



Te Ope Whakāora

your support in action

# Reporter

2012 ISSUE 1



## On the edge of the precipice

Yvonne (budget coordinator), Alofa (client) and Diana (social worker)

Helping families back from the brink of disaster.

Averting catastrophe and unravelling the complex problems behind families' often dire situations is the painstaking job of The Salvation Army's social workers and budget advisers.

One recent case almost resulted in the loss of a family's home, their bankruptcy and even threatened the existence of the family unit.

South Auckland Community Ministries social worker Diana Vao was called to Alofa and her husband's house after a school nurse alerted CYF to a possible case of physical abuse. Some of the couple's children had arrived at school with apparent bruising. While investigating the case, Diana discovered the bizarre truth.

For several years, water draining from a neighbouring section had been seeping onto Alofa's property. Capillary action had drawn the water up into the house's framework, causing dampness and mould throughout a large part of the house. The bruising on the children was in fact mould spores, which had also

infected their parents.

Despite both parents working, they did not have the savings to install new drainage or repair the damage caused by the water. The plasterboard walls were soaked, and crumbled when touched, and the internal walls and ceilings were black with mould.

Salvation Army head budget adviser Yvonne Challis was called in. Faced with more than \$20,000 of repairs to get the house to a safe standard, and with the family having scant financial reserves, she contacted Habitat for Humanity, which agreed to undertake the repairs for the \$9000 cost of materials.

Yvonne was still faced with the choice of finding the money or helping the family with a mortgagee sale and bankruptcy. After much negotiation, she successfully applied to have the couple's KiwiSaver superannuation funds released on the basis of hardship to the family.

The family underwent tremendous strain, says Alofa, but their house is no longer a health hazard and the family itself is no longer under threat.

Demand at The Salvation Army's food banks jumped to 66,000 food

parcels in 2011, up 18 per cent from 2010, as the problems families faced became increasingly complex and time-consuming to solve.

Salvation Army social workers saw their workloads soar 67 per cent compared to 2010, while budget advisers' services increased by a third.

Salvation Army staff across the country say rising living costs and high rents combined with redundancies, reduced working hours or just insufficient wage rates are often enough to push even the most frugal and functional families into a spiral of debt and intense emotional stress.

### Salvation Army community support for the 12 months ending Dec 2011:

**66,038** Food parcels distributed

**39,296** Families receiving emergency food aid

**67%** Increase in social work services provided

**33%** Increase in budget advice services

**12%** Increase in counselling

**Inside:**

Committed to Christchurch

Low-income families battling poverty on many fronts



## Committed to Christchurch earthquake recovery

One year on from the 6.3 magnitude earthquake that claimed 185 lives in Christchurch, Salvation Army recovery personnel predict a tough year ahead, particularly for eastern suburbs residents.

The 12-month insurance cover of rent for insured homeowners forced from their properties is beginning to expire, leaving families with the often impossible task of paying mortgages and rates on houses they can't live in, as well as rent. Quake-related redundancies will exacerbate the situation, says Earthquake Response Manager Bruce Coffey.

He expects a new wave of mainly middle-income families will seek assistance during this year as their budgets collapse under the strain. He says there are already cases of people moving back into their damaged homes because they can't afford to pay overheads on two dwellings. 'People are saying they have no option except to move back into derelict homes or put a tent or caravan on the back section, with or without running water, so we expect more people to be driven back into substandard homes once their accommodation assistance runs out.'

Client referrals and demand for services have already been growing as The Salvation Army's range of services is better understood by the public and its reputation as an organisation that gets the job done becomes increasingly

recognised by other agencies.

Another emerging challenge is the number of isolated, elderly people being overwhelmed by the complex and usually frustrating negotiations with insurance companies, EQC and other bureaucracies, and finding themselves unable to make the tough decisions needed to move on from their damaged homes.

'Often, the reaction is to go inside, close the door and avoid dealing with the problems—this is not uncommon,' Bruce says. 'Our big concern is that in a couple of years, there's the possibility of seeing some of these older folk evicted because they've been unable to make the decisions they need to make.'

Long-term financial pressures and the ongoing disillusionment and uncertainty associated with multiple insurance claims, rezoning, property repairs and trying to make major life decisions are compounded by the trauma and stress sparked by every aftershock. There have been more than 3100 magnitude three or greater aftershocks since last February, including a series of up to magnitude six quakes on 23 December 2011.

### Aftershocks challenge resilience

Social worker Wilfrid McKerras says residents are fairly resilient and stoically get on with day-to-day life, but the aftershocks and ongoing frustrations mean many people are so focused on day-to-day living that they neglect

their emotional health. A lot of people who have not dealt with past issues of loss and grief are finding these are resurfacing because of the ongoing pressures, he says.

Jocelyn Smith coordinates a team providing support for students and staff at 15 schools predominantly in the severely damaged eastern suburbs. Their role also involves assisting with school field trips and fun-filled events for children. She says many parents—especially single parents—are under considerable stress dealing with traumatised children and maintaining a home under trying conditions, and rarely have time to look after their own emotional health. 'These are people who have been living with high tension for over a year now,' she says. 'We aim to offer moments of joy and relief from some of the ongoing strain and tensions faced in these quake-affected days.'

Gilly Blacklee manages three teams of mobile community care workers. She says the larger aftershocks in December left already anxious residents badly shaken and despondent, feeling that their situation seems to have no end. 'We see people who are quite volatile who wouldn't normally be that way, and we're seeing the symptoms of depression,' she says.

Twelve months on, Salvation Army social workers are becoming more involved in complex case management, referring those in need of treatment on to mental health agencies.



