be that a utility, a financial institution, a moneylender, but perhaps even a school, a sports club, an undertaker. In all these scenarios we realise quickly there quite simply is often not an appreciation amongst these institutions of the income and costs for families.

Another comment from a person who needed Society assistance:

*"It is very stressful being poor...Although you don't think about next week or next month you are constantly thinking about tomorrow or the next day...Will I be able to get some food for the dinner...Will we have electricity next week?...It's real basic but it's stressful."*

## THE LIMITATION OF CHOICE

People experiencing poverty are not just income poor - their choices are limited, their lives can be limited and their life chances can be diminishing. For people, such as SVP members, seeking to assist them there is growing frustration.

- Frustration about not being able to make a difference;
- Frustration about the complexity of cases,
- Frustration about referrals from the State to our service
- Frustration that in the SVP we are meeting the same households in the same places again, and again and again and we see the loneliness, pain and challenges of people's lives:

What we try to do is turn that frustration into ambition.

The people we assist continue to struggle and search for hope and a future to look forward to – where caring for each other, children, older people and people with disabilities is valued and supported; where individuals, families and communities can participate fully in Irish society and where an adequately resourced State, a strong economy, employment and business support the type of Ireland in which people can live in with fairness and equity for everyone.

In the SVP we are framing our hopes for the future by asking ourselves what do we expect and want for the people we assist after the recession and economic crisis?

We are asking:

- How can we ensure that increasing employment means that quality jobs and employment opportunities are available to those distant from the labour market?
- How can we make sure that when recovery comes, the people we assist and their children - the next generation - are not left behind?
- How can we highlight and tackle intergenerational poverty and joblessness
- How can we prevent people of working age who are living in poverty now becoming older people who are poor in the future?
- How can we ensure that children in Ireland can grow up free from poverty?
- How can we ensure the full participation of all of our citizens in Irish society - in and after the crisis.

**“ THE SVP ARE  
BRILLIANT PEOPLE ”**

**says Dolores Keane**



SINGER DOLORES KEANE paid a magnificent tribute to the Society of St.Vincent de Paul on RTE's Late Late Show transmitted on Friday, May 30.

"They are brilliant people," she said, recalling that when times were very difficult for her she had gone to the Society for help. She had battled cancer and alcoholism and the Society had helped her when times were tough for her and her family.

"I wasn't ashamed or afraid, I went for help to the Society of St.Vincent de Paul and they helped me out," she told the show's Presenter, Ryan Tubridy, who agreed with her that people in difficulties should not be reluctant to approach the SVP.

"They help you, they talk to you and they listen, they are great people, they help you out.You feel there is someone there for you, someone thinking of you, someone who wants and is willing to help you."

In a wide-ranging interview the singer, an international star, told of looking forward to her return to giving public performances. She said she was free of cancer now and had also dealt with alcoholism.

Dolores Keane had also been the subject of a TV documentary on her personal life battles on RTE and received a rapturous response from the Late Late Show audience.

The singer told the Late Late Show that there had been times when she had not enough to provide food or a fire at home, but when the pressures were intense, she had found support and



help from the Society of St.Vincent de Paul. She had great family support in her difficult times, she said. With that support she also counted the SVP.

"I got the all-clear from the cancer on Valentine's Day. I hadn't a clue what the results were going to be. I haven't had a drink now in eight months. Now it's different when I wake up in the morning."





YOUNG VOICES FOR THE SVP

# DEDICATED YOUNG PEOPLE PLAN SVP WORK FOR THE FUTURE

**The future of the SVP will be found amongst young people who today support the activities of the Society in various ways. The East Region Schools Day provided an insight into the ideas, inspiration and support which today's school pupils are considering as ways to develop social justice initiatives in the future.**

By Deirdre Walsh, Youth Development Officer, East Region

The Schools Day is a celebration of the projects, volunteering, campaigns and learning taken on by young SVP volunteers in schools around the region each year. It is also an opportunity to share ideas, meet like-minded people and find inspiration and support for future SVP work. In the lead up to this year's schools day I worked with a committee of young people from the Belvedere College Conference in Dublin to plan it. They also assisted in leading activities throughout the day.

Sunshine House allowed us the use of their wonderful building in Balbriggan and as the sun shone we made the most of the gardens and had games outside in the morning to allow people time to settle in and get to know each other. Ten schools attended and with 87 young people and 22 adults there was a lot of mingling and exchanging of ideas. Ailsa Flynn, National Youth Representative on the NMC opened the day with a reflection. We were treated to 6 presentations, given by the Young SVP volunteers, about their projects and volunteering and most importantly about why they want to be involved with the SVP and the impact their work has had on them, and also how they have assisted people in their communities. Many schools also had visual displays and artwork to represent their learning and actions during the year through their SVP school Conference. Becca Gallagher, the National Youth Coordinator, awarded every group a certificate and thanks for their

work during 2013/2014.

I had heard the food in Sunshine house was fantastic and we weren't disappointed. After lunch we gathered to listen to our guest speakers. Audry Deane from the Social Justice Department in National Office spoke about the recent campaigns that they have been working on and the importance of caring and acting together to work towards social justice. Colm O'Rourke from SVP in NUI Maynooth then spoke. He highlighted how much he has personally learned through volunteering with the SVP in 3rd level, and took questions from the audience about ideas for fundraising and volunteering. He also highlighted that he is the new Youth Representative for the East Region and that they could approach him with ideas and thoughts that he can then relay to the National Youth Committee.

We then split up into workshops groups exploring campaigning, social justice, being part of a Young SVP committee, and how we might set up a new Young SVP Council for the East region. To close the day a student from Belvedere College said a prayer and everyone lit a candle and formed the initials of SVP together.

It takes a lot of dedication from young people and their teachers and chaplains to plan and incorporate SVP work into their school schedules. The day was about celebrating this dedication, enthusiasm and offering as much support as we can to young people and their teachers and leaders. The young people present were full of energy and want to assist people who are lonely, in poverty or excluded in different ways. It is true that young people like those who attended our schools day are the future, and I'm sure they will make the future a little bit brighter.



# MINISTER URGES MORE FAMILIES TO APPLY FOR INCOME SUPPLEMENT

The Minister for Social Protection has urged low-paid workers with children to apply for assistance under the Family Income Supplement scheme.

This is a weekly tax-free top-up payment from the Department of Social Protection available to employees on low pay with children.

Minister Joan Burton said that “70% of first-time applicants for FIS qualify for a payment.”

Over 44,000 working families with almost 100,000 children are currently benefitting from the scheme.

Speaking about FIS, Minister Burton said: “My Department spent an estimated €230 million on FIS in 2013 and I have allocated over €280 million to the FIS scheme in 2014. FIS is a crucial support for many working families. 70% of first-time applicants for FIS qualify for a payment ranging between €20 and €680 a week with an average payment of €113 per week. Even if a person only qualifies for a small FIS payment, they will still get a minimum of €20 a week – or over €1,000 a year – and this is paid directly into the person’s bank account.”

“Once the level of payment is determined, it will generally continue to be paid at that rate for a year, provided that the person remains in full-time employment. This gives people who are getting FIS certainty that they will receive a guaranteed level of income support for a full 12 months. This provides a real incentive to workers with families to avail of employment opportunities.”

Application forms for FIS are available at [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) or from local Intreo Centres across the country. Completed applications should be accompanied by the person’s latest P60 form, recent payslip, and a copy of their Certificate of Tax Credits for the current tax year.

**FIS**

**STEP UP TO WORK**

**FAMILY INCOME SUPPLEMENT**

**WEEKLY TOP-UP PAYMENT FOR WORKING FAMILIES** **TAX** **PAID WEEKLY INTO YOUR BANK ACCOUNT**

**TO QUALIFY:**  
YOU MUST BE IN PAID EMPLOYMENT FOR AT LEAST 19 HOURS A WEEK OR 38 HOURS EVERY FORTNIGHT

**YOU COULD BE:**  
ENTITLED TO €20 - €680 A WEEK, DEPENDING ON YOUR INCOME AND THE SIZE OF YOUR FAMILY

**For more information**

Department of Social Protection  
LoCall: 1890 92 77 70  
Direct: 043-3340053

FISSection@welfare.ie  
www.welfare.ie

The rates charged for using 1890 (LoCall) numbers may vary among different service providers.

Intreo logo and Department of Social Protection logo.





# “ENERGY ENGAGE CODE” PROMISES TO REDUCE DISCONNECTIONS

By Brendan Hennessy, SVP Social Policy

Since 2008 the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has experienced a 100% increase in calls for assistance from people in need seeking our assistance. In that time SVP energy assistance rose a staggering 200% from €3.8million to €11.3million. In 2013 alone 10,000 electricity customers and 6000 natural gas customers had their energy disconnected. It was therefore crucial that a solution was sought to prevent disconnections for such vulnerable customers.

The Energy Engage Code, effectively a no-disconnections policy for engaging customers, has been produced by the five energy utilities operating in Ireland, and is backed by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and the Commission for Energy Regulation. The code should serve to ensure people in financial distress do not live in fear of disconnection.

## Customer Engagement

The Energy Engage Code is predicated on customers making and maintaining contact with their suppliers. This is something SVP has always encouraged. An ‘engaging customer’ is someone who is considered to be:

- Communicating with their energy supplier directly or through a third party representative
- Genuinely working to clear arrears on their account and manage current charges through a payment plan, Pay as You Go meter or other means agreed with their supplier.

Amongst the obligations of the code are that ‘engaging customers’ should be dealt with empathy and positivity and that their debt management solutions are appropriate for their circumstances.

Non-engaging customers are those who fail to respond to communications from suppliers, do not enter into arrangements to deal with their arrears or fail to meet the terms of an agreement without contacting their supplier. The code stipulates that suppliers will at every point in the disconnection process encourage non-engaging customers to engage and provide them with the opportunity to avoid disconnection.

SVP recognises the experience of households for whom an energy bill is one of many difficult financial decisions they must make on a weekly basis. As one mother said to us:

“It is very stressful being poor...Although you don’t think about next week or next month you are constantly thinking about tomorrow or the next day...Will I be able to get some food for the dinner...Will we have electricity next week...It’s real basic but ... it’s stressful.”

Sometimes for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul our role is not just about helping people pay their bills, it is often simply to be there

when they open the envelope. There is a terrible isolation which accompanies financial distress. People need reassurance that they are not alone.

Therefore, to customers in debt we advocate that they:

1. Approach their supplier: let them know what you can afford
2. Assess your usage: find out are there ways you can reduce your energy bill
3. Agree to the installation of a Pay As You Go meter or repayment plan.

