

## **Home Visitation – Frequently Asked Questions?**

### **What is the purpose of the Home Visit?**

- To listen to our Neighbour's needs. We listen for ways to help them move forward in ways that are meaningful to them.
- To be a friendly face to our Neighbours (somebody who cares).
- To build a relationship of trust and respect, affirming their dignity and celebrating their independence.
- To offer referrals to other agencies and other forms of assistance available.
- To provide material assistance most often with food, clothing or basic needs.
- Bring our love, respect, compassion and hope to our Neighbour.

Your Neighbour is calling for help. You are responding by attending to their home and engaging with them. The goal is to see how you can help. It is not the goal to establish a dependent relationship with an expectation that you will subsidize their income.

### **The First Home Visit -What should we say when we arrive?**

Hello, we are Vincentian volunteers from the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul from (parish). May we come in?

Remember – if you are there for the right reasons (i.e., you want to act on your faith, to serve others, and to help make a difference), you will say and do the right things. Be yourself. Trust God and yourself.

- Ice breaker – if the Neighbour seems, embarrassed, uncomfortable, or even antagonistic (because it can be hard to admit you need help), take a few moments to get everyone comfortable. Commenting on an interesting photo, asking the cat's name, or focusing in on something that would seem to be of interest to the person you are visiting will help.
- Ask questions that are easily answered and gain useful information at the same time, and keep the conversation open and comfortable. How many children? Age? School? How long have you lived here? There are lots of questions you can ask that are easy to answer and not intrusive and they will come easily as soon as you enter your Neighbour's home.

### **Do you have a document to guide us through Home Visitation – what information to gather when, other components on a Home Visit?**

Yes, we do, please see Appendix One and Appendix Two of this document. And visit our videos on the website ([SSVP Training Modules](#))

## **Our Neighbour said, “Do you have to come inside; can’t you just drop the help through the mail slot?” What should we do?**

Be direct and honest.

“I am sorry, when the time of our visit was confirmed, you should have been informed that we will visit your home, like Neighbours do. You called for assistance and for us to help, we need to understand what you need and if we can help. Is it okay if we come in for a quick visit? “

If your Neighbour says no to a home visit, it is okay to say, “if you need help to call us again and please make time for a visit.”

It is ok to withhold assistance if you can’t find out about the Neighbour’s situation because they will not invite you into their home.

If they have a good reason for not allowing you to visit their home, then decide with the Neighbour to meet in a quiet and private place. This acknowledges our roles as invited guests looking to maximize the level of comfort and convenience on behalf of our hosts. In exceptional cases (bed bugs?), the visit might take place elsewhere, but definitely in an environment where privacy and meaningful person to person contact is maintained.

## **How often should we visit? We visit every month, 2 months, 3 months, whenever we are called - which is correct?**

You should visit as often as your conference has determined is reasonable. If your Neighbour understands that others are also calling on the Society, and that Vincentians and funds are finite, they are more likely to understand when you suggest they call only when they find themselves really in need. Repeat, “The goal is not to establish a dependent relationship with an expectation that you will come regularly to subsidize their income. You will come when they call and are in need.

All Neighbours’ needs are unique. Setting a firm timeline on how often to call back (i.e., every three months, two months, one month) can and often does lead to an expectation and even a sense of entitlement to regular (e.g. monthly) support. Best to respond fairly and honestly to calls. Some people really need a lot of help up front, and some need help regularly as they simply cannot access any other help to get by. When a Neighbour calls more than once or twice, it is important for the Conference to discuss the circumstances of the visit, the assessed need and the conference’s potential ongoing response to the need.

## **Should we explain where the funds come from?**

At some point during that first visit (and subsequent visits from time to time), be sure to let your Neighbour know the funds for assistance come from people who go to church and put their money in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul donation box to help persons who find themselves in need. Our Neighbours need to know that we are not government funded.

## **What do we do if we see something concerning while on or during a visit?**

Concerning such as a child in immediate danger? Address the concern immediately. “Please don’t leave your baby alone in the bathtub while we sit in the kitchen, we will wait until you are done.” All persons have an obligation under the law to report any suspected or witnessed incidences of child abuse. For further details, please see [Child Welfare Legislation](https://www.ontario.ca/page/report-child-abuse-and-neglect). <https://www.ontario.ca/page/report-child-abuse-and-neglect>

**Life-Threatening Issues:** Call 911.

Concerns such as drug paraphernalia accessible to minors? Call Children’s Aid, explain how you came to be in the home and what your concern is. Something not quite right and it eats away at you? Call the Toronto Central Council office and ask for input or if it feels more serious (obvious criminal activity), go to your local police station, and discuss with the officer at the counter.

