

Fallen on hard
times this
Christmas

Christmas research report



**Christmas
Appeal**

December 2022





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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

Our values are:

- **Integrity**
- **Compassion**
- **Respect**
- **Diversity**
- **Collaboration**

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: salvationarmy.org.au/about-us/inclusion

The Salvation Army is an international movement. Our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name with love and without discrimination.





About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international movement, with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is also one of Australia's largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion. The Salvation Army has a national annual operating budget of more than \$1 billion and provides more than 1000 social programs and activities across each state and territory in Australia. The organisation is active in communities in local hubs and community centres, co-located with other support services and agencies, and through churches and corps centres. Main program areas include:

- Emergency Relief, material aid and case work
- Financial inclusion and counselling
- Housing and homelessness
- Family and domestic violence
- Drug and alcohol support and addiction treatment and recovery
- Youth services
- Emergency disaster and strategic response
- Employment services
- Chaplaincy
- Aged care services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Recognition

Thank you to all participants who completed surveys and shared your views and experiences with us. We appreciate your time and insights.

Thank you to all the dedicated Doorways staff, volunteers, officers and members of our Salvation Army corps.



Overview

Many Australians look forward to Christmas and it is typically a festive time celebrated among family, friends and community. Christmas is also a major religious occasion, marking the birth of Jesus Christ. Yet for many, it can create additional pressures and be a time of financial stress, hardship and loneliness. Christmas is an expensive time of year. Buying gifts for loved ones and arranging a special Christmas meal can be a real struggle. A change in financial circumstances or an unexpected expense can have a big impact for those on a tight budget, forcing some to go without this Christmas.

Christmas is typically a busy time for community organisations and charities, a time when many people reach out for help and seek a sense of community connection. Last Christmas, The Salvation Army supported thousands of Australians, many who were struggling with essential household bills, enough food to eat or finding a safe place to sleep. During this time, our Emergency Relief services provided hampers and food vouchers, bill assistance, access to accommodation and presents for children to open on Christmas morning.

Last Christmas season¹, The Salvation Army provided:



\$2.55M

in **financial assistance** to people who accessed our Emergency Relief services



65,000

food vouchers and **hampers** worth over \$1.75M to people in need



\$96,000

worth of **assistance** to families who needed help paying essential bills



41,000

toys and gifts to families who accessed our services



68,000

bed nights and **136,000 meals** to people who accessed our Homelessness services



8500

individuals and their children with **accommodation support services**

¹ Christmas season refers to 1 December to 31 December 2021, data extracted from SAMIS TSA internal information management system.



In 2021/22, The Salvation Army's Doorways Emergency Relief service^{2,3}:



Operated from more than
280 sites across the country



Assisted nearly
121,000 people



Provided nearly **291,000**
sessions of care to those in need



Distributed **\$17.6M** in financial
assistance⁴ to people in need

This research project was conducted to understand the experiences and challenges people who access our Emergency Relief centres face at Christmas time.

This report demonstrates the financial stress and hardships people experience, many struggling to afford their rent and enough food during Christmas time. Many were worried about having enough money to afford presents for their children and family or spending Christmas alone. Most respondents reported a range of adverse life challenges which further exacerbated the pressures and stress at Christmas time, such as unstable housing, family conflict, and deteriorating mental health. The report paints a solemn picture about many people who are struggling at Christmas time.

This Christmas, The Salvation Army will again provide essential services to thousands of Australians in difficult circumstances and those doing it tough this year. Corps officers, employees and volunteers will help people in financial hardship, some of whom are struggling to afford food and presents for their children, and connect with people who are isolated and alone. The Salvation Army will offer a little sense of community spirit, hope and kindness to those who need it the most this Christmas.

² Includes Emergency Relief assistance and case management.

³ Data extracted from SAMIS TSA internal information management system.

⁴ Cash, gift cards, food vouchers and bill assistance.



Method

An online survey was conducted to examine the circumstances, views and sentiments towards Christmas among community members who accessed The Salvation Army's Emergency Relief services.

Qualtrics was used to host and distribute the online survey. A random sample of 6000 people who had attended The Salvation Army's Emergency Relief centre in the past six months were invited via text message to complete the survey. A total of 1453 respondents completed the online survey (24% response rate) between mid-September and early October 2022. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous.

The Salvation Army commissioned the corporate market research company PureProfile, to administer the same online survey across the nation. The survey questions were identical to this research project for comparative purposes with the general population. The data was collected during October 2022. A total of 2015 Australians aged 18 and over completed the online survey. PureProfile respondents were financially remunerated for participating. PureProfile conducted its own data extraction and analysis. Aggregated cross tabulation data was provided. No individual identifying details were provided or referenced in the report. The sample was representative and reflects the Australian population data.

Data analysis

Data was extracted and analysed using Qualtrics and PowerBI. Missing responses were low (<5% of total sample) and were excluded from the calculations.