## The continued need to tackle energy poverty

We believe that the Energy Engage Code represents an official acknowledgement of a critical area of energy poverty. Unfortunately preventing disconnections does not mean an end to arrears. It is crucial therefore that we work further to help households who may not be at threat of disconnection but who find themselves in constant debt and arrears. The recognition of energy affordability and fuel poverty is an essential part of this work. Along with recognising the rising cost of energy we must constantly remind ourselves of people who simply cannot afford to heat their homes. Ultimately, for the households we visit, energy poverty is a consequence of low income as well as energy inefficient homes.

SVP remains worried about the number of customers who find themselves in arrears but for whatever reason are unable to access Pay as You Go meters. To this end we have submitted suggestions to the Commission for Energy Regulation on both market monitoring and affordable repayment plans for credit customers in energy arrears. It is crucial therefore that we work further to help households who may not be at threat of disconnection but who find themselves in constant debt and arrears – in short, those who struggle to heat their home.

## SVP’s call for Energy Suppliers to show flexibility

Energy suppliers have worked with many SVP Conferences to find the best option for households in need. That experience of finding the right approach, the right advice and the right resolution must inform their work to make the Energy Engage Code a success. Customers who approach their suppliers in financial distress must be met by flexibility and understanding. This engagement by suppliers with customers is crucial to the success of the Energy Engage Code.

More information on the Energy Engage Code can be found on the news section of the Electricity Association of Ireland website <http://www.eaireland.com/> or from the following energy suppliers: Bord Gáis Energy, Electric Ireland, Energia, Flogas and SSE Airtricity.

# TRUST FOR ST. VINCENT DE PAUL REMAINS HIGH

By Nichola Mullen,  
Head of Fundraising, SVP

The end of last year and in to the early part of this year was a particularly challenging time for charities. As a sector, we witnessed a host of negative press about various 'scandals' within charities and how they were governed. Though the scandals in question were limited to a very small number of organisations, this negative publicity had a much wider impact and really affected the confidence of charity supporters throughout the country.

Throughout this challenging period the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul participated in a country wide survey conducted by nfpSynergy during November and December 2013. In this survey, over 2,500 people from Ireland were asked several questions to find out how they felt about these scandals and charities in general.

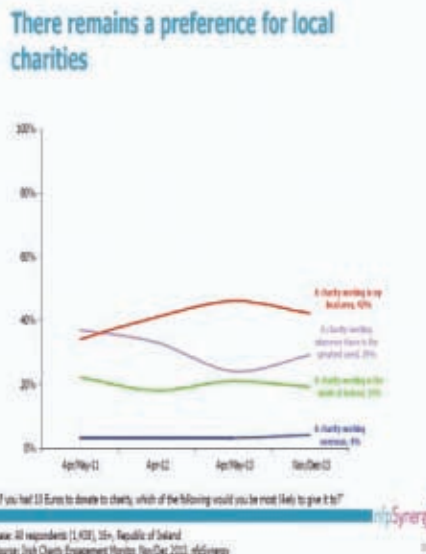
What the survey results clearly found was that after these scandals were reported, the percentage of donors who said that they no longer trusted charities had unfortunately grown to 13%. This clearly showed the impact these had on charity supporters who were now clearly concerned about how their valuable donations were being used and the impact their donations were making.

However, in this midst of this challenging time, there is still some very good news to report for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Survey results showed that though donors were understandably a little less trusting of in charities in general, their trust in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul still remained high with 77% of all those questioned reporting that they trusted ST VINCENT DE PAUL a great deal.

## Our local presence

One of the key reasons we have maintained this high level of trust with the public is in no small measure down to the work of our members, who tirelessly volunteer their time to help people in need in most in towns and villages the length and breadth of the country.

Because of this local presence and the nature of the work our members carry out, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul remains one of the most recognised charities in the country with 97% of those questioned knowing of and about the work of the SVP.



Despite the concerns about the charity sector in general, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul still has a strong supporter base with nearly half of all those questioned in this survey indicating that they had supported the work of the Society within the previous 3 months.

This support came in the form of donations, volunteering their time, sponsoring another person who was engaged in fundraising, such as doing a 'fundraiser' for St. Vincent de Paul or donating to one of the many St. Vincent de Paul shops throughout the country. The Society has seen a dramatic rise in the number of people requiring our help in recent years. Despite some improvements in the economy, we are not seeing a decline in the number of families and individuals who need our help to put food on their tables, keep their homes warm or afford basic health and schools costs. This loyal support from our donors is very welcome and is vital to help ensure we can keep meeting this need throughout the country.

## WORDS CHOSEN BY THE PUBLIC TO REPRESENT HOW THEY THINK ABOUT THE SVP



## Making an impact.

The Society carries out a wide range of work throughout the country. SVP volunteers work to meet the need they see in where towns and villages they work and the communities in which they live. We were delighted to see that when charity supporters were asked what words would spring to their minds to describe the work of St Vincent de Paul, Local, Poverty and Help were at the forefront. Homelessness also featured strongly. The words chosen by those interviewed for the survey are shown in the graphic.

Each year the Society's 11,000 volunteers spend over €40 million helping tens of thousands of families and individuals in the ways described. This clearly shows that the hard work of St Vincent de Paul volunteers is not going unnoticed as they discreetly work to help those in need throughout Ireland each week.

## Transparency

Though we are extremely grateful that our supporters have remained so loyal to the Society during difficult times, transparency from charities is a justifiable concern amongst all supporters. The Society of St Vincent de Paul reassures all our supporters that any donations we receive are put to use to make a really big difference to those who need it most in communities through-out Ireland. The donations we receive locally are spent locally. We pride ourselves on being open and transparent. Our audited accounts are published on our website www.svp.ie

# TEACHERS – OUR FORGOTTEN HEROES?

By Becca Gallagher, National Youth development Co-ordinator

In recent editions of The Bulletin you will have noticed a number of articles celebrating youth engagement and youth involvement in the SVP Youth Development Programme. It has been a wonderful few months across the country and I have had the pleasure of seeing, experiencing and sharing in the wonderful exhibitions and celebrations of the works and projects carried out by young people in over 190 schools across the island.

Young People in schools today have some wonderful opportunities to engage in social action and they do so with great enthusiasm and passion. SVP has established a programme for youth that encourages development and engagement in social action while we share the SVP knowledge and experience with them.

“Within the wide network of SVP members there is a wealth of knowledge and experience in the areas of tackling poverty and social justice. It has been recognised that this should be used constructively and it is believed that young people can benefit from our expertise. We have a duty to pass on our knowledge to future generations. Young people are well placed in society; they have a voice that should be heard, they are our future leaders and change makers; let us encourage them to think critically about societal issues and social justice; encourage them to take action and get involved in creating a more just



and fair society; a society in which they can be proud to live” (Ailsa Flynn, National Youth Committee Chair). The SVP Youth Development team is here to support these young people in becoming ‘social action heroes’ and we are developing ways that local members can also assist and support this work (please contact me for more information).

Without teachers and chaplains in schools, across the country, taking on and running our SVP Youth Programme we would not have the opportunity to engage with any of these young

people. At a time when teacher’s time is under ever increasing demands we are extremely lucky to have so many dedicated and enthusiastic teachers encouraging students to engage in our programme (be it through Youth for Justice programme, overseeing Youth Conferences or engaging in supporting activities for SVP). These teachers are our essential link, so let me take this opportunity to say a heart-felt and genuine thank you to all teachers out there who have supported the SVP Youth Development Programme this year;





# THE FRUSTRATION OF DEALING WITH IRISH WATER

**Government Pricing Does not add up**



**By Brendan Hennessy,  
SVP Social Policy Team**

The on-going saga of the pricing regime of Irish Water is becoming increasingly frustrating. The reality of the situation is that households will be charged for water from October and that bills will start appearing in January. Beyond that everything is conjecture and quite frankly the recent Government policy on pricing does not stack up.

SVP's core position on Irish Water pricing policy is that people on low incomes must be offered protection and that there should be easy billing and budgeting options made available to the public. Our reaction to the recent Government direction on Irish Water is a mix between immediate concern for multi-occupancy adult households who will face the highest bills and our concern about the long-term impact of Government policy on the viability of Irish Water. In a letter to the Minister for the Environment SVP had strongly argued that Government must publish the findings of an ESRI report it commissioned on water affordability in Ireland. Furthermore the principles that underpin the Government decision on water pricing and an expert analysis of their impact is vital in order for us to get a real understanding of the impact of water pricing on low income households.

## **Government Direction on Pricing Policy**

What has happened to date is that Irish Water proposed a tariff model which was then opened by the water regulator, the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), to public consultation. Irish Water's preferred tariff option depended on a significant standing charge and a single national rate per litre of water. However, during the consultation period, and before the local elections, Government gave a direction to CER that there should be no standing charge, that pricing will be solely on consumption, and that the average bill per household should be €240 and these prices would be fixed to 2016. Government also announced water allowances of 30,000 litres per household and 38,000

## Households will pay more than Government says

litres per child, as well as a €100 payment for households in receipt of the household benefits package.

All that may seem fine if it added up, but it doesn't. Because what we also know is that Irish Water must make €500 million per year and that the Government subvention for Irish Water, as well as the fixing of charges, will be in doubt post 2016. To add to the confusion the Minister for the Environment gave average cost figures of €138 for single occupancy homes and €238 for homes with 2 adults and 2 children. Without considering those figures in terms of water consumption it is very difficult to get to the point of pricing.

### Price of water will rise higher

According to various studies the average water consumption of a single person household is approx. 55,000 litres, for the average Irish household of 2.7 people it is 140,000 litres and for a two adult, 2 children family it is 190,000 litres. While these figures can only really be put to the test when metering happens they are the best information we have. Therefore, if as the Minister says that a single household will pay €138 after allowances, then the price for a cubic litre (1000 litres) will be €5.52, however if we take his example of €248 for 2 adults and 2 children, taking account of allowances, it will be €2.95. Which is it?

Again, if we take the average price of €240, knowing that there are 1,400,000 households who will use Irish Water, the revenue raised will be €336 million, a shortfall of €164 million of the €500 million Irish Water needs to raise. However, considering the loss of income from households with children in receipt of allowances and the fact that households with their own septic tank will be spared the waste water element of the charge the loss of revenue may be even greater than it seems.

From all this comes the SVP concern that by removing the standing charge and setting pricing solely on water consumption that the tariff will be set very high, that this rate still will not be sufficient to fund Irish water and that consequently water pricing in Ireland will not only be high, but will have to rise even higher



when fixed pricing ends and if the Government subsidy reduces post-2016. Hence, SVP is extremely concerned about the impact of the recent Government decisions for the long-term.

