



Turning concern into action

**“Charity is the cement which binds communities  
to God and persons to one another.”**

**–St Vincent de Paul**



St Vincent  
de Paul Society

England and Wales

Turning Concern into Action



## Contents

SVP mission and values	3
Mini Vinnies at your school or parish	4
Setting up your Mini Vinnies group	5
Role descriptions for leaders and children	6
Recruitment and commissioning	7
Getting started & regular meetings	8
Building relationships	9
SVP knowledge and inspiring the Mini Vinnies	10
Raising funds & supporting the school community	11
Raising awareness & staying in touch	12
Checklist	13



## Welcome to the Mini Vinnies!

The aim of this guide is to provide guidance and assistance to teachers, SVP members and priests on setting up a Mini Vinnies group in a school or parish. The Mini Vinnies are the youngest members of the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP), an international Christian voluntary organisation dedicated to tackling poverty in all its forms. The SVP was founded in 1833 in Paris by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, a young Catholic student who was keen to put his faith into action. He followed in the footsteps of St Vincent de Paul and Jesus Christ in supporting those most in need in the community.

## The SVP mission



United we seek and find those in need, providing practical support and fellowship in a spirit of justice, while tackling the causes of poverty.

## Our Vincentian values

<p><b>Responsive</b></p> <p>We aim to be alert to the ever-changing needs in communities across England and Wales, and to respond accordingly to alleviate poverty in all its forms.</p> 	<p><b>Generous</b></p> <p>We aim to be generous with our time, our possessions and ourselves in the service of others.</p> 	<p><b>Accountable</b></p> <p>We recognise our accountability to those we seek to help. We use our gifts and talents to do the best we can, while acting within the limits of our own knowledge and skills. We don't need to do everything, we just need to do something.</p> 
<p><b>Christ Centred</b></p> <p>We acknowledge and recognise that in all we do and experience Jesus is present.</p> 	<p><b>Compassion</b></p> <p>We aim to show compassion that is non-judgmental towards those with whom we work. We are moved by the struggles people face, and we seek to help.</p> 	<p><b>Confidential</b></p> <p>We respect the confidentiality of those we help, and we recognise that we meet people at some of the most vulnerable moments in their lives. We only share information if it's necessary to keep someone safe.</p> 

**Our Vincentian values**



## Mini Vinnies at your school or parish

Establishing a Mini Vinnies Conference (group) provides children with opportunities to put their faith into action, make a real difference to the lives of others in their community, and helps to develop leadership skills and empathy. Mirroring an adult SVP Conference, the Mini Vinnies come together for weekly or fortnightly meetings to discuss needs in the local and the wider community and to address them in the most appropriate way. Mini Vinnies Conferences promote the development and formation of their members. As well as developing their faith, it is a cross-curricular activity which enables children to connect what they are learning in school to the world around them.

### The mission



#### **Where is the need in our own communities?**

Giving children time to express their concerns and reflections on the world they live in and experience.

#### **What would Christ do, and how would he do it in modern society?**

This time to reflect on the Gospel and the example of Jesus is key to the Vincentian family. It is our responsibility to preach the Gospel through words and work.

#### **Act in support of those in need**

The SVP is a family built on action. After action, there is time to reflect on how they have been Christlike, where they saw Christ, and how to go about spreading the word and getting others involved.





## Setting up your Mini Vinnies group

- Simply complete the online application form at [www.svp.org.uk/newgroup](http://www.svp.org.uk/newgroup)
- We'll then send you a welcome email and we aim to put you in touch with one of our volunteer Young Vincentian Development Officers (YVDO) to help get you set up
- You will be invited to organise a date with the YVDO for a school visit to talk about Mini Vinnies
- You can place your order for a Starter Kit via [youngvincentians@svp.org.uk](mailto:youngvincentians@svp.org.uk). More details about the kit will be available in this guide
- It's then time to recruit your Mini Vinnies and have your first meeting





## Vincentian Coordinator

When you set up your Mini Vinnies group, you will need to nominate a staff member or SVP member to be your Vincentian Coordinator.

Their role is to:

- facilitate meetings for the Mini Vinnies
- offer help and practical support
- oversee matters of safeguarding and risk assessment for projects
- magnify the possibilities of the children implementing charitable works in a Vincentian spirit
- be the link between the children and other branches of the SVP

## Mini Vinnies' Leadership Roles

Some groups change these as often as once a term so that all children have an opportunity to take on leadership roles.