Where appropriate, findings from this research were also compared with results from the PureProfile survey that portrays circumstances, general sentiments and worries of the general Australian population during the Christmas season (hereafter referred to as 'general Australian population survey').



Themes

The Christmas season raises challenges and hardships for many families, particularly those who access The Salvation Army's Emergency Relief services. Key themes that arose from this research project included:

- A. The rising cost of living expenses will significantly and negatively impact most respondent households this Christmas
- B. Most respondents reported affording basic household essentials such as enough food to eat and paying for their utilities or their rent will be most challenging this Christmas
- C. Financial hardship was evident among respondents with nearly all expected to have a shortage of money or financial difficulties this Christmas
- D. Disconnection from family and friends, social isolation and loneliness over Christmas were prevalent among respondents
- E. Physical health, illness and mental health concerns were common among respondents this Christmas
- F. People who accessed The Salvation Army's Emergency Relief services experienced higher incidences of hardships and adverse life circumstances compared to the general public



Key findings



99%

were worried and stressed about the upcoming Christmas season



99%

expected to have a shortage of money or financial difficulties this Christmas



90%

were provided with food from The Salvation Army's Emergency Relief services



89%

respondents will struggle to pay at least one of their essential bills this Christmas, such as food, household utilities, or their rent



83%

indicated that the rising cost of living will significantly and negatively impact them this Christmas



81%

from households with children were worried about affording presents for their children for Christmas



77%

were concerned about affording enough food to eat this Christmas



66%

reported their financial situation would be poor this Christmas



50%

were worried about their mental health this Christmas



43%

from single person households were worried about spending Christmas alone this year



48%

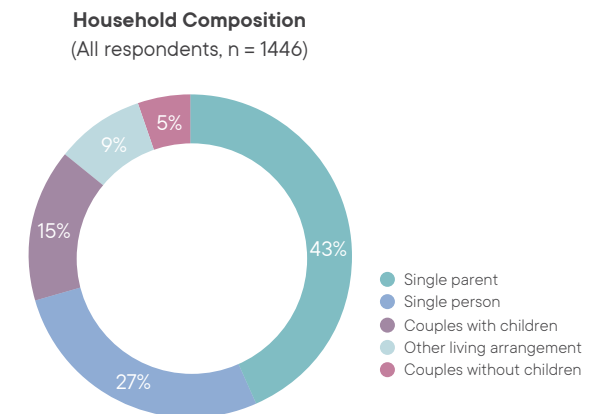
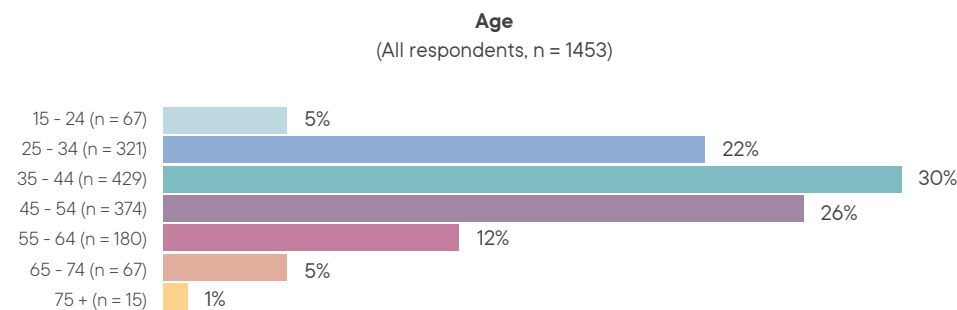
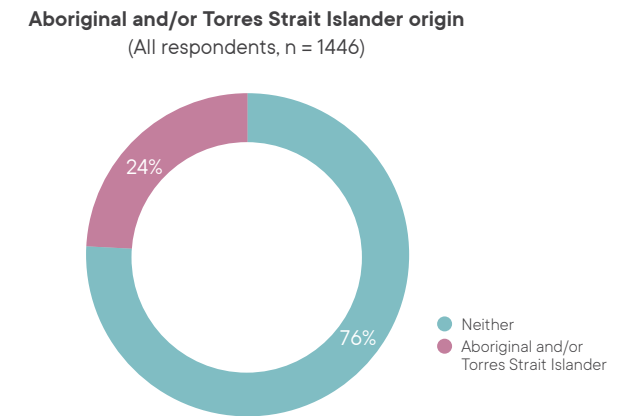
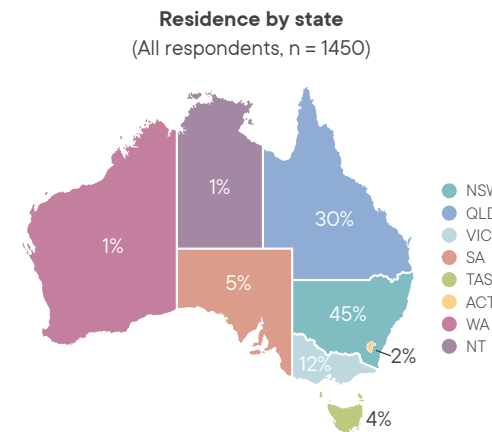
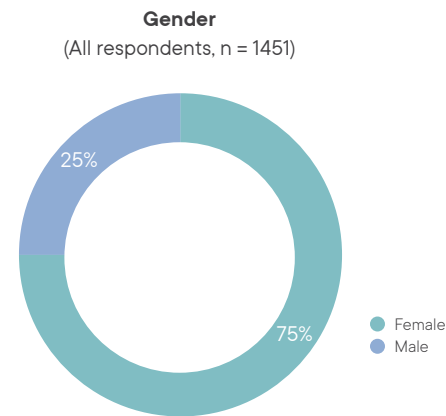
were not looking forward to Christmas

