

## **What can we do? Covid-19 Guidance**

Ever since 1833 the St Vincent de Paul Society has dedicated itself to tackling poverty, disadvantage and social isolation by providing direct practical assistance to anyone in need; our work and call-to-serve is no different today though times have changed rapidly.



During unprecedented times, with fresh challenges and new responsibilities facing us as a Society amid the Coronavirus outbreak, we are gratified and inspired by the many enquiries we are receiving from people who are offering their time and service to their parishes and wider communities, and in some cases to establish new SVP groups, known as 'Conferences'.

The SVP endeavours to provide;

- Ongoing support for you, your other volunteers and those you are able to reach out to
- Some easy-to-implement strategies which will be meaningful for those who are facing various forms of poverty at this time
- A source of inspiration, comfort and motivation for your day
- Some ideas on how you might inspire others to join you in service

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, our founder, said: "No act of charity is foreign to the Society." Please let us work with you to do anything and everything we can to seek and find those in need.

"You are the light for the world"; there are people in this world who only your light can reach. Whether it is through a hope-filled and regular phonecall with somebody who has nobody else but the news to keep them company or in the material assistance and delivery of essential supplies to people who have no other means to be supported, your efforts will be meaningful, life-changing and inspiring. Thank you for the generosity you offer.

Only really one frequently asked question at this time although it has various interpretations: "How can we help." Thank you for your generous response, you can keep doing what you always have but just in new ways. With the forum on the website we are hoping to gradually respond to more questions as they emerge.

## **How can we help each other?**

Supporting all the need around you as an unsupported individual will be challenging. There are not enough hours in the day to be all things to all people. So, a Conference is vital to multiply the number of helping hands or listening ears. A supportive and encouraging Conference will accept every Member-gift offered, and will not just care for others but also for one another. While you are adapting the way

that you are working, we ask you to please offer any and all the support you can to one another while we adjust temporarily.

### **How has the need changed?**

Before Covid-19 we were already responding to a variety of different needs within the Society; those on the outskirts have been pushed even further back, those who were vulnerable before are even more so today. What follows is by no means an exhaustive list of dimensions to consider but might be worth considering.

#### **Financial poverty**

Uncertainty around jobs, global finance etc are a cause of great concern. Conferences have mechanisms in place to sometimes offer financial support in practical ways to help people who find themselves in need and lacking the necessary funds. We are also regularly called upon to provide advocacy support to individuals while we befriend them; we offer to make calls on their behalf, research their options and seek to put them in touch with the best possible advice.

#### **Material and food poverty**

We are regularly asked for assistance with providing some of the basics, whether it be the urgency of food poverty or requests for basic furniture or occasionally maintenance. During these coming weeks and months we will discover quickly what we need but do not have access to, this may not just be toilet rolls but also access to a thermometer, sanitary products, cough sweets and even colouring books, which may all provide a great deal of comfort and relief.

#### **Homelessness**

The SVP have offered a service for a number of years caring for those who suffer from homelessness, by offering Vinnie Packs, small parcels containing a warm hat, gloves, socks, toothpaste and a few other essentials. We do not wish to cease our efforts, if this is something which you think would be useful in your area then please do contact us on some of the numbers provided.

#### **Isolation**

This is the area where the greatest amount of our time is addressed. Over half a million hours per year have been committed to making people feel less alone through our befriending service. We are adapting to continue responding and many of our existing beneficiaries will be receiving regular phone calls, postcards and meaningful gifts to let them know that they are cared for and important.

#### **The poverty of hope**

This has always been a threat but perhaps a never more pressing one than now. We know how we feel after watching the news for more than an hour. As well as

responding to all of the challenges detailed, Vincentians do so with hope, joy and care and in a way which promotes dignity. We will provide moments of calm and compassion, moments of spirituality and service. But we cannot give what we do not receive so it is imperative that our members are taking time to reflect, pray and compose themselves, and behind every good member there is a spiritual advisor and a listening ear. We will be working hard over the coming weeks to ensure that a corner of the SVP website can be an island of tranquillity for you and please if you have words of wisdom, reflection and solace do share them with each other and the SVP staff.

### **How can we continue to serve?**

If you are not over 70 or considered to be in an at-risk group;

- If you are willing to help with shopping or picking up prescriptions please let us know (we have various systems in place to ensure you are reimbursed)
- Leaflet the local area to find what support people may be in need of. You will need to provide a contact number so please work with us to do this safely
- Support parents who are now having to arrange emergency childcare, perhaps by providing craft materials, colouring books etc. (This would require a significant conversation with us about safeguarding and DBS)
- Perhaps you are able to support neighbouring Conferences technologically, now that meetings are having to find alternative means of taking place. If you know how to set up Skype, Zoom, conference calls etc, then please help within your Districts
- Get in touch with local food banks to see what support you might be able to offer them, and consider distributing food parcels
- Writing letters or making cards with children to send to those in isolation – posting a card or letter to an isolated person could be a great source of hope for them

If you are in self-isolation or physical distancing yourself from other people;

- Befriending phone calls – a phone call to an isolated elderly person can make all the difference to their mood (even if you are self-isolating or vulnerable you can still be involved in this)
- Find out, perhaps from a university chaplain, if there are any isolated international students so that they can receive a regular phone call, and if required organise someone to shop for them
- Work with your Conference to submit requests for money and aid
- Work with a Conference to arrange for essential deliveries to people who may be in need
- Assisting families who are in need – perhaps offering suggestions of activities or phoning parents for a chat or getting a mystery hamper of craft materials delivered

- Be an active, helpful and supportive voice on social media – you can point people in the direction of help who may not know who they can turn to and fact check false and unhelpful news
- Find springs of renewal, ensure that your fellow helpers know that they are being prayed for, supported, cared for and “gee’d up”

### **How can we encourage more helpers?**

We are seeing a massive boost in the number of people asking to help out. Please work with us to make them welcome and able to share. Please welcome more members, (through Auxiliary Membership in the first instance), volunteers and helpers. Be aware that the avenue of lectern appeals is now shut off to us however.

- Share information on what you are doing on your local Facebook groups. It might help you find those in need as well as more volunteers to help. Offer specific ways they can help –telephone befriending, collecting shopping, finding resources for children off school, etc
- Contact Catholic and other churches in your area to make them aware of your efforts. Perhaps your parish secretary is able to put out an email
- Reach out to other community initiatives to join forces – many county councils have an official response and you can be part of this
- Reach out to other charities you may need - form links with foodbanks,
- You can setup a Conference Facebook page for your group very quickly and easily –you can use this to share resources that might help, such as local food delivery services or resources to keep children occupied while off school

### ***And finally...***

*One of our regional membership development officers wrote the following to their Central Council.*

I hope you have found this advice useful. I would like to finish with the following:

1. There is no right or wrong approach. We are in uncharted territory so you must do what you believe to be right.
2. Treat each case on its specific merits and risk-assess any potential actions. Remember, the priority is one’s own personal health.
3. If you have any queries, issues or concerns please contact me and I will endeavour to answer them for you. (And this stands for the entire team)
4. If I can be of any assistance to your Conference in terms of helping you with your support for beneficiaries, please let me know. (And, again, the whole team echo this)