## **No one is free to attend with me. Can I go visit alone?**

No. If no Vincentian can attend, then bring an adult with you if it is an emergency call and the help can’t wait. Don’t make a habit of this though. Home Visits are for two Vincentians to attend. If you go alone, you are not insured by the Society and you put yourself, your Neighbour and the Society at risk.

## **We pay rent and utilities because we can. Is that okay?**

Not on a routine basis and only after careful consideration. Significant expenses must be discussed with the Conference and the Particular Council as per our Financial Policy ([SSVP Financial Policy](#)). If you pay rent today, and clear up the utility bills, what is the plan going forward? No payments should be made in haste; timely discussions should be held first.

## **We keep records of all sorts of things. Is it okay to copy SIN, Health Card, Tax Returns, etc. of our Neighbours?**

No. You are not opening files on your Neighbours. You have no right to have any of their personal information unless it is for the express purpose of assisting them with something such as an application, a tax return, etc. Personal information is not for your files or records. You can note relevant information in your Home Visit call logs, but be aware that your Neighbour has the right to review whatever you record. Record facts, not judgements and choose your words carefully. Privacy Policy ([SSVP Privacy Policy](#))

## **Do I need information about government services i.e., ODSP, Child Benefits, OW?**

Absolutely. Understanding what our Neighbours are up against really helps you understand the challenges they face. Someone in your Conference would likely have the skills to look this information up and ensure it is current. You can also find it on the Society's website ([SSVP Equity of Services](#))

## **We are not trained social workers, yet we feel we can do more than simply providing the phone numbers for assistance, e.g., mental health and or addictions. What can we do in these situations?**

When someone is broken you can't fix them. When someone is hurting you can't take away their pain. The most profound challenge a person encounters is to feel alone. You can, however, show love for them by walking beside them in their hurt, provide support, a listening ear, gentle guidance, practical assistance. Check-in and let them know someone does care and that they are not alone.

## **We mailed assistance to people who called in during the pandemic. It was so easy that we are going to continue to help that way. Is that okay?**

No. Mailing vouchers out during the pandemic was a practical, safe way to assist our Neighbours. All Conferences must have an honest discussion about moving back to Home Visitation, where practical and reasonable. Mailing out assistance may continue as we ride the pandemic wave, however, we must work hard to connect with our Neighbours, and nothing does that better than a visit. If you are not quite ready to visit in someone's home, are you meeting outside, or in an open space? Are you connecting by telephone conversations and email exchanges?

Distributing food vouchers is easier and efficient if we were a delivery service like Canada Post. Delivering food vouchers is not what our Society is about. Our service is about person to person contact with our Neighbours who are experiencing poverty. The Society is not a mail order organization. We do what we can no matter what the challenge. Home Visitation is our core service.

## **We are concerned about bed bugs in our Neighbours home. What do we do?**

When you are making arrangements for your Home Visit, most Neighbours will tell you straight up if they have bed bugs. In that case, make alternate arrangements to meet in another location. If you are visiting in an area that is known for bed bug infestation, sit on a hard surface, tell your Neighbour you can't sit in certain locations because you have been in bed bug areas, or you can ask, are you having difficulties with bed bugs? and respond accordingly.

# APPENDIX ONE

## Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Greater Toronto Central Council

### Home Visitation – Frequently Asked Questions?

#### Components of a Home Visit:

##### 1. Information gathering and sharing

Sharing includes asking how they learned about us and explaining who we are – do not assume the Neighbour calling knows what the Society is and where the money comes from. It is important in this first visit (and subsequent visits from time to time if necessary) to let your Neighbour know that the funds for assistance come from people who go to church and put some money in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul donation box to help people who find themselves in need. Explain that you are a volunteer member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul which is a Catholic organization working in your parish to help needy people of all denominations in the community. We are not government funded. We depend on the donations of our parishioners. Share your conference calling card at this time in the visit which should restate this information in writing.

On the very first visit, you need the name, contact information, number of people living in the home and the reason for calling. The Greater Toronto Central Council has a Privacy Policy ([SSVP Privacy policy](#)) Please be careful how you manage a person's personal information.

It is important you let your Neighbour in Need know we are here to help if we can and what our limits of service are. Let them know we can help, we will respond when they call, but we may not be able to assist with all their needs. However, we may be able to help them find other sources of assistance.

Be clear with your Neighbour that they can reach out and you will let them know what you can do to offer support when they are in need. Be clear about the limits of what you can do to help and do not create expectations you and your conference cannot deliver.