- President – works closely with the Vincentian Coordinator, chairs the meetings and helps allocate work to the members
- Vice President – supports the President and takes on leadership of meetings in the absence of the President
- Secretary – take notes at the meetings and keeps a record of projects and activities undertaken by the group
- Treasurer – keeps track of the money raised by the group
- Communications Officer – keep display boards up to date and create posters for projects. Provide short descriptions for publications about Mini Vinnies projects



## Recruiting your Mini Vinnies

Joining the Mini Vinnies is a commitment, so it's important that the children have time to think why they would like to become a member and take the time to express their interest to their teacher in the form of a letter/drawing.



[Download writing task](#)

[Download drawing task](#)

## Commissioning ceremonies

Once you have recruited your Mini Vinnies, a great way to introduce them to the rest of the school is to hold a commissioning ceremony. This could be part of an assembly or Mass and it would be a lovely opportunity to bring together the parish priest, adult SVP members and your YVDO.

**You can request your free Commissioning Ceremony Toolkit via [youngvincentians@svp.org.uk](mailto:youngvincentians@svp.org.uk)**





## Getting started

### Order your Mini Vinnies Starter Kit

To order your Starter Kit, from September 2023, you will be able to do this via our online shop. [Click here](#) to view our sample pack to see the resources.

### 'Mapping' activity

Our '[mapping](#)' activity is a great way for children to visualise the places in their local area and where help might be needed, and it provides an opportunity to put together a plan of action. It also helps the Vincentian Coordinator to plan for the term or year ahead. This exercise can be done in a single session, or divided up, which you will see in the new starter sessions below.

### New Starter sessions

A set of [ready-to go meetings](#) to help your group hit the ground running, including a breakdown of the mapping activity above, if you would like to use this over a number of sessions.

## Regular meetings

Like an adult SVP group, the Mini Vinnies should aim to meet weekly or fortnightly at lunchtime or after school. Meeting duration varies from school to school, so this could be anything between fifteen minutes and an hour. The structure of the meetings is also very similar to that of an adult SVP group.

- The President opens with a prayer
- A short spiritual reading/reflection/piece of music/meditation follows
- Group members take turns to do this
- Discussion on Mini Vinnies activities carried out since last meeting
- Discuss future plans/work on project
- President closes with a prayer





## Building relationships

### Young Vincentian Development Officer (YVDO)

Your YVDO is a regional volunteer who is available to help you set up your Mini Vinnies group. Keep them updated on your Mini Vinnies projects and any changes regarding your Vincentian Coordinator.

### Parish SVP adult conferences (groups)

Find out if there is a local SVP Conference in the parish/ local area. The children will be able to learn more about the work of the SVP through its members, and there may be opportunities to collaborate in supporting those most in need in the community.

### Young Vincentians Team

Contact Katy Ramsey (Mini Vinnies Manager) at [KatyR@svp.org.uk](mailto:KatyR@svp.org.uk) to ensure you are signed up to the Mini Vinnies e-news mailing list. This e-newsletter is filled with updates from groups around England & Wales, resources and news from the team. This goes out once a term. Don't forget to send us your stories and photos, along with the Photo Consent Form to feature in our e-news and possibly the Vincentian Concern magazine.

### Other schools with a Vincentian presence

If there are any other Catholic primary schools with Mini Vinnies or Youth SVP groups in your area, why not make that link? Groups can collaborate on projects and learn from each other. It's also a great way to support other Vincentian Coordinators and share ideas.

### School website

Contact the Young Vincentians team for the Mini Vinnies logo and description, which you can display on your school website.



## SVP Knowledge

It is important for the Mini Vinnies group to learn about the history and works of the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP). The organisation is nearly 200 years old, but it is still very much young at heart with members and volunteers from all over the world with the same mission in mind: turning concern into action. Why not ask a local SVP member or your YVDO to come in and share information and stories with the children about the SVP?

