

Food Collections

The St Vincent de Paul Society is very grateful for the support schools provide with non-perishable food collections. Providing food parcels to families is still a significant part of the work members do all across Australia.

The St Vincent de Paul Society receives over 600,000 calls for assistance each year in Victoria!

Why do St Vincent de Paul still collect tins of food when they can just give supermarket cards?

These days the St Vincent de Paul does both!

Taking food to someone is a warm, hospitable gesture. It breaks down barriers. Bringing food to someone shows those in need that there are people who care. These people then feel more comfortable to talk about what's going on for them. This is where the members can offer a real 'hand up' not just a 'hand out'.

Supermarket vouchers have an important role to play too. They allow people to choose what they purchase which gives them dignity. It also allows them to purchase fresh items like fruit, vegetables, bread and meat. Rich or poor - we all need to eat healthy!

SEE — This is a story similar to many others across Victoria.

Helen is a single mum with two children in primary school. These past two weeks she has been caring for her youngest son who has had a very bad case of the chicken pox. Helen doesn't have any family in the area to help her out so she has had to stay at home caring for him. This also means that she hasn't been able to work. This is bad because Helen works as a casual employee so she only gets paid for the shifts she does. She has been trying to pay all her bills on time so she hasn't had a lot of money left over for food. The school year starts next week and she needs to buy new school shoes and books for her kids. She calls the St Vincent de Paul Society and asks for help.

The St Vincent de Paul Society come and visit and help her out with food. This takes a lot of pressure off Helen because the money saved can be used to get her kids ready for school.

THINK - List the items in your food pantry at home? Circle the 5 favourite things you like to eat.

As a group, brainstorm the items that you think would be most useful to put into a box /parcel to give to a person/ family in need. Teachers - you might want to bring in supermarket catalogues for the students to look through

DO - Here are some ideas for your school food collection:

- Speak to your local St Vincent de Paul conference members. They might have some ideas about what they really need (eg, they might have lots and lots of baked beans but might be in greater need of other items). They might be able to share some stories of people they have helped too.
- Speak at assembly about your food collection. Ask the students to think about when they come home from school, do they go to the pantry and look for a snack? What if the pantry was mostly empty? How would they feel?
- Make up posters to put around the school listing suggestions of items to bring. Sometimes we can get a bit stuck for ideas but if we see a list, it can remind us that there are lots of great things that we can help with.
- You may want to give each class or grade level a theme. Eg, preps bring pasta, Gr 2 bring fruit juice, Gr 6 cans of soup.
- Make the food collection fun... you can see which class or house colour group can make the longest line with their donated items. Maybe the whole school can have the challenge of trying to line up the items around a basketball court... or maybe you can try and spell a word out with the donated items. Be creative.
- Some schools liaise with their local conference and actually pre-pack boxes or carry bags with the food so that it is ready to take to the families. Every conference has their own way of doing things so have a chat to them first. It's a rewarding activity.

Here are some suggestions of non-perishable foods that are appreciated by those in need:

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| - Packets of pasta or rice | - Instant coffee and tea bags |
| - Jars of pasta sauce | - Tins of tuna / chicken |
| - Cans of soup | - Jars of simmer and stir through sauces |
| - Packets of biscuits | - Museli Bars |
| - Boxes of cereal / museli | - Pet food |
| - Spreads eg. jams and peanut butter | - Pancake mix |
| - Long life milk and fruit juice | -Plus lots more |

Final notes:

- We appreciate tins of baked beans and spaghetti, but conferences seem to get lots of these so we haven't listed them specifically 😊
- Ask the students to check the 'Used By' and 'Best Before' dates so the items can be used
- If your local conference doesn't do food parcels, contact the School Liaison Officer who can discuss other programs which your school can support