### Shared concerns about Irish Water

Of course SVP is not the only organisation with concerns about Irish Water. It is very noteworthy that the Ombudsman expressed disappointment that his office will not have responsibility for complaints made by the public against Irish Water. Irish Water will become the largest single utility in the State and will have over 1.4 million customers. Any new organisation will have teething problems and SVP has already stated to CER that where such issues arise that the issues must be resolved with due deference to the customer experience. It is important that the Irish public have trust in Irish Water and that anything the company can do to ameliorate the negativity towards the organisation should be done. In the same vein it is of concern to SVP that the Irish Water regulator, the Commission for Energy Regulation, does not have a role in dealing with customer complaints, an area for which it has vast expertise in dealing with energy utilities.

SVP, just like many families, is preparing itself for the onset of water charging. It is incredibly frustrating therefore that we don't know how much water will really cost and we can't advise families on what to expect. More worrying still is the sense that we will be bounced into a pricing structure that won't add up and which will neither help the Irish public nor Irish Water.

A large crowd of people is seated in a hall, possibly a church or a large meeting room. The lighting is warm and focused on the foreground, where a single lit candle is prominently displayed. The candle is yellow and glowing, with a bright flame. The background is filled with people, some of whom are looking towards the camera, while others are looking away. The overall atmosphere is one of a significant gathering or event.

# HUMANITY IS LACKING IN IRELAND WHERE GREED EXISTS

“When the worker is considered by employers as an instrument from which maximum service must be obtained at the lowest possible cost, that is exploitation.”

“HUMANITY” is the expression of human nature in defining the best of human attributes and applying them to the advancement of human nature.

It should be an essential quality of a caring community, one which is concerned that in the welfare of all citizens of a nation, equal opportunities are offered in life.

It does not seek that everyone should be exactly the same, nor that their level in life is precisely similar.

What expression of “humanity” should mean is understanding of the needs of all citizens, including those

who have fallen through the rungs of what is perceived as the social ladder; so that while even while failing to achieve a quantifiable level of self-support and to be in need of help, they are not perceived as disposable or outcasts, but people who, in humanitarian consideration, are due the caring assistance of the community at large.

Thus a State, established and approved by the people, should care for the least of its brethren as much as for the best.

This is neither a Utopian concept nor a social one.

It requires that the underprivileged in society are considered for their value as much as the wealthy for theirs.

Arising from this a question which deserves discussion in today's Ireland is –

## WHY IS IT ALWAYS THE WELL-TO-DO WHO TELL OTHERS THAT THEY MUST CONTINUE TO SUFFER AND THAT 'MORE AUSTERITY IS NEEDED'?

Where is the 'humanity' shown by those people, to whom the loss of twenty or thirty Euros a month from their income would not be a matter of concern, for those for whom such a loss is a catastrophe which can destroy the ability to make ends meet?

Do they, from their privileged position in life, with more than adequate incomes, give thought to how their views and their influence can destroy the lives and hopes of others?

This attitude prevails from the European Union and its Central Bank through Irish Government, business, economic opinion and the media.

"GREED" – the insatiable desire for more wealth has been fused with the lack of "HUMANITY" to effect a disregard for human dignity which has fuelled the economic disaster visited upon Ireland and for which too many families and individuals have paid an enormous price in personal suffering.

That is the reality which the policy-makers, the leaders of business and economic opinion, the media, the politicians could do well to accept: Ireland lacks the humanity which a community requires.

## WHY IS IT NECESSARY FOR EXECUTIVES AND MANAGERS TO BE GIVEN 'PERFORMANCE BONUSES'?

Without the work of employees they can achieve little. Effectively it is on the backs of their staffs that targets are achieved. While private companies contend such arrangements are entirely for themselves to decide, the 'bonus' perk has been evident even in State-appointed bodies. Why is it that Government can cut the wages/salaries of workers, but not break contracts with more powerful people?

Frederic Ozanam, the founder of the SVP, maintained that all classes of society needed to be aware, through a more enlightened education, of the need for movement towards greater social unity. He contrasted the privileges of the professional and well-to-do classes with those regarded as the "workers" and the "working class".

He told the privileged:

*"You blame the inadequacy and extravagance of the worker, his unmethodical routine and frequent display of bad manners and yet, not only do you refuse to encourage, but you actually fear organisations which might help him to draw closer to his equals."*

In the post-election debates where some areas of political life have suffered deep trauma and the need for re-examination, the outcome confirmed what SVP members had experienced from their visitation work – many people were angry, disillusioned and without hope. SVP members help families

and visit them inside their homes. It is a privilege which other interests are not granted as readily.

An improvement in the economy is welcome, more jobs are essential but how many of those created are full-time and not part-employment? Is Ireland over-dependent on foreign investment and should more attention not be devoted to the development of indigenous industries and businesses? Why is the banking sector still permitted to dictate rather than be subservient to the nation which it almost destroyed? Why are property values again rising rapidly in a nation which was practically made bankrupt by property development? Why is there an increasing homeless problem with more families and individuals in fear of losing their homes? Why is Ireland still a hugely unequal society where the old adage that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer," applies?

The words of Ozanam, committed to social cohesion, in expressing his belief of the vital need for social unity, are as appropriate in these modern 21st century times as they were when he founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the 19th century:

*"It is right that he who renders service to society and enriches it should himself have a proportionate share of the increased social wealth."*

*"There is exploitation when the Master considers the worker not as an associate, as a helper, but as an instrument, from which he must draw the maximum service at the lowest possible cost."*

### SVP STATEMENT on the Medical Cards debacle:

The resolution of this papered over the cracks of a broken system of which the SVP has long been a critic of the serious anomalies and inconsistencies associated with the Medical Card Scheme.

It is now two years since Government promised to offer free GP care to those on the Long Term Illness Scheme – but this has not yet happened. Free GP care for under sixes was announced in Budget 2014 and this is now delayed. The discretionary medical card system has been operating unfairly and inconsistently for years.

The recent policy reversal on reviewing and removing medical cards from people with serious medical conditions is welcome but reveals a floundering system. Instead, we want a health care system based on fairness that is transparent and efficient.



# A PERSONAL STORY OF HOMELESSNESS

*By Pat Cahill in  
Laurel Lodge in  
Ennis.*

Pa was admitted to Laurel Lodge in August 2010 after losing his private rented accommodation. His children had been living with him so this was a very traumatic time as he was now separated from his family.

During his stay Pa was supported in achieving goals, getting his social welfare benefit transferred, his housing application updated, family access, medical card and local G.P. etc.

During keyworking sessions, Pa's excess alcohol consumption, was highlighted and he was encouraged to address this issue. He was accompanied to AA meetings, by a staff member, who could identify with the issues that arose from alcohol addiction. This was also of benefit to Pa when addiction was being discussed, during key working sessions. Slowly, he became more aware of his alcohol abuse, and decided to seek residential treatment

He was referred to Bruree treatment centre. After referral process he was put on a waiting list, having to phone regularly to ascertain bed availability and also to show that he was sincere about addressing his addiction. He continued with this process until he was admitted to the centre.

On leaving Bruree Pa was re-admitted to Laurel Lodge. Then began the painstaking process of finding suitable private rented accommodation that would be suitable for him and his family. A lot of barriers confronted us in this quest. Some landlords were

not willing to accept rent allowance, while some were not willing to rent their property to a man with young children. Numerous visits to estate agents ensued and there was numerous phone calls made to landlords who advertised in local papers.

Eventually Pa secured a semi-detached house in a beautiful location. The landlord was very receptive to his needs. Staff assisted Pa with the process of completing rent supplement forms and lease agreement, getting electricity transferred to his name.

Pa and his family moved into their new accommodation in March 2011. We continue to provide an outreach service to him on a regular basis. This may entail completion of forms, reading and explaining complex documentation that he may receive, liaising with agencies on his behalf that may be in relation to his children's education, or in general just giving him some advice on day-to-day living. An important factor of the outreach service is the reassuring effect for Pa that there is support available to him whenever he feels that it is required, that he is not alone in his journey to provide for his family.

Pa and his family are happily settled in their family home and wish to remain there for the foreseeable future.

*Laurel Lodge is an SVP project. This article is published with the full support of Pa to indicate how life can be changed.*



# PLANNING FOR THE RIGHT KIND OF RECOVERY

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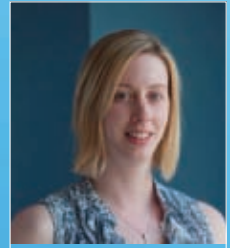
The theme has been selected because of the public discussions about Ireland being on the way to recovery, with some positive developments evident in employment trends and our exit from the Troika programme.

However, the reality is that for many people across Ireland, there is no sign of recovery, and some elements of 'recovery' that are being discussed, such as increasing house prices, are instead causing more and more hardship. Divisions are emerging between those who are poised to take advantage of the recovery and those who are not.

There is an opportunity now to plan for the right kind of recovery, a recovery which will tackle the inequalities that are preventing our people from reaching their full potential and which are storing up human, economic and social costs for the future. The right kind of recovery will not exclude those who are experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

The experience of the SVP working with people in need on the ground gives us a unique insight into life on a low income, which has been made more difficult by six years of austerity. Our pre budget submission sets out the key priorities for Budget 2015 which, if implemented, we believe will set us on the path towards the right kind of recovery.

*This is the theme of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's pre-Budget submission to the Government for the Budget in October this year*



*By Caroline Fahey  
SVP Social Policy  
Development Officer*



### **A FAIR BUDGET IS NEEDED THAT WILL TACKLE POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

Planning for the right kind of recovery means that all individuals and families can access a living income, in and out of employment. It means ensuring that the cost of living does not spiral, and that individuals and families can afford essentials like food, housing, energy and water. It means investing in Ireland's housing stock, through the provision of social housing by the State and by improving the quality, standards and energy efficiency of all housing in Ireland.

#### **Government must...**

Ensure that adult social welfare rates, child income supports and all secondary benefits reflect the increased cost of living so that their purchasing power is maintained

The cumulative impact of cuts to incomes, increased taxation and new service user charges means that the real value of social welfare payments and incomes from employment has not been maintained. Increasing deprivation rates across all age groups demonstrate the impact of less income on people's ability to afford basic essentials such as adequate food, clothing and heating.

With costs rising, and the doubling of carbon tax for solid fuels having taken place in May of this year, energy efficiency measures for low-income households are an absolute priority. Budget 2015 must introduce measures which protect struggling households and which address increasing levels of poverty and social exclusion. Further measures which reduce the incomes and living standards of households that are struggling will only serve to undermine Ireland's recovery and to entrench the problems which have emerged as a result of several years of austerity.

