



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Submission to Senate Select Committee on Mental Health

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY VICTORIA INC.

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Permission is given for this submission to be published.

*This submission focuses on the last of the committee's terms of reference:
- (p) the potential for new modes of delivery of mental health care.*

01 The Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc.

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc. (SVDP) has approximately 8000 members and volunteers, driven by the Gospel imperatives to help the disadvantaged in our community. The Society assists over half a million individuals annually across Victoria. SVDP delivers a variety of community support services including aged care facilities, housing services, youth services and disability services. *(For more information about the activities of the Society, see Appendix 1.)*

02 Overview

SVDP is currently operating a peer-support program known as the COMPEER Program ('companion' + 'peer') for people with a diagnosed mental illness.

Volunteers meet their companion once per week for at least a year in simple social circumstances such as sharing a 'cuppa', a chat or a walk.

This simple peer-level support helps clients to regain:

- Social skills
- Self-confidence
- Independence

These skills are commonly diminished or poorly developed in people living with mental illness.

03 Some real feedback from professionals and service users

The program's aim is simple but its effects can be profound.

EXAMPLE #1: In a recent meeting with a referring mental health professional to review the twelve month companionship between his client and our volunteer, the professional commented that the Compeer program had achieved all that he had hoped for.

- Prior to the program, the client was isolated, refused to attend office-based appointments and resisted all attempts to connect him into outreach programs.
- At the end of the year he was going out more, regularly attending appointments at the professional's office and had begun attending a drop-in centre and men's group.

EXAMPLE #2: A young female volunteer has seen her companion blossom ...

- from being a quiet, shy and frightened young woman who spent hours sitting alone in her room unable even to use the telephone,
- to the point a year later when her companion is now chatty and sociable (as Compeer staff clearly observed at a recent social function for volunteers and companions).
- The companion now enjoys regular outings and is even considering employment. When the volunteer first began this friendship, it was a delicate and time-consuming major task to get her companion to leave the house to go for a walk.

04 Outcomes

Our twelve-month EVALUATION surveys (completed by referring professionals, clients and volunteers) report significant improvement in clients referred to the program in areas such as:

- Social skills
- Self-esteem
- Self confidence
- Trust
- Increased independence
- Increased ability to access other outreach programs
- Increased ability to access broader community social networks

The program promotes self worth and a valuing of clients – they are visited not by paid staff but by volunteers who want to visit in their leisure time.

05 Relapse prevention and education

- The program fits with the aim of preventing relapse in people experiencing mental illness through supporting their recovery and continuing care.
- It also serves a community education function through regular public information sessions for potential volunteers. These sessions provide a compassionately-focused introduction to the personal and social impact of mental illness (about 70% of attendees apply to join the program).

06 Program history

The Compeer Program (companion + peer) began in USA 30 years ago. (see www.compeer.org) In 2004 SVDP Victoria established this volunteer companionship program for people with a diagnosed mental illness under licence from USA. SVDP NSW established the same program in Sydney in the early 1990s.

SVDP currently operates the Compeer Program in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, in various parts of Sydney and regional NSW. SVDP is well placed to establish the Compeer Program in multiple locations around Australia.

07 How program works

- Volunteers are recruited, screened, trained and supported by professional staff. About 70% of those who attend Information Sessions apply to become volunteers and 80% of those who apply are ultimately accepted as volunteers.
- Trained volunteers spend about one hour each week for at least a year with the same person. They engage in low key social activities and develop a form of companionship which promotes social skills. This is simple but significant.
- Mental health professionals (mainly case managers at community mental health clinics or private psychiatrists) refer clients to the program and are available as required for information and feedback about their client.
- Compeer staff provide ongoing guidance, support and supervision for the volunteer.
- The program is evaluated each year during December–January with surveys to volunteers, clients and mental health professionals.

08 Cost of program

While staff costs are significant, the program is cheaper to run than many other elements of mental health services because the volunteers' time is unpaid. To manage the program effectively, staff is required to:

- Promote the program (through newspapers, public engagements, producing and distributing promotional material etc)
- Appropriately and effectively deal with responses and enquiries
- Conduct information sessions
- Interview and screen potential volunteers
- Conduct training sessions
- Liaise with referring professionals to maintain the focus and direction of the program
- Work together with referring professionals to match volunteers with their clients
- Regularly review the progress of the relationship (eg. it would be counter-productive to foster client dependency).
- Provide ongoing supervision and support for volunteers

SVDP Victoria has employed 3 staff (2.2 FTE) to establish the program in Melbourne's eastern suburbs and undertake the above mentioned tasks. By the end of 2006 the program plans to operate around 80-100 volunteer/client matches.