## **2. Identify Needs:**

Identify the Neighbour's immediate needs (food, clothing, basic furniture, other needs). "How can we help you today?" A question such as this will start the Neighbour talking about their current situation and what they hope you can do for them. On the first visit, listen, listen, listen. Listen to the words. Listen to the tone.

Each Neighbour in Need presents us with a unique life story, and with a one-of-a-kind set of values, beliefs, hopes, gifts, challenges, joys, sorrows, and the baggage of life. Dealing with the Neighbour in Need as an individual and as a person worthy of respect, time and best efforts requires:

- Empathy for their situation; that is, feeling the pain, hopelessness, shame, anxiety, depression, anger, or fear they are experiencing.
- You want to respond to their needs, getting to know them and building a relationship of trust, so together we can make better-informed decisions about how best to assist and move forward in a meaningful way to them.

## **3. Provide What You Can**

Provide the assistance you are able (food, clothing vouchers).

Your exit will be as friendly and comfortable as your introduction and will reinforce we can help, we will respond when they call, but we may not be able to assist with all their needs.

So many Vincentians ask about serving persons with mental health issues. The very fact that you care, that you touch base, that you send a card, that you remember their birthday, that you follow through with a call when you say you will can make a profound difference in someone's life. The material assistance is gratefully received, but the caring interaction can be life changing.

## **4. Follow Through**

Be sure to follow through on any assistance you promised but could not provide immediately (furniture, beds, other basic needs, or information) On promises – be realistic and honest about what you can or cannot do for the Neighbour. Your genuine honesty demonstrates that you care and have respect for them. Follow through on promises while it is still fresh. Do what you said you would do.

# APPENDIX TWO

## Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Greater Toronto Central Council

### Home Visitation – Frequently Asked Questions?

#### First and Subsequent Visits

<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Visit:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unless we have reason to think otherwise, we assume there is a genuine need and we will give what the person is asking for, within the limits set by our conference.</li> <li>• We explain that the funds are contributed by parishioners of the local Catholic parish and that we have a responsibility to ensure they get to those most in need.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assistance Provided:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conferences agree on a \$ value for food and clothing vouchers that is appropriate for a single person, a couple and for each additional child.</li> <li>• A bed and/or other furniture, if deemed needed/appropriate.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information required:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• name</li> <li>• address</li> <li>• phone number</li> <li>• reason for call</li> <li>• number and ages of children</li> <li>• amount and type of assistance given.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> &amp; Subsequent Visits:</b></p> <p>If the Neighbour in Need requests assistance additional times, it may be that they are in need on a longer-term basis.</p> <p>While our hope is to help people through a difficult period in their life or through a difficult circumstance, we are aware and prepared to provide additional financial assistance to help them deal with these temporary challenges. Within the limits of our time, experience, and knowledge, we may also be able to assist them in areas such as:</p> <p>Budgeting money management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Accessing government services/programs/tax benefits</li> <li>○ Locating re-training courses</li> <li>○ Seeking health services, including counseling.</li> </ul> <p>Whether we continue to visit, and the amount and form of that assistance will be determined by the Vincentians and the Conference.</p> <p>The following may be helpful:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you believe the Neighbour in Need requires this assistance in order to meet basic needs?</li> <li>2. Does the Neighbour in Need understand the source of our funds and our responsibility to manage the funds carefully?</li> </ol> <p><b>Note:</b> The issue of whether resources are available should not be the deciding factor because conferences with excess funds are sending them to the PC to be sent up or redistributed to needy conferences.</p>	<p><b>Assistance Provided:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depending on circumstances, the response of the Vincentians might be very similar to the first visit – giving what is requested and needed, within appropriate limits.</li> <li>• More substantial assistance in exceptional cases after consultation with Conference (and the Particular Council) up to a maximum of \$500 after which additional assistance requires Particular Council approval.</li> <li>• It might be clear at this point that the Neighbour’s circumstances justify ongoing assistance for a longer term.</li> <li>• If special needs arise and require additional or unusual assistance (e.g., paying rent or for computers), a decision will be taken at the Conference (after consultation with the Particular Council if the request for assistance exceeds \$500).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information required:</b></p> <p>We now need more information in order to be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make informed decisions about the type and amount of assistance that is appropriate.</li> <li>• make informed decisions about what other types of assistance the person may require.</li> <li>• provide other Vincentians who may be visiting the Neighbour with the information they require to make a productive informed visit.</li> <li>• We will not, however, collect information merely to make the Neighbour in Need to “jump through hoops.” If the information does not help us in understanding, we will not collect it.</li> <li>• We will continue to build our relationship with the Neighbour and look for opportunities to improve their circumstances.</li> </ul>