MEDIA RELEASE
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Complex Homeless Problem Demands New Strategies

State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW / ACT, Mr. John O’Neill announced today a major shift in its caring for homeless people to be discussed at the Society’s State Council meeting on February 18th in Sydney.

“The inability of successive governments to adequately understand and resource mental health services has left our facilities to pick up the pieces.

“The causes of homelessness have become increasingly complex in the seventy years since the establishment of the Matthew Talbot Hostel Sydney.

“Really helping these people will require considerably more money and people resources than the Society has been able to commit in the past, but not to do so would be to allow a growing slice of our young people to disappear into a destructive homeless abyss.

“The people who are presenting for assistance across the State today come with a much wider range of problems than the alcoholics and gambling addicts of the past.

“Relationship breakdown, domestic violence, and mental illness numbed by substance and alcohol addiction are part of the complex mix.

“Failure by an increasing number of young people to cope with a society obsessed with success all contribute the numbers of people presenting at our homeless services.

“These people are the new poor.

“When these broken people come to any one of our thirty five homeless services, they have few if any lifelines left.

“In the absence of any place to move on to, the St Vincent de Paul Society must take a more interventionist approach in caring for and providing a way forward for these fragile and damaged people.

Mr. O’Neill said that the key strategy in breaking the cycle of homelessness was not in providing more crisis accommodation beds, but in increasing the number of professional counsellors to work one to one with homeless people.

“The St Vincent de Paul Society can no longer wait for governments to take action. The fate of many of our State’s most vulnerable citizens lies in our hands,” he concluded.

The St Vincent de Paul Society is the State’s largest provider of homeless services with 35 sites providing crisis accommodation for one thousand plus people every night.

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Every day in NSW & ACT the Society helps many thousands of people through Home Visitation, Migrant and Refugee Assistance, Hospital Visitation, Prison Visitation, Aged and Special Care Services, Retail Centres, Sheltered Workcentres, Hostels for Homeless Men, Women and Children, Overseas Relief, Disaster Recovery, Budget Counselling and Youth Programs.