#### **Government must...**

Ensure that adult social welfare rates, child income supports and all secondary benefits reflect the increased cost of living so that their purchasing power is maintained

### **THE BUDGET MUST BE INCLUSIVE TO TACKLE UNEMPLOYMENT AND PROVIDE SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE IN JOBLESSNESS HOUSEHOLDS**

Budget 2015 must introduce measures to tackle unemployment through ensuring access to quality employment opportunities, education and training services, particularly for those most distant from the labour market.

The much discussed economic recovery and reduction in unemployment has been less evident outside of Dublin and some of the other major urban areas. SVP members around the country, and particularly in rural areas, report little evidence of increased employment opportunities and economic recovery for many of those we assist.

#### **Government must...**

Make activation services and supports available to people beyond those on the Live Register, including those on social welfare payments other than Jobseekers Allowance and Benefit, and including unemployed people who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment

The high cost of childcare and housing are barriers for many of those who are trying to take up employment opportunities. SVP is also very worried about unemployed people not being able to progress out of the 'low skills trap' as they are not being offered appropriate upskilling to upgrade their literacy and numeracy skills to a level whereby they can achieve the qualifications needed by employers.

Budget 2015 must introduce measures to ensure balanced regional development, the provision of education, training and employment opportunities to all in urban and rural areas, and address the cost of housing and childcare as two of the most serious barriers to employment facing our country.

#### **Government must...**

Not introduce any further restrictions to eligibility for the various support schemes aimed at low income adult learners who wish to avail of second chance, further and third level education opportunities

### **THE BUDGET MUST INVEST IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

SVP welcomes the publication of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020. We fully support the strategic focus on implementation in the framework with its stated purpose of coordinating all of Government's functions and responsibilities to achieve better outcomes for children.

We see the frustrations and barriers which too many parents experience when they try to either move into education or training or take up work. The supply of childcare places for

**Government must...**

Restore Child Benefit to families of children in full time second level education aged 18 and over; and living in low income households

those returning to study or work is not adequate to meet the demand. There is often a shortfall between the subsidy and the actual cost of childcare that poorer families simply cannot make up.

SVP continues to advocate for a reduction in the various participation costs of education which many low income families just cannot afford; school books, uniforms, ICT learning tools, subject equipment, and of course school tours, sport and recreational activities. We continue to work with the Minister for Education and Skills and his staff on ways to reduce costs. Child and adolescent mental health is growing as an area of concern. There are regional disparities and differences in both diagnosis and access to appropriate treatment in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health teams and SVP wants Government to prioritise improving both the composition of these teams and equity of access to this service, particularly for 16 and 17 year olds.

While 92% of students sit the Leaving Certificate the numbers of young people from disadvantaged or low income families progressing to third level studies remains lower. One in 10 young people still leave school early and these are predominantly students from low income families. SVP wants to see all relevant agencies (SOLAS, Education and Training Boards, Community Training Centres, DSP, Youthreach) collaborate to provide high quality courses which meet the developmental and vocational needs of early school leavers and offer them a stepping stone to further education and work experience opportunities.

Budget 2015 must prioritise investment in our children and young people and tackle the inequality of opportunity that is experienced by too many of our children, young people and families.

**Government must...**

Resource the forthcoming National Access Plan for Access to Higher Education to improve progression to third level study from disadvantaged groups



## BUDGET 2015

The Budget Submission is INTRODUCED with the following OPINION by SVP NATIONAL PRESIDENT, Geoff Meagher:

The SVP sees at first hand the impact that the crisis and the austerity programme which has followed is having on struggling households across Ireland. Calls for assistance to the SVP's largest regional offices have increased by over 100% since 2009. The impact of cutbacks to incomes and services has been most keenly felt by those least able to afford it, resulting in increased demand for our services. SVP is spending almost €80 million per annum helping individuals and families in need. The reality witnessed by the Society of St Vincent de Paul cannot and should not be ignored in any assessment of the impact of the crisis, recession and the effects of long term disadvantage on communities across the country. This is a time of risk and opportunity for our country. We are asking Government to announce a budget for the right kind of recovery, a recovery which will tackle the inequalities that are preventing our people from reaching their full potential and which are storing up human, economic and social costs for the future. We need Government leadership and policies that focus on people as much as fiscal and economic issues. Our priority should be to ensure that when recovery comes, those who are struggling, disadvantaged, poor and excluded are not left behind. We need a budget that outlines what Government will do to ensure that increasing growth and employment means that quality jobs are available to all, including those who are distant from the labour market, those in rural and disadvantaged areas and those who have been scarred by the experience of long term unemployment, poverty and educational disadvantage. We need

*SVP President Geoff Meagher meets President Michael D. Higgins to discuss the way forward for Ireland in Social Justice.*

a Budget which allocates the resources to allow all children in Ireland to grow up free from poverty through the provision of better services and income supports to families. SVP wants Budget 2015 to deliver on three key priorities so that we can plan for the right kind of recovery, a recovery which does not leave people behind.

Unless we plan for a more inclusive society in Budget 2015 and beyond we risk leaving a generation of children behind; we risk creating a future population of older people who live in poverty; we risk being unable to weather future crises; and we risk missing the opportunity to develop Ireland into a fairer, more equal society.

**The full Pre Budget Submission for 2015 with further details about the experiences of the SVP in working to alleviate the effects of austerity and to create social equity and the Society's key policy priorities are on the SVP website, [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie).**



# TWO SVP YOUTH MEMBERS RECEIVE NATIONAL AWARDS

Two young SVP students have been honoured with national awards.

"We need to celebrate our young people today to inspire them into being leaders of tomorrow. We salute Aine Stafford and Melanie Scott," said the Republic of Ireland's Team Manager, Martin O'Neill, when he presented them with the 2014 Pramerica Spirit of Community Awards.

Eighteen-year-old Aine Stafford from Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, is a sixth-year student at the Loreto Secondary School in the town. Aine fundraises for cystic fibrosis and volunteers for the Society of St. Vincent DePaul.

"I have lived with cystic fibrosis for 18 years, but I believe nothing should hold anyone back," said Aine. The money she raises is given to the new cystic fibrosis facilities at Waterford Regional Hospital. She also set up the St. Julia Conference in her school for the Society of St. Vincent DePaul. After raising €4,000 for the charity, she continues mentoring her peers on how to continue her work. Last year, Aine travelled to Lourdes, France, as a volunteer. While there, she looked after sick pilgrims and transported them to and from Mass. Aine also helps connect older people with their families abroad by teaching them basic computer skills, how to use Skype and how to send email.

Máire McMahon, National Secretary of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul said that "without the work and effort of the St. Julia Conference, I can say for certain there would have been families in Clonmel who would not have had the memorable Christmas they did have."

Aine is daughter of SVP National Vice-President, Kieran Stafford.

*Melanie Scott from Kircubbin with Republic of Ireland Football Manager, Martin O'Neill and Andrea McBride, Vice President - Systems, Pramerica Systems Ireland Ltd. Photos: Paul McGuckin.*



*2014 Pramerica Spirit of Community Awards.*

*Aine Stafford from Clonmel pictured with Republic of Ireland Football Manager, Martin O'Neill and Andrea McBride, Vice President - Systems, Pramerica Systems Ireland Ltd.*

Thirteen-year-old Melanie Scott from Kircubbin in Co. Down, is a student at Our Lady and St. Patrick's College, Belfast and volunteers with several organisations in her locality. She has helped with assistance to senior citizens with the SVP and in fundraising. She joined the St. John's Ambulance Badgers at the age of five and was asked to stay on as a Badger Helper when she was 10. Melanie has been volunteering with the Badgers for the past three years and mentors younger members on their First Aid skills. Melanie overcame her fear of public speaking to read prayers of the faithful at mass and sing in the parish choir. She has also been involved with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, since 2011, raising funds and attending meetings during her lunch breaks. For the past three years, Melanie has volunteered at the local senior citizen's Christmas dinner, preparing food and interacting with the older people.

"Volunteering is so rewarding," she said. "First aid, in particular, is very important to me because my skills could someday save someone's life."

Melanie's School Principal Dermot Mullan said: "Her personal example and commitment gives young people something to emulate. It encourages them to assume responsibility as they get older."

There were 20 awards in all presented at a ceremony in Donegal at which the Managing Director of Pramerica Systems Ireland Ltd, Caroline Faulkner said the young people by their voluntary help in their communities "have awed and amazed us."

The Pramerica Spirit of Community Awards programme is modelled on The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, which was created in 1995 in the United States by Pramerica's parent, Prudential Financial, Inc. (PFI)\*. Since then, nearly 375,000 young Americans have participated in the programme and more than 130,000 have won awards. The programme has been widely praised by educators, government officials, parents and community leaders.



# WHAT WILL THE NEIGHBOURS THINK?

A statutory commission of investigation is to be set up by the Government into issues in religious-run mother and baby homes across the State. The special commission of investigation will examine the high mortality rates at mother-and-baby homes during several decades of the 20th century, the burial practices at these sites and also secret and illegal adoptions and vaccine trials on children, according to Minister for Children Charlie Flanagan.

A woman, now in her mid-60s who experienced the trauma of one of these homes spoke to The Bulletin on conditions of confidentiality

Extracts from her comments:

"From the day I had to go into what is called a 'mothers-and-babies' home in the press these days, I felt my parents abandoned me. That was when I was 17."

"The baby I gave birth to I have never seen since he was removed from my arms a short time after he was born."

"I have never married. I could never trust anyone again."

The woman concerned conveys the impression of a confident professional in her life.

She told The Bulletin that she had tried to put the experience of what had happened behind her, but the controversy which has arisen in the media and in political and social life had brought it all back again.

"Most of all I find it so hard to understand why my parents treated me like they did and how much of it was because of what the neighbours would think. That really hurts but those were different times and at this stage I can understand, but forgiveness is much harder. I moved away and didn't ever want to go back to that place. I have had contact with my parents, but what love can you have for those who didn't look after you when you needed it."

She said that any investigation which deals with the practices of the religious orders will inevitably have to look into who gave permission for girls who were pregnant to be put into these homes and that will lead back to parental responsibility.

"Yes, I did wrong, it was sex outside of marriage and that was a terrible crime where the Church and my parents were concerned. So I was called with that disgusting term 'a fallen woman' but what about the boy involved? I didn't make myself pregnant. He and his parents turned their backs on me too. He never took any responsibility and neither did they. My life changed for ever, everyone else involved continued on with theirs. No one gave much thought to me."

