



Frequently Asked Questions

How many Mini Vinnies groups are there in Victoria?

At the end of 2014, we had 75 active Mini Vinnies groups on our database. We are receiving new enquiries from schools frequently.

How long has Mini Vinnies been running in Victoria?

A small handful of schools have been running their Mini Vinnies for up to 10 years now with minimal support. As the demand started to grow, the St Vincent de Paul Society allocated staff resources to go and speak with schools about the benefits of starting Mini Vinnies, as well as give presentations to students about how the St Vincent de Paul Society helps the community.

The direction moving forward is to develop resources which teachers can use with their Mini Vinnies to help promote ideas for actions but just as importantly, to encourage reflection about the reasons for the actions.

Our school already has a Social Justice group – why would we want to consider a Mini Vinnies as well?

For some schools, the Mini Vinnies is the Social Justice group. For others, they have both groups. Every school will work differently. Here are two examples of schools that have both groups –

(1) The Social Justice group is a leadership team consisting of Gr6 students. The Mini Vinnies is a special program open to Gr4 students to give them something special to be part of.

(2) The Social Justice group learns about and promotes issues from a variety of organisations, both locally and internationally, where the Mini Vinnies group has more of a link to faith in action and might keep their actions small – focusing on actions for the school and local community (via the local conference members).

What grades should we make our Mini Vinnies open to?

There is no set model. Every school decides on how their Mini Vinnies will work to fit in best with the school's existing programs. Here are some common models.

- (1) Open to the Gr 6 students. Students have to apply by explaining why they want to be involved.
- (2) Open to anyone from a certain range of graders eg. Grades 3-6. This model usually involves larger numbers and the teacher plays a bigger role in forming and supporting smaller working groups so that everyone can contribute to projects.
- (3) Gr 6 students form a leadership committee and drive the group while students from Gr 3-6 can attend meetings and assist with the initiatives
- (4) Open only to a certain grade level as a special program just for them.

What is the ideal number of students for a Mini Vinnies group?

There are groups with 6 members and others with as many as 70! Generally most groups will have about 10-15 members. This all depends on which grades the Mini Vinnies is open to and how leadership in the group is structured.



How often do Mini Vinnies groups meet?

We encourage regular meetings and find that once a fortnight is popular. Some Mini Vinnies meet weekly and others just a few times a term to work on a specific project.

What is the role of the teacher in supporting a Mini Vinnies group?

We encourage Mini Vinnies groups to be student led as much as possible. Saying this, excited students will come up with some big and creative ideas and often need the teacher to help guide them as to what is realistically achievable.

Some Mini Vinnies elect a President, Vice President, Note Taker, etc. These students will actually run the meeting and the teacher helps facilitate the action points and offer advice. For larger groups, the teacher will actually run the meeting, asking for student input as much as possible.

Does our Mini Vinnies group have to fundraise and organise activities solely for the St Vincent de Paul Society?

No. As much as we greatly appreciate all the support given to the St Vincent de Paul Society by schools, there are a number of organisations that need support from schools too. Saying this, we do ask that there is some support the St Vincent de Paul Society throughout the year.

Most importantly, a Mini Vinnies group replicates the wider St Vincent de Paul Society model of embracing subsidiarity. The group should meet for prayer, reflection and then action based on what they themselves decide are the needs most important to them.

Are there any restrictions on what our Mini Vinnies can do?

We ask that any activities involving Mini Vinnies fall under the same strict parameters that any school would have for programs involving their students – especially when travelling off-site such as a visit to the local Vinnies store or aged care facility.

As Mini Vinnies is part of the St Vincent de Paul Society, we ask that Mini Vinnies groups do NOT engage in any activities for organisations that have values contrary to the Catholic faith.

What is the relationship between the Mini Vinnies and the local St Vincent de Paul conference?

A relationship between the Mini Vinnies and local conference is strongly encouraged. It really helps students to see that they are part of a wider organisation of people giving up their time to help others in any way they can. The local conference can give talks to the students as well as provide ideas on ways the students can help them. The School Liaison Officer can put you in contact with your local conference president.

What support does the School Liaison Officers give to Mini Vinnies?

The School Liaison Officer works to promote the St Vincent de Paul Society to schools in general. A focus of the role is to support schools with Mini Vinnies groups. As the program is in a period of growth, there is a focus on resource development to assist teachers in supporting their groups. The SLO can also provide ideas and contacts as well as talks and activities. In 2015, a number of inter-school Mini Vinnies Festival Gatherings are planned. The School Liaison Officer is very open to ideas which will improve the program.