The program has so far been funded by general SVDP donations and specific short term grants from philanthropic trusts on the understanding that once successful, established government funding will be sought.

09 Conclusion and Recommendation

With a proven track record of developing and managing this program and the support of staff at Community Mental Health Centres, SVDP is well placed to establish the Compeer Program in multiple locations.

- SVDP NSW introduced this program in Sydney about ten years ago and is now developing the program in other parts of Sydney and country NSW.
- SVDP Vic also wishes to develop the program in this way around Melbourne and country Victoria.

We ask that the Committee's report to Government supports the value of this innovative program and recommends that it be actively supported through financial and other resource commitments.

The program has value not only for the mentally ill but also for the broader community through cost-effective grass root support delivered via a community based spirit of personal connection and care.

10 Further discussion welcome

We would welcome the opportunity to talk in detail about this program with any member of the committee or other interested party.

END OF SUBMISSION

APPENDIX 1: Role of St Vincent de Paul in Victoria

1. THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY VICTORIA INC.

The **St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc.** consists of voluntary members and volunteers outreaching to the most vulnerable in our community through:

- **HOME VISITATION**

Members of the St Vincent de Paul Society form local groups known as 'Conferences'. There are over 300 of these volunteer groups in Victoria, undertaking home visitation to people in need, in their local area. Conference members visit people in their homes, and in hospitals or prisons, extending the hand of friendship and offering practical support - helping individuals and families to remain in 'main stream' community.

- **SOUP VANS**

The Society has six Soup Vans which travel around the streets each evening providing soup, sandwiches, tea and coffee to people they meet. The vans visit people not only on the streets, but also in boarding houses, refuges, squats and hospitals. 'Vannies', as they are known, are conference members of the Society.

- **CENTRES OF CHARITY**

Centres of Charity, also known as 'op shops' provide second-hand clothing and furniture for sale. The main role of the Centres, however, is to resource the local Conference - providing clothing or furniture free of charge to outfit a struggling family or individual through the home visitation process. The remaining stock is sold to the public, having two further advantages: It offers the opportunity for people on a tight budget to afford clothing, household goods, and furniture; and the revenue generated helps to fund the work of Conferences, and Community and Support Services.

2. ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY 'AGED CARE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES'

The Society's Aged Care and Community Services provide a range of professional services and support to marginalized people. These services are funded jointly between government and the Society. They include:

- **AGED CARE SERVICES**

The Society provides care and accommodation for elderly citizens through its various hostels and nursing homes.

Low Care Facilities

Bailly House:	In North Melbourne provides 41 beds
Vincepaul Hostel:	In Box Hill, provides 53 beds
Rosalie House:	In Geelong, provides 32 beds
St Anne's Hostel:	In Westmeadows, provides 30 beds
O'Mara House:	In Traralgon, provides 49 beds
Vincentian House:	In Geelong provides 59 beds
May Noonan Hostel:	In Terang, provides 34 beds

Independent Living Units

Bendigo:	30 units
Ballarat:	3 units
Maryborough:	6 units
Mildura:	14 units

High Care Facility

The St Vincent de Paul Society Nursing Home in Box Hill.

Day Therapy Centre

Attached to the Box Hill Nursing Home.

- **HOMELESS SERVICES**

The Society provides a range of accommodation and support services to people who are marginalized and homeless within the Victorian community.

Accommodation Services

Transitional Housing Management

Provides interim housing and support services for people who are homeless or experiencing a housing crisis situation.

Ozanam House

A 60-bed crisis accommodation facility for homeless men.

Quin House

A 10-bed residence for homeless people who have undertaken a detoxification or rehabilitation program.

Support Services

Outreach Youth Services

Provides case management assistance and stable housing for homeless young people in Melbourne, aimed at providing safety and security so that they may rebuild their lives.

Outreach Adult Services

Provides case management assistance and housing to homeless and marginalised people throughout Melbourne.

Community Centre

Provides support to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, through material aid, housing support, onsite health services, skills development and community development.

OzLink personal support program

Provides participants with “time out” from the pressures of looking for work, to focus on and address issues that affect their ability to look for work. Ozlink is funded to support 60 participants.

Domestic Violence Support

Provides support and temporary housing for women and their children who are escaping domestic violence.

Compeer Program

Recruits, trains and matches volunteers to provide an hour a week of friendly companionship to help those isolated through mental illness who are referred by (and under the ongoing supervision of) mental health professionals.