# THE GREEN SHOOTS? FOR WHO?

Every day it seems now, that we hear economists and the politicians telling us that we are seeing the "green shoots" of growth starting in our bare country. We associate green shoots with a new time of life, when the buds come on the shrubs and trees. Green shoots mean that we have come alive and have left the long winter days behind. So naturally when we hear these phrases used we hope we have left all the problems we have encountered since the Celtic Tiger absconded behind and that a new era has begun. Is this the truth or is it more of the same spin? Are the green shoots for some and not for others? Green shoots don't select just some plants. In nature, all plants experience the green shoots as soon as the time arrives for rebirth.

A report published by the Central Statistics Office called Eu-silc (Survey on Income and Living Conditions) paints a different story especially for those who are poor, disabled or sick. In 2012, Eu-silc compared a broad range of issues in relation to income, living conditions and across a number of poverty indicators such as the "at risk of poverty rate," consistent poverty rate, and rates of enforced deprivation in Ireland.

It found that disposable income has decreased every year since 2004 when they started collecting that data. The findings also showed that the percentage of people who were at risk of poverty rate was also higher (16.5% compared to 16% in 2011). In households where there was no one at work that increased to 36.6% and for single unemployed persons that poverty rate stood at 34.7%. That is almost one in every three households in those circumstances were at risk of poverty. These are not green shoots!

Long-term unemployment is at a historic high and the proportion of our young people not at work is the 6th highest in the OECD with 16.7% out of work compared to the OECD average of 12.6%. These are not green shoots!

Our young people, especially those with third level education are emigrating in large numbers. They were educated by the Irish taxpayer and their loss to Ireland prevents strong growth and creates significant demographic problems for

the future. According to the OECD, Ireland's economic output, employment and average incomes all remain far below the 2008 meltdown. These are the facts. There is a pretence that we are in recovery mode and that employment is growing but we still have 292,000 people unemployed and a growing number who are working fewer hours than they would like. These are not green shoots.

Society at a glance shows that incomes in the average household in Ireland have fallen by 50% since 2008. Almost one in ten people (9%) surveyed said they did not have enough of money to buy food, up from 4.2% in 2006. Lower income families are now more vulnerable to this food poverty and the gap between the rich and poor is set to continue. Figures about unemployment, falling incomes and the increase in deaths by suicide all highlight the poverty being endured by families.

When you consider that 1 in 6 adults now live in homes where nobody is in employment, compared with the rate before the financial crash, which was 1 in 10 adults, the scale of poverty is unacceptable. The poor and those in low paid jobs have suffered the most as their income was not sufficient in the first instance to live meagre lives. When people become long-term unemployed they become permanently disconnected from the labour market and face poor earning or employment prospects throughout their careers. When employment does not give the financial rewards expected it becomes increasingly difficult for jobless people to work their way out of poverty. When a person gets employment in a low-paid job, they often see only limited gains. That does not motivate people.

The negative effects of poverty on people's lives deprives them of opportunities in life and the children of poor adults often go on to be poor themselves. Debt and exclusion from the mainstream financial services also impact on those on low incomes and they are pushed into borrowing from high interest lenders like moneylenders. Social exclusion or the feeling of not being equal within the community where they live and feeling unequal because of their financial circumstances all take their toll on the poor.

The high numbers of people who live in poverty is no asset to any country and should be tackled at every level and equality made a priority to improve the lives of all citizens before damage that is irreparable continues and destroys communities and puts lives at risk. The green shoots need to filter down to those most in need if we can make statements that our economy is in recovery for everyone.

*Peg Hanafin, M.Sc. Psy. Rehab.Couns, Dip Psych.,  
is a Counsellor with 35 years' experience*





# TAKING THE SVP INTO THE FUTURE



**Youth for Justice Project** *Report: Attracta McNiece SVP Youth Development Officer North East*

Befriending the elderly and those with special needs was one of the themes at chosen by students in the North-East for this year's Youth for Justice Programme, the fifth year in which the project has been held in the region. Twenty-two school Transition Year Classes completed 24 'Action Projects' which involved a total of 600 pupils.

Taking up the theme of education on which the Society of St. Vincent de Paul places a major emphasis and commits considerable finance towards providing educational opportunities, there were several projects such as shared reading projects with National Schools, provided by the Secondary School students.

The schools who participated were: St. Louis Secondary School Dundalk; St Vincent's Secondary School Dundalk; Our Lady's College, Greenhill's, Drogheda; Sacred Heart Drogheda; St. Aidan's Comprehensive School, Cootehill; St. Claire's College, Ballyjamesduff; Eureka Secondary School, Kells and Ardee

Community College; St. Marys College, Dundalk and St. Oliver's Community College Drogheda.

Projects included: If you Don't Wear it Share it Campaigns; SVP Fashion show; Shared reading projects; Befriending project with St. Bridget's Special School; Christmas hampers and Carol singing, as well as social research projects on mental health, homelessness and Autism.

This was the fifth year the 'Youth for Justice Programme' has been operated in the North East Region and it has gone from strength-to-strength. It provides opportunities for the students to help others in a practical way as they undertake action projects on behalf of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

An exhibition of the projects provided a public showcase of the work carried out by the participating schools. Each TY class put together a Display Board about their project and also did a





project presentation. These were very creative, educational, thought-provoking and innovative.

The Nuremore Hotel in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan, was packed for the event, with 450 school students and their teachers, as well as SVP members. The Exhibition was opened by National Vice President Kieran Stafford who praised the excellent work students had done on their projects. He encouraged them to reflect on their experiences and thanked them for the tremendous support they had given to the SVP.

Social justice campaigner, Fr. Peter McVerry, as guest speaker stressed the importance of reaching out to people on the margins of society and said that by the projects they had carried out, those taking part had come to realise how unfair and unjust the world could be and their role in helping to change that.

"Time is the most precious thing we have and by giving people your time and sitting down with them and listening, it shows they

have an importance in life and you have done very good work in achieving the completion of your programme projects."

The 'Youth for Justice Programme' provides students with the chance to reach out to members of their community and make a connection with the groups they work with. The theme this year was 'walking in the light', aimed at showing young people there is light and dark within us all, but that it is the part we act on that makes us who we are. Involvement with the SVP is a way to give help to others and to be a force for and help people who have fallen down on the road of life.

It is our hope that these young people will continue their involvement with St. Vincent de Paul into their adult lives and support the Society of St. Vincent De Paul in any way they can. They are the potential volunteers of the future, with fresh thinking, new ideas, energy and enthusiasm to take the Society into the future.



# CHARITY REGULATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE SVP

The National Management Council of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul is chaired by the National President and meets ten times a year for the overall operation of the Society. The authority for the work of this Council is devolved to it by the National Council that is composed of Regional and Area Presidents and which meets twice a year. The National President appoints a number of members to the National Management Council with particular special responsibilities. At NMC meetings the National Director reports on the work carried out by the staff employees of the Society on matters as directed by the Council. Each SVP volunteer member of this Council is also a Trustee of the Society, an essential and legally responsible role, which is particularly relevant in regard to the creation of the Charities Regulatory Authority. Máire McMahon, a volunteer member of the Society who is SVP National Secretary and a solicitor by profession, outlines the duties imposed on Trustees.

## *What effect will the creation of the Charities Regulatory Authority have on the Trustees of the Society of St Vincent de Paul?*

The Charities Act 2009, was signed into law on the 28th February 2009, but the establishment of the Charities Regulatory Authority has taken 5 years. The appointment in March 2014, of Úna Ní Dhubbghaill as Chief Executive of the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) and the appointments of the 15 members to the Board of the Charities Regulatory Authority, now provide a focus on the commencement of the work of the CRA, which is anticipated in Autumn 2014. The CRA will ensure that there is better governance within charities, and ensure compliance of the legal obligations of charities under the Act. Under the legislation the Charities trustees are accountable to the CRA.

Article 32(i) of the Rule for the Society of St Vincent de Paul, states that the members of the National Management Council are the SVP trustees, this means at each Regional President, as well as the National President's nominees, and the Spiritual Director are the charity trustees, and are the "sole responsible party before any national authority .....for events occurring in respect of the Society".

Charity trustees are responsible for the governance and strategy of the charity, and must at all times act in the interests of the charity, and furthermore seek in good faith to ensure that the charity operates in a manner that is consistent with its purpose. Charity trustees are expected to put the interests of the charity

as a whole before their own and local interests, and as a body are collectively responsible for all the activities of the charity. Each trustee is equally accountable for the organisation, and they must all observe the requirements of the Act. Trustees will only be allowed to defend allegations made against them if they can prove that they took all steps necessary to ensure compliance, and acted in good faith and to the best of their abilities.

The SVP trustees, being the Regional Presidents, are elected by the Conferences that constitute the SVP and therefore the obligation to ensure good governance lies with every member of the SVP; from the local Conference to the National President. Whilst the commencement of the work of the CRA, will not change the core work of the volunteers within the SVP; it highlights the importance to all volunteers in every Conference, whether visitation or special works, of the need to keep good records in particular financial records, ensure good governance within Conferences by the rotation of officers under the Rule of the SVP, and to ensure that all aspects of the law are complied with when dealing with employees of the SVP.

The current reform strategy within the SVP, aims to provide stronger structures around Special Works such as shops and hostels, and the core visitation work, is absolutely vital to ensure that the SVP can adhere to its responsibilities, and uphold the SVP's reputation and trust of the public; both those who donate to us and those we help.





# HUMAN BEINGS CARING FOR OTHER HUMAN BEINGS

**By Audry Deane - SVP Social Justice and Policy Officer**

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The Irish health system has rarely been out of the news recently and for all the wrong reasons. The anomalies and inconsistencies associated with the medical card scheme, and in particular the granting of discretionary medical cards, which played an important role in the outcome of the recent local elections have been centre stage for months now.

SVP has long been a critic of the serious anomalies and inconsistencies associated with the Medical Card Scheme. We are not alone, the HSE Director of Primary Care admitted that the discretionary medical card system has been operating unfairly and inconsistently for years, while the outgoing Chief Executive of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) criticised the lack of accountability in the health system and noted that she did not know how many people the system was killing and harming. These are shocking admissions from people in the highest roles in our health system. The recent policy U-turn on the granting of discretionary medical cards, while welcome, shows just how flawed and slow progress has been since the Government promised to offer universal free GP care.

How a health system is structured tells a lot about the values underpinning it. The SVP agrees totally with the Harvard economist William Hsiao when he states that the primary decision in the development of a national healthcare system is a moral one: "Your ethics, your sense of justice, determine how you distribute goods and services, including healthcare - so the first question has to deal with a country's ethical values". SVP wants a health system based on fairness that is transparent and efficient, in which there is a commonly agreed definition of equity. The Society is very supportive in theory of any reform which increases efficiencies, transparency and equity. We agree totally with the Adelaide Hospital Society's assertion that 'healthcare is fundamentally about human beings caring for other human beings'.