## Ideas to inspire your Mini Vinnies

- **Gather the family**– Gather the family – organise an SVP tea and coffee event or lunch to bring together Mini Vinnies and SVP members. Cross-generational work is a great learning tool and wonderful way to bring the parish and school closer together
- **Buddy bench**– have a space in the playground for children to go to if they want to make friends or find someone to talk to at playtime
- **Visiting local care homes**– Mini Vinnies could pay residents a visit as a group, help in the garden, sing, chat or make cards to share their message of love and compassion
- **Hold appeals**– collect food, clothing, toiletries, Easter eggs, winter woollies, or gifts for those most in need
- **Cards for parishioners** – Christmas, Easter or throughout the year, this is a great way for Mini Vinnies to reach out to those who might be lonely or feeling isolated
- **Uniform swap** – could your Mini Vinnies set this up for uniform to be collected and redistributed?
- **Fill a backpack** – collect backpacks in good condition and fill with stationary to be donated to those who might need it at the beginning of the new academic year
- **SVP food bank**– get each year group to donate a different type of item to your own school SVP food bank, which can then be donated to families most in need



## Raising funds

The main aim of the Mini Vinnies is to provide practical support to those most in need. This could be a listening ear and showing kindness. Raising funds is in addition to these actions, and we would love your Mini Vinnies to fundraise for the SVP at least once a year to support the good works of the wider organisation. They may also need to raise funds for a particular project they want to organise, and we also know that Mini Vinnies around England & Wales fundraise for a number of other causes, and this is great too.

## SVP Summer Sleep

The SVP Summer Sleep SVP is a scalable fundraising event to engage with our children and young people to raise awareness of the issues surrounding poverty in England and Wales.

Whether you choose a sleepout, sleepover or sleep without, there is something for everyone. Find out more in the spring term in time for the summer.



### Some other fundraising ideas:

- Guessing competitions
- Non-uniform days cake stalls
- Fun runs
- Bag packing
- Dance-athons
- Grow a pound

## Supporting the school community

The Mini Vinnies could also raise money to help families most in need within their school community. Even though the group would not know exactly who is being helped through such a programme (confidentiality is a fundamental requirement for all SVP works), they would know that they are giving vital support to a family within their immediate community. This money could help with school trips, uniforms, stationery, and many other items. The Vincentian Coordinator would liaise with senior management to organise a project such as this.



## Raising awareness

One very important role of the Mini Vinnies is raising awareness of social justice issues. The children can support the SVP by adding their voices in support of those most in need in the following ways:

- School assemblies- a great opportunity for the Mini Vinnies to speak about current issues with the rest of the school and why they think they are unjust
- Create stalls, displays or events at school which draw attention to the issues the children are concerned about
- Write letters to local councillors, members of parliament, business leaders, and others in positions of power
- Take part in the SVP Young Vincentians Lenten campaign each year

## Staying in touch

We love to hear about the great projects the Mini Vinnies are undertaking, so do keep in touch with us via the following platforms:

Facebook: [\*\*Mini Vinnies \(England & Wales\)\*\*](#)

Email: [\*\*KatyR@svp.org.uk\*\*](mailto:KatyR@svp.org.uk), for stories you'd like featured in the e-newsletter or Vincentian Concern. Please note that we cannot use any photos without completed [\*\*photo consent forms\*\*](#).

Twitter: [\*\*@MiniVinniesEW\*\*](#)

Instagram: [\*\*@svpyoungvincentians\*\*](#)





## Checklist

- ☐ I've completed the online application form to express interest in setting up a group
- ☐ I've been allocated a Young Vincentian Development Officer (YVDO) or Youth Team member contact
- ☐ I've made links with the local adult SVP Conference
- ☐ I've notified the parish priest
- ☐ I've arranged an initial meeting with the YVDO or Youth Team member
- ☐ I've arranged a date for an assembly for the YVDO to share more with the children
- ☐ I've given the children the Mini Vinnies letter application form to complete for recruitment
- ☐ I've planned a commissioning ceremony for the new Mini Vinnies
- ☐ I've ordered the Mini Vinnies Starter Kit from the Young Vincentians Team
- ☐ I've printed the first session activities to do with the Mini Vinnies
- ☐ The children have elected those to undertake the leadership roles
- ☐ I've created a Mini Vinnies display board for the children to manage
- ☐ I've put up the We are a Mini Vinnies school certificate in the foyer at school and shared the news of the group on the school website