### Salvation Army pulls together

The social work, school community workers, community care and pastoral support team, managed by Bruce Coffey, works hand-in-hand with local Salvation Army corps (churches) and Community Ministries centres. Christchurch's Community Ministries centres have distributed the bulk of quake-related welfare support, with most seeing increases in service provision of several hundred per cent over the past year. Corps have provided a volunteer base and offered spiritual and practical support for many Christchurch residents.

The Salvation Army played a significant and rapidly expanding role in Canterbury from the first few hours after the September 2010 7.1 magnitude quake.

In the immediate aftermath of the 6.3 magnitude quake last February, Salvation Army Emergency Services served up to 4700 meals a day to displaced residents and emergency service workers, providing over 75,000 meals. Around 1200 officers and staff, from as far away as Australia, converged on the city to join psychosocial teams that visited in excess of 100,000 affected households in Christchurch and surrounding areas.

Since the September 2010 quake, The Salvation Army has spent around \$8 million in welfare support, including food, clothing, furniture, grocery, petrol and hardware vouchers, as well as \$500 Care Cards for the financially strapped. Respite holidays were provided for traumatised families and individuals

needing to get out of the region for a break.

When domestic water and sewage services were in disarray, The Salvation Army provided \$1 million to fund 20,900 chemical toilets. It also contributed three mobile, custom-designed shower units comprising 21 shower and changing cubicles, costing around \$130,000 to build, ship and operate.

In addition, many corps and Community Ministries centres saw steep increases in demand for their help as thousands of individuals and families left Christchurch to seek refuge in other parts of the country.

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### Generous public support

The Salvation Army's practical and high-visibility work encouraged public donations of \$18.3 million to The Salvation Army Canterbury Earthquake Appeal. In addition, corporate New Zealand provided a range of funding, services and volunteers for Salvation Army projects.

A side effect of The Salvation Army's work in Christchurch has been a heightened public awareness of the Army's wider work and a greater

willingness by the public and companies to support it. This has been illustrated in greater support for Salvation Army fundraising appeals since the quake.

### Looking ahead

Territorial Commander Commissioner Don Bell says Salvation Army officers, staff, church members and volunteers—particularly local personnel who suffered property damage and personal disruption—responded with energy and commitment to the recovery work. This provided immeasurable relief to thousands of Cantabrians. 'The Army remains strongly committed to supporting Canterbury communities for the long term,' he says.

Head of The Salvation Army's earthquake response, Lieut-Colonel Lyndon Buckingham, expects the year ahead to be at least as challenging as 2011. He says one of the key aims will be to build long-term resilience in quake-affected residents and among Salvation Army personnel involved in the earthquake recovery work.

'The Salvation Army has been part of the fabric of the city of Christchurch since the late 1800s, and serving its people will remain high on our agenda for the foreseeable future. The strength of the Canterbury people, assisted by so many from around New Zealand and around the world, shows us that in the saddest and toughest of times, people want to help bring hope and healing. It is our privilege to be at work as part of the recovery and rebuilding process of this beautiful city and its people.'

## Low-income families battling poverty on many fronts

Pressure on Salvation Army welfare services has continued with little respite since the recession began in 2008.

The Salvation Army's provision of food parcels increased 18 per cent in the year to December 2011. It has risen 34 per cent over the past three years. In 2011, more than 66,000 food parcels were provided to 39,300 families and individuals.

Salvation Army Secretary for Social Services Major Pam Waugh says behind the rise in demand for food parcels, and help with other household basics, is the increasing number and complexity of problems clients are facing.

With few exceptions, families come with long-term and often high-interest debt, usually compounded by—and exacerbating—other problems such as homelessness, relationship breakdown and family violence, poor mental health, or a family member's drug or alcohol use, she says.

Intensively marketed, high-interest loans to beneficiaries and low-income earners and 'buy now, pay later' retail deals targeting low-income people have long been hazards in poorer communities. Debt and low incomes combined with rising rents and living costs, and breadwinners losing their jobs or having working hours cut, have seen poverty levels in many parts of the country deepen and widen.

In central Auckland, where families face a dire shortage of affordable accommodation, The Salvation Army's team of social workers has seen a 95 per cent rise in the number of people seeking help to secure a home since the start of the recession in 2008.



Central Auckland social work team Rachel, Fiona and Keri

Head of the Family Social Work Team Fiona Knight says it isn't uncommon to find a dozen or more people living in a two-bedroom unit, sleeping on beds and mattresses in shifts. This makes one of the social work team's priorities finding suitable accommodation for clients. They also identify the root causes for their clients' current situations and provide strategies to ensure they can maintain a stable and sustainable home for their children.

In addition, the team provides a Transitional Housing Programme, mainly for homeless women and their children, some of whom are escaping potentially dangerous situations. It provides eight weeks' accommodation,

intensive social work support, and assistance to find long-term housing. Residents have access to Salvation Army budgeting services and parenting and life skills programmes. Once families leave, they receive another four weeks of social work support.

'We believe homelessness does not exist in a vacuum,' Fiona says. 'It is usually a symptom of some other issue, whether it be a relational breakdown, family violence, financial difficulties, addiction or a mixture of all of the above.' At the heart of the programme is the aim to support clients to address these underlying barriers so they can achieve goals for themselves and their children.

## YOUR LEGACY CAN HELP THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE

For over 125 years The Salvation Army has been supporting New Zealanders in need and helping build better communities for us to live in. We want to continue doing this for many years to come: but we can't do it alone.

Write to: **The Salvation Army, Free Wills Booklets, PO Box 27001, Marion Square, Wellington 6141**  
Freephone: 0800 53 00 00 or visit: [salvationarmy.org.nz](http://salvationarmy.org.nz)



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