SVP sees at first hand the impact of Ireland's two-tier health system. We see how possession of private health insurance fast tracks people to diagnosis and treatment while those in the public system often wait for needed care. We find it unacceptable that while taxation accounts for about 67% of the health spend, with 18% coming from out of pocket expenses and 12% from private health insurance, it is clearly the case that explicit rationing exists in the public health system creating long waiting lists while those without medical cards pay for care at point of use in primary care. This is fundamentally unfair. We believe that the ethical values of equity and fairness, using evidence based information, should shape how decisions are made regarding how to reform our broken system.

In a recent submission to Government on the White Paper on Universal Health Insurance, the Society stated that our core interest is in improving health outcomes, morbidity and mortality rates for those who suffer the most from a lack of timely access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment. We stated that we want a health system with minimum transaction and administrative costs which avoids complexity, is stable and has the confidence of the general public.

Reforming our very flawed health system will be an arduous and challenging process and will need the full support and confidence of all of us. Currently, there is much anger, indeed outrage, at the shortcomings at various failings in the system. For the Government to have misjudged the very deep distaste, felt by the general public, at the shortcomings of the medical card scheme, shows a degree of strategic drift which is very worrying. For the Government to have embarked on a very narrow consultation process on Universal Health Insurance in such a climate, shows a perplexing lack of emotional intelligence. The terms of reference of the consultation process offered to the Irish public on Universal Health Insurance were prescriptive and indeed restrictive. SVP, like many other community and voluntary organisations, rejects this narrow process and respectfully asks that the Department of Health invest in a deeper more meaningful engagement with the Irish populace. Without this authentic engagement it will not be possible to generate the solidarity needed to ensure general acceptance and support of such a wide ranging, and needed, reform.



# THE RIGHTS STUFF



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

One sunny Friday in April I spoke at the end of a very long seminar cooped up in a room while outside, Newry basked in the heat. SVP had been asked by the Irish Human Rights Commission to present at a rights and poverty seminar co-hosted by the human rights bodies of both the Republic and the North of Ireland. I was asked to talk on our stance regarding human rights from an SVP perspective – social and economic rights in particular. You'll get as many views on such rights as there are Society members, since 'rights' is a very personal and ideological concept. It's quite onerous to try to address such an esoteric issue apparently removed from day to day Conference work, let alone speak about it on behalf of an organisation as large, as broad and as complex as the SVP.

Or are rights so divorced from our visitation and services? And is the 'rights stuff' really that nebulous? As a charity with a social justice perspective, through our volunteer work in communities across Ireland, North and South, we are about responding to immediate needs. We are also about helping people to (re) build their own potential in a variety of ways. Either consciously or unconsciously, members and staff seek to maintain and protect the dignity of people and families. And our social justice work aims to challenge and change structures and practices that deny people full access to incomes, services and goods that we regard as the norm in Irish society.

Unlike most organisations represented at the seminar in Newry, I think it's fair to say that we are not a rights-based organisation, despite what we may aspire for SVP on a personal basis. According to the Centre for International Humanitarian Cooperation (CIHC) in New York, a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction views poverty as a denial of human rights as it curtails human freedom, undermines human dignity and also infers some level of negative discrimination. While I think we can agree with this in principle, I don't think we as SVP consciously practice a rights-based approach; rather we apply immediate, pragmatic response to the circumstances facing people we assist. In general we act more as a (much needed) sticking plaster addressing short term challenges or crises in peoples' lives, often with a view to helping people build their independence through access to / financial assistance with supports such as childcare, education and training.

We're not a 'community development' organisation either. We don't consult local people or service users on an ongoing basis about what they want from the organisation or what direction it should take. We don't set out to change local communities on the basis of input from people who access our services in those communities. And that's alright – we don't pretend to be 'community development' oriented. But we are a charity with a social justice perspective. And I do believe it's vital that we consult people we visit, people we house, people we serve, through research and other methods on a fairly regular basis, to inform our policy submissions but perhaps more importantly to inform – and improve – our service to people, based on their very valid perspectives and feedback.

We do make submissions on equal access to services for those we assist, and occasionally we'll feed into the work of other organisations advocating on social and economic rights. The Constitutional Convention has in fact recently recognised the importance of social and economic rights. The Free Legal Advice Centres are currently drawing together insights from organisations such as ourselves, on peoples' access to these rights, and others are doing similar work. Indeed, the Catholic Church's former Justice and Peace advocate Jerome Connolly has just launched a tome on the issue, regarding the case for rights to housing, health and other services and the Constitution. So the discussion is not the preserve of one sector, or the refuge of the few. While understated, we are part of the 'rights' conversation.

'Rights' also poses a difficult truth for SVP. In our supports and services, it is fair to say we don't apply consistency of treatment with service users across the board, and that indeed the feedback of people seeking our assistance consists of a whole variety of experiences of SVP; not all of which are positive. While most people who are helped appear to benefit from their interaction with us, some practices don't necessarily have the dignity of the human person at the centre of the interaction. Getting the fundamentals of visitation and service provision right is the most practical way of ensuring that dignity is at the heart of our interactions with people. This of course is easier said than done, but we still have to keep trying. And where dignity is upheld, rights are maintained, even if unconsciously.



# THE UGLY FACE OF AGEISM IN IRELAND

By Jeff Dempsey

One of the ugliest forms of discrimination which has been emerging for some time in Ireland and which is now evident in several aspects of Irish life is ageism.

Defining 'What Is Ageism?' on the website About.com Psychology, Kendra Cherry wrote:

*"Ageism is a type of discrimination that involves prejudice against people based upon their age. Similar to racism and sexism, ageism involves holding negative stereotypes about people of different ages. The term ageism was first used by gerontologist Robert N. Butler to describe the discrimination of older adults."*

The Equality Authority has described age discrimination as "a significant problem in Ireland."

The National Council on Ageing and Older People was dissolved by Government decision in 2009 under the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act.

It had been established in 1997 with specified functions:

1. To advise the Minister for Health and Children on all aspects of ageing and the welfare of older people;
2. To assist the development of national and regional policies and strategies designed to produce health gain and social gain for older people;
3. To promote the health, welfare and autonomy of older people;
4. To promote a better understanding of ageing and older people in Ireland;
5. To liaise with international bodies with functions similar to the functions of the Council.

It was claimed that this would save money and that subsuming it into the then Department of Health and Children would not adversely affect Government commitment to the welfare of older people.

That would, however, be disputed by many older people who suffer discrimination and experience alleged neglect and poor treatment

Age Action is a charity which promotes positive ageing and better policies and services for older people. It has urged older people to challenge ageism. Rising awareness of the issue and promoting

inter-generational understanding of the discriminatory aspects of ageism are amongst its activities.

In Britain, Age UK is the largest charity dedicated to "helping everyone make the most of later life. It defines ageism as ***"discrimination or unfair treatment based on a person's age. It can impact on someone's confidence, job prospects, financial situation and quality of life. It can also include the way that older people are represented in the media, which can have a wider impact on the public's attitudes."***

Ageing is not an illness, but it can be challenging, particularly because of economic conditions in Ireland in the past few years which have led to an increasingly widespread attitude that older people are economically inactive, a drain on the State's resources and therefore, of low priority.

The resultant effects on older people of these attitudes do not seem to have been given much consideration in public policies of State bodies.

There remain arbitrary upper age limits in legislation, policies and regulations. An example is the implementation of driving licensing provision for those over 70 which make up a fast-growing section of the Irish population. Access to a vehicle has an immense impact on the lifestyle and mobility of older people. This is especially important in rural areas where a car may be the only means of transport and without the use of which older people can be severely restricted in social and economic terms.

Irish drivers over 70 or reaching that age when applying for a driving licence are restricted to a three-year licence. No such restrictions are applied to the age group of younger drivers which are responsible for the majority of the most serious road traffic accidents.

The Road Safety Agency has previously accepted that: "As long as someone can drive safely there should be no restrictions placed on them, regardless of age."

But that is precisely what is being done and, excluding medical fitness reasons, what is the justification for this example of official State ageism?

"Third Age" was established as a national voluntary organisation "celebrating the third age in life when people may no longer be in paid employment, but can remain healthy, fulfilled and continue to contribute to society"

"The longer that people are encouraged to remain in this life stage, the better for older people themselves, their families, communities and society as a whole," it declared.

But the reality is that in Ireland today, ageism is a serious social discrimination which is, regrettably, growing.

## ELDERLY PEOPLE VULNERABLE TO CHANGE - SVP View

"Older people visited by St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) volunteers mainly belong to the cohort who will never bank on line, or Skype their emigrant children," an SVP volunteer has told a conference on positive ageing.

"They do their business locally, collect their pension, often pay a little off their electricity bill, buy their messages and collect their medication. This they can cope with – just about," Madeleine Uí Mhéaloid, a member of the SVP's National Social Policy Committee and North-East Regional Council who comes from Mullagh in County Cavan told the meeting held at City West, Dublin.

"This is the reality, that many of the older people we visit find filling in forms or dealing with bureaucracy very distressing. Some may even have literacy or numeracy difficulties."

She said that some older, vulnerable people were keeping cash in their homes as a result of the closure of local banks and the new arrangements that exist in those that remain. The introduction of machines for cash deposits and similar developments made dealing with financial affairs a challenge for many and enough attention was not being given to these issues.

Calling for the protection of small rural post offices, she said the threat of closure of these was "alarming," as they were the only 'banking' outlets available and accessible to many of the older people visited by SVP volunteers.

Closure of Garda stations have left older people in rural areas very anxious, she added, but commended Gardai for the manner in which they implemented the Garda Siocahan strategy for older persons, launched in 2010. An audit of older persons in each locality had been carried out and there was now an officer in each Garda area designated to deal with the safety and protection of older people.

Expressing concern at cuts in funding for rural transport, Madeleine Uí Mhéaloid said that since 2010 these had amounted to almost €2m. This had inevitably resulted in the curtailment of services which were very necessary to keep older people in their homes for as long as possible.

Many elderly used rural transport to collect their pensions, do their shopping, visit their GP or participate in community activities," she added.

- The St. Vincent de Paul Society is one of a number of non-government organisations (NGOs) which has assisted the Department of Health in devising the recently launched Strategy For Positive Ageing.

DUBLIN

## SVP EAST REGION SCHOOLS RUN IN PHOENIX PARK



Report: Deirdre Walsh, SVP Youth Development Officer East Region  
Photos: Alison Keogh



On my visits to schools around the Region I always ask young people what their ideas are for Young SVP actions and projects. These include awareness raising, social action projects, campaigning and fundraising projects. The idea of hosting a schools run to raise money, get young people together from different schools, and raise the profile of SVP amongst young people was suggested a number of times. So we thought why not? Let's organise the first East Region Schools' Fun Run.

I worked with Paul Halpin, the Fundraising Coordinator, to organise the run. We decided that Phoenix Park would be a great central location and the Parks staff were very helpful and encouraging from the beginning, giving us advice and the perfect route near the Papal Cross in the park. Once insurance, safety plans and permission were in place we began advertising the race amongst schools that engage with SVP in the region. We created maps, posters and information for participants to circulate in schools. Some students took it upon themselves to promote it with their friends and get people signed up and ready to participate.

The next step was to organise logistics and plan for all eventualities. So it being Ireland and with April showers a likelihood we organised a marquee for registration, and Bear events provided us with a start/finish gantry and giant clock and sound system free of charge! We began setting up from 9am in the park, with volunteers arriving early to mark the route, organise race packs and get our race day in order. Volunteers included 3rd level students from SVP societies in TCD and DCU, an Area President, members and staff. Students and teachers began arriving from 12.30pm for registration. Everyone received an SVP t-shirt, race number, Young SVP wristband and snacks. Many of the participants put in a huge effort to dress up on the day, and we had ballerinas, grannies, furry animals and colourful outfits galore.

Becca Gallagher the National Youth Coordinator led us in a 20 minute warm-up to get everyone ready for the run. Then everyone lined up in order of who wanted to run, jog and walk. There were some very ambitious runners at the front and chatty walkers at the back! After the ready, steady, go they all leapt into action and did the 2.5k route twice before their final run through the finish line. Volunteers acted as stewards around the race route for encouragement and direction. The first people past the finish line were Patrick Peters and Steve Spillane from Castleknock College. Despite their competitive spirit and their fast time of 20 minutes 15 seconds they decided to come through the finish line together and won joint first place. We awarded 1st and 2nd place in each year group, and there were winners from Loreto Balbriggan, Loreto Swords, Belvedere College and St. Paul's Monasterevin.

Everyone received a Young SVP Schools Run medal. There was also a prize for the person who collected the most signatures on their fundraising card, to highlight the effort that goes into fundraising and approaching people for this kind of event. This went to Debbie Harrison from St Paul's in Monasterevin.

With over 100 young people participating, plus teachers and parents, it was a really positive event that brought young people together from around the region who want to make a positive difference in their communities. There was a great sense of community amongst the young volunteers and the consensus was that we should repeat the event next year and make it bigger and better, encouraging families and college students to participate and ensure this is an annual Young SVP event.

Alison Keogh our volunteer photographer on the day captured the fun atmosphere and energy during the day. Some of her photos are included here and on our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/SVPSchoolsEast](http://www.facebook.com/SVPSchoolsEast)



NAVAN



Mayor Francis Deane leads the SVP Tara walk

## RAIN FAILS TO DETER SVP CHARITY WALKERS

It was by no means a 'fun in the sun day,' but wet weather failed to dampen the spirits of the 200 or so who walked or ran from Navan to the Hill of Tara in aid of charity. The 9 km. trek to the historic hill, organised by Navan St.Vincent de Paul Society (SVP), realised €3,000 for those in need in the area.

Led by the local Foresters' Band, the community event was started at the Ardboyne Hotel by Councillor Francis Deane, who was performing his final official function as the last Mayor of Navan.

At the outset, Mayor Deane paid tribute to the late Michael O'Keeffe, of Crossakiel, Kells, a former SVP North-East Regional Council President, to whose memory the walk was dedicated. His untimely death occurred in a tragic farm accident last August. It was Mr. O'Keeffe's encouragement which led to

the creation three years ago of the annual fundraising event.

The Mayor also complimented the SVP on its work for local people in need and wished the society's volunteers success in their future efforts.

Seamus Ryan, President of the local SVP St. Francis Special Works Conference, which promoted the walk, wished the participants in the family-oriented occasion an enjoyable and safe afternoon. He also thanked the public for their support, as well as the firms, individuals and organisations for their assistance in organising the event.

Last year, the St.Vincent de Paul Society in Navan spent €350,000 in helping the less well-off in the area.



Navan SVP member Madeleine Ledwidge chats to a Navan band musician at the start of the walk.

## HAPPY DAY AS MORNINGTON CENTRE CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

NORTH-EAST

Report: Bill Lawlor

*Planting a tree to mark the 50th anniversary of the Mornington holiday centre are: (from left): St. Joseph's Conference members Fergus Ledwith and Eithne Killeen; Rev. Willie Cleary, Rev. Denis McNeilis and Liam Reilly, President, North-East Regional Council.*



It was a day of happy talk and fond memories as SVP members mingled and many old friends reminisced as they renewed acquaintances.

The 50th anniversary celebration of the Ozanam Holiday Centre in Mornington was a major landmark in the success story of the SVP's popular seaside amenity, run by the local St. Joseph's Conference. It began with a tree planting ceremony watched by all present, including Regional President Liam Reilly, Fergus Ledwith, St. Joseph's Conference, Eithne Killeen, do; Rev. Willie Cleary and Rev. Denis McNeilis. The Mass which followed was concelebrated by both priests.

Three of the original St. Joseph's Conference committee members received presentations. They were: Maeliosa O Riain; Frank Tuohy and William McNamara. However, Mr. McNamara was unable to attend on the day and the gift was accepted on his behalf by Seamus Mimna.

Since its establishment, with upgrades and renovations, the centre has developed into an excellent facility where accommodation includes 32 en suite twin rooms. In addition to society volunteers, the early summer occasion brought together past and present members of St. Joseph's Conference, whose dedicated efforts over the years have led to the current success of the venture.

Also there were former and current staff members of the holiday centre; North-Eastern Health Board personnel who provide a day care centre at the Mornington facility, as well as volunteer musicians who regularly entertain the visitors. There was a special welcome for the leaders of the many groups who come on holidays annually to the Ozanam centre, thereby helping to make it such a special place.

As the day went on, the shared memories emphasised the big part which the Mornington amenity plays in the local community.

WATERFORD

## SVP INTEGRATION BBQ

Report: and photos: Joe Dalton

The 7th Annual St.Vincent De Paul Society's Integration Barbecue took place in Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre, Barrack Street, Waterford. Local Conference members and members of the public joined together with members of the new communities in a fun-filled day of music and chat. A big thank you to all who helped on the day in giving out the food and the clean- up afterwards!



ENJOYING THE DAY



Dan from Vietnam pictured with her friends



Mum and daughter Jane and Ursula Regan at the Integration Day in Waterford



Robert Farrell with Community Garda Mary Murphy.

## KELLS VP THEATRE CELEBRATION EVOKES QUIET MAN MEMORIES

Report: Bill Lawlor



Kells SVP President, John Grant, with an original Quiet Man poster which highlights The Isle of Innisfree theme tune.

"The Isle of Innisfree," theme song of the iconic movie 'The Quiet Man,' first performed publicly in the St.Vincent de Paul Theatre in Kells in 1950, was again played there to mark the centenary of that popular venue's establishment. The late Dick Farrelly, composer of the ballad which was to become internationally- recognised, was a native of the Meath town. But few had heard the then unknown piece until it was intoned to a piano accompaniment at a St. Patrick's Day '50s concert in the SVP Hall.

John Grant, President of the SVP special works Conference which runs the recently-upgraded theatre, recalls that the singer was Tom Comiskey and the entertainment that day was staged by Kells Silver Band. On a nostalgic occasion for many, the current members of the band rendered "The Isle Of Innisfree" as part of an extensive celebratory programme enjoyed by residents, local dignitaries and guests.

Both Farrelly and Comiskey were members of An Garda Siochana.

The SVP Conference also staged an exhibition of theatre

memorabilia. These included more than 1,000 photographs depicting people, music and drama groups, as well as events associated with the premises over the past few decades. In addition, a 40-minute DVD of similar material and interviews with former and present day users of the hall, evoked great interest.

Also performing on the day was the Kells church choir; some of whose members have strong links with earlier years of the venue.

John Grant, who is also a popular local amateur actor and producer, outlined the history of the theatre and its link with the Oscar-winning film. He also recalled that the father of the movie's star, Maureen O'Hara, was a Kells man and that the renowned actress received the Freedom of Kells from the Town Council last May.

The celebrations finished with a tribute performance of numbers from Les Miserables by the Kells Musical Society.

## NEWSPAPER RECYCLING DONATION TO ST VINCENT DE PAUL



Recycling 2000 presentation of cheque to SVP at the Wexford Enterprise Centre. L.to r. Mary Dempsey, SVP; Eamonn Murphy, Wexford Enterprise Centre and Richard Barlow, Recycling 2000. Photo: Jim Campbell.

The St Vincent de Paul Newspaper Recycling partnership with Wexford community enterprise project, Recycling 2000, has been a huge success with €3,022 being raised to date. The project has been running since the end of last year and the appeal to the households and businesses of County Wexford to donate old newspapers by bringing them to a local St Vincent de Paul Newspaper Recycling Bin has proven very popular.

The SVP receives a donation for each bin of paper collected and all funds generated from the initiative go directly to helping the people in need within our communities. The goal of the project is that Recycling 2000 will collect 50% more newspapers than they did last year which will translate into a sizable donation to the St Vincent de Paul.

Recycling 2000 has seen a big increase in the number of people using their 50+ Newspaper collection banks throughout the county and are positive this upward trend will continue. All old newspapers collected are used to produce environmentally-based products. In addition, by sourcing a larger proportion of newspapers locally the level of handling and unnecessary transportation of old newspapers will be significantly reduced, thus reducing the carbon footprint of all involved. The majority of households and businesses throughout the country are now segregating their waste and have adopted excellent recycling habits. We are now looking for these same people to make one more change and to bring their newspapers to an SVP Newspaper Recycle Bin. By making this change they will be making a donation to St Vincent de Paul and will also be supporting a community project that employs 12 staff.

## FLOOD RELIEF FUNDRAISING



L to R : R.Hehir; C.Garvey; Michael Murphy, SVP Regional President; M. McGill; A.Ryan; M. Dunworth and in the background a First Year student group.

In response to the devastation caused to parts of the city and community in Limerick during flooding, Ardscoil Mhuire Parents' Council organised a bingo night 'fundraiser.' This event was most enjoyable for students, families and the local community. Sponsorship of the night was supported by a vast range of groups,

individuals and companies. A cheque for €1,800 was presented to the local Saint Vincent de Paul Conference to distribute to those effected. Many thanks also to Castletroy College who also supported this cause by donating a portion of the monies raised on their colours day.

St. Agnes Community Centre for Music and the Arts was officially opened in Crumlin, Dublin, by Mrs Sabina Higgins wife of President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins. It is a project founded by Sr. Bernadette then Principal of St. Agnes's Primary School to provide each student in the school with a musical instrument. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is proud to have been instrumental in supporting this very worthwhile project from the initial stages. The project has developed and now includes parents, teenagers and anyone in the community wanting to enjoy music and learn an instrument.

President Higgins himself, prior to being elected, praised Sr. Bernadette's work as being "inspirational" and helping to transform the Crumlin area.

Sr. Bernadette now has an orchestra in place which has been taking part in numerous concerts including at the National Concert Hall.

We wish Sr. Bernadette many years enjoyment in her new Music Centre.

The Society is proud to have been instrumental in supporting this very worthwhile project from the initial stages.

## MUSIC AND THE ARTS CRUMLIN



Pictured with Sr. Bernadette are Noel Boyce SVP South West Area Council Secretary and Patricia Hannify, President of St. Pius's Conference SVP.

## PUTTING THE 'FUN' INTO 'FUNDRAISING'.

*By Martin Fallon, SVP volunteer in North Midlands Region.*



The weather held, mostly, for the second SVP Paddy Run in Athlone. Close on five hundred people turned up, mostly wearing green and many embraced the spirit of the day with Irish-themed outfits. It was a perfect morning up to the start but within the first five minutes a few drops of rain fell, nothing too dramatic thankfully. The local Mayor Gabrielle McFadden started the event and there were SVP members from Galway and Cork participating and taking notes for events next year. This year saw new locations for SVP Paddy Runs with events in Tullamore, Kinnegad and Ballinacarrigy. Tullamore deserves special credit for raising over €10,000 on their first attempt at a St. Patrick's morning run/walk event. There was even a scaled down version in Cork Institute of Technology in early March.

The Athlone event attracted 480 entrants this year, up marginally on the 450 we had last year and the amount raised was also up on last year. It was very encouraging to see so many teenagers running in the event, promoting exercise and local charity and shining a positive light on our national day

About two years ago a challenge went out from the fundraising section in SVP to start thinking about new fundraising initiatives. While a fun run is hardly a novel idea I think the idea of SVP Conferences in major towns and cities, having local events based around St. Patrick's Day has great potential. All participants are encouraged to wear green, as fun is an important part of the whole

All proceeds go to the local SVP to help the local community. Hopefully in 2015 there will be SVP Paddy Runs in every county in Ireland. While many younger people take no offence with the name 'The SVP Paddy Run' and see it as bright and breezy and a little self-deprecating, I'm aware that some people have difficulty with it. The name is not meant to antagonise. If organisers want to call the event "The SVP St Patrick's day fun run/walk," then that is for them to decide.

- Galway Area Council visited the Athlone run and are organising a run in July.



NORTH-EAST

## HORSEMAN GERARD PLANS TO TROT UP SHOP PROFITS



Keen horseman Gerard Kenny won't be rushing his fences as he assumes the new role of SVP Regional Shops Manager in the North-East.

"I am looking forward to working collaboratively with all shop teams to develop the retail image and strategy of the Society's Vincent's outlets in Longford/Westmeath, Meath, Louth, Cavan and Monaghan," says Gerard, who brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the position.

A man who competes regularly in equestrian events, he will no doubt be mounting plans for new shop openings and expansions while hacking around the quiet lanes and countryside of Meath. Gerard is a retail specialist who has developed the sales functions of some high profile companies, including the Benetton Group, of which he was General Manager and Head Buyer over a period of 15 years. Now he is set to deliver the highest standards in customer service, merchandising and display to SVP outlets in some of Ireland's busiest towns. Looking at the development of volunteer activity, Gerard is anxious to encourage both young people and experienced staff to "become involved with the shops" and says that Conferences planning the opening of new outlets or the expansion of existing ones should liaise with him. Another move on the horizon may be the development of an on-line presence and the use of digital media and social platforms.

Gerard's appointment to the SVP position comes after an impressive career in merchandising. In addition to his time with the Benetton Group, he has been Retail Development Manager with Enable Ireland, where he re-developed the brand and image of the charity and was behind the opening of three new highly profitable shops. He has also been Retail Operations Manager for Scouting Ireland where he developed the retail profile of the Outdoor Adventure Store and the Scout Shops. The organisation was voted second best outdoor specialist retailer.

## 25 YEARS OF COMMITMENT

WEXFORD

Twenty-five years is a long time of dedicated service and it was justifiably marked at Kilmore in County Wexford. Bibi Bates is the only founding member still in the Conference and a celebration was held to honour her 25 years of membership and service to those in need and the Conference's existence.



Dennis Doyle PP; Mary Dempsey Wexford Area President and Bibi Bates Kilmore founding member.



25 Years celebration at Kilmore in County Wexford





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# A Fixed Star

NEWS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE DEVELOPMENTS



## **Social justice must be at the centre of a nation which cares for all of its people equally.**

Influencing social policy is about knowing what is needed and accumulating evidence in advocating for that purpose, creating the opportunities for change. A regular area of social policy work is the writing of formal submissions to Government and regulatory agencies. Recent submissions by the SVP range across diverse topics such as health insurance, water metering, provision of social housing and responding to the EU Commission, including challenging its views.

All SVP submissions can be read on [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie)

Submissions, policy recommendations, media and advocacy work must be grounded in a broader framework – a vision, if you will. Back in April our National President Geoff Meagher wrote about a vision for Irish Society in the 'Irish Independent,' noting concerns about those people who are least able to take advantage of the fledgling recovery due to poverty, unemployment, educational disadvantage or crippling debt. In the coming months, we hope to invite leaders in public life to join in our conversation about the Ireland which the SVP believes would have equality at its core and, in pursuance of that aim, to articulate a vision which we believe will provide the necessary resources and approaches to enable people to reach their full potential.

## **Meeting Minister Burton and Gearing Up for Budget 2015**

At the centre of this edition of the Bulletin you'll find a summary of our Pre-Budget Submission. It is hard to believe that at this early stage in the year we are already feeding in our policy recommendations for 2015. Because Budget Day is now earlier, held in mid-October, the drafting of our annual submission and liaison with Ministers happens a lot earlier. In May, SVP Budget 2015 work began at a meeting with the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, where we raised urgent issues such as the plight of homeless families in Dublin hotels; the rising rent levels in the private rented sector exacerbating this situation and the need to help low income tenants at risk of losing their private rented homes. We also urged support for all low income households when water bills fall due in 2015. While we welcomed the free household and per-child allowance for water consumption, we voiced concern that households with two or more adults headed by jobseekers or low paid workers will be

particularly exposed to water charges. Some of these families will contain school / college-going over 18 year olds. We asked that budget 2015 be designed to tackle poverty and social exclusion; combat unemployment and provide supports and opportunities to jobless households; and invest in our children and young people.

## **The Homeless Crisis in Dublin**

Early this year, Dublin members reported the plight of homeless families placed on an emergency basis in Hostels around Dublin City and the need for more appropriate housing solutions, including measures in the Private Rented Sector. We met with Dublin Region Homeless Executive on the issue, as well as the Department of the Environment and indeed Minister Burton. As a result of our work in this area, in conjunction with NGOs such as Threshold and the efforts of the Homeless Executive, greater information and support is being made available to tenants who are in dispute with landlords and / or are struggling with rent arrears.

## **A time of change for SVP social justice volunteers**

The last meeting of the National Social Justice and Policy Committee took place in May 2014. The Committee which had been in place for fourteen years had served SVP well as a consultative group who brought the experience of volunteers and staff from around the country. Many thanks to all the committee's members over the years and to past chairs John Monaghan and Muiris MacCarthaigh, and especially, to out-going chair Eileen Gernon. The Committee in its closing meeting also remembered the work of Noel Clear who was instrumental to the social justice work of the Society. The outgoing Committee also praised the work of the social justice staff team who supported the work of the committee in all its years. A new Social Justice Advisory Committee under the chairpersonship of former National President Mairéad Bushnell will meet for the first time this September and will be informed by the social issues that membership of the new regional structures will bring to the table.

## **Guide for Visitation Conferences**

Reminder: Copies of the new member's guide for visitation and family support Conferences have been sent to all SVP Conference Presidents in the Republic of Ireland. If you would like additional copies, please contact National Office on 01 838 6990.

# THE LAST WORD

Letters to the Editor

## DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF THE SVP IN NORTHERN IRELAND

SVP Northern Regional President in Belfast, Aidan Crawford, has been developing contacts with politicians in Northern Ireland to acquaint them with the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. In pursuance of this work and supporting the creation of awareness of the Society in the North, the SVP Bulletin is circulated widely to politicians. This letter was received by the Regional President from Armagh Councillor Garath Keating:

"I have just finished reading the SVP Spring Bulletin and thought that I would write briefly to commend your organisation firstly on the publication and also on the magnificent and noble work being done by SVP in addressing the issues of poverty and inequality.

"I am a newly selected councillor in Armagh City and I regularly see at first-hand the effects and manifestations of poverty and disadvantage in dealing with welfare issues coming through our advice centre. I found your publication extremely informative, interesting and inspiring. I am not a religious person but appreciative of the values and ethos espoused by your contributors to the publication and particularly so the Social Justice Policy message running through the same.

"The quote from Pope Francis at the end of Johnmark McCafferty's article was particularly resonating in its message and has given me a more favourable impression of the church's appreciation of such matters and certainly a greater appreciation of the Pope.

"I also particularly enjoyed the articles by Peg Hanafin and Padraig Yeates and the poem from Mother Teresa.

"I certainly have a much greater understanding of the work and aspirations of SVP and will be sure to bear them in mind. May your organisation's excellent work long continue and I look forward to reading of your progress in the next Bulletin."

- **Garath Keating**

## DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE THAT NEEDS A HOLIDAY?

Bundoran Holiday Centre provides holidays to those that need a well-deserved break in a relaxing, safe and caring environment at an affordable price. A holiday away from the stresses and strains of everyday life can be something to look forward to in difficult times.

Bundoran Holiday Centre is available and open to all individuals, families, clubs and associations. Should you feel that any of your clients or service users need or would benefit from a holiday, we are here and will be more than happy to help.

I would welcome the opportunity to show you around the centre if you happen to be in Bundoran. Until then if you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Georgina Fox  
Manager, Bundoran  
Holiday Centre  
St. Vincent de Paul,  
Bundoran,  
Co. Donegal  
Phone: 087 2434528

[www.svp.ie/bundoranholidayhome](http://www.svp.ie/bundoranholidayhome)

## HAVE YOUR SAY

Send your letters to the Editor by post to: SVP Bulletin at SVP House, 91-92 Sean McDermott Street, Dublin, 1 or by Email to: [editorsvpbulletin@gmail.com](mailto:editorsvpbulletin@gmail.com)



# Calling all volunteers....

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