Main findings

Demographic profile

A total of **1453 respondents** completed the survey.⁵ Most were female (**75%**), and one in four (**25%**) were male. Respondents were aged between 16 and 88 years; the average age was 43. Most respondents were from NSW (**45%**), followed by Queensland (**30%**) and Victoria (**12%**). South Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia and Northern Territory had response rates under five per cent. Respondents were mainly Australian citizens or permanent residents (**76%**), and **nearly one in four (24%)** were First Nations peoples, which is 7.5 times higher than the total proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' population in Australia (3.2%).¹

Most respondents (**92%**) listed government income support benefits as their main income source, followed by no income (**4%**) and employed or owned a business (**2%**). **Nearly six in ten (58%)** respondents were households with children, of these **more than four in ten (43%)** were single parent families and **one in six** were couples with children. **More than one in four (27%)** lived alone, and **nearly one in ten (9%)** lived in shared accommodation and **five per cent** were couple only households.



⁵ Cash, gift cards, food vouchers and bill assistance.

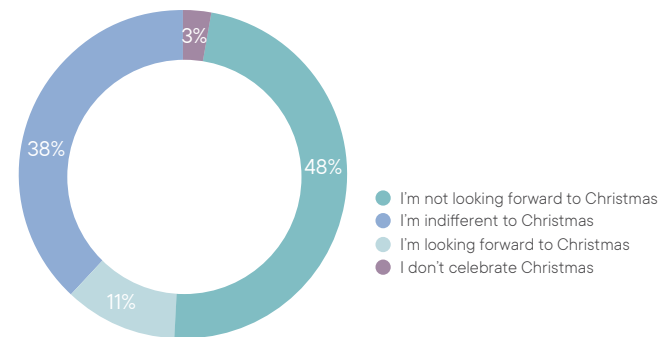
¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022, July 1). Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/australia-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-population-summary>

Sentiments toward Christmas

Christmas can be a challenging time for many Australians and not everyone looks forward to the festive season. In fact, **nearly half (48%)** of respondents were not looking forward to Christmas, and this was most apparent for single households. Rates for the general population were much lower, with only **one in ten (10%)** not looking forward to Christmas.

People spending Christmas alone were almost twice as likely to be not looking forward to Christmas (**65%**) compared to those who were spending Christmas with their family (**37%**). **Two in three (66%)** respondents provided sombre feedback about their feelings toward Christmas and most frequently described the occasion as *stressful, lonely and sad*. This suggested many respondents recognised Christmas as a challenging and difficult time of year, rather than a celebratory or joyous one.

Sentiment towards Christmas
(All respondents, n = 1445)



66%

held negative sentiments about Christmas

48%

were not looking forward to Christmas

11%

were impartial to Christmas

3%

did not celebrate Christmas

MOST COMMON PHRASES

Sad

Family

Lonely

Stressful

Worried



Main worries about this Christmas were affording:



Presents for my children (62%)



A special Christmas Day meal (51%)



Presents for family and friends (47%)



Cost of travel to see my family and friends (35%)



Activities for children during holidays (34%)

Worries this Christmas

While Christmas is a celebratory time for many Australians, it can also be a time of financial pressure and emotional strain. Nearly all respondents (99%) were worried about the upcoming Christmas season. Similar to last year's findings, affording presents for children and family members, a Christmas meal and activities for their children over the holidays were the most prevalent worries.

Respondents who accessed The Salvation Army Emergency Relief were very concerned about the upcoming Christmas season. Each respondent was worried about at least three different concerns. Salvation Army respondents were at least **four times** more likely to be worried about affording presents for their children or affording special activities over the holidays and **four times** more likely to be concerned about affording a special meal on Christmas Day compared to the Australian general population. This highlights the increased level of hardship and financial strain experienced by people who access The Salvation Army's Emergency Relief services.

"I feel guilty knowing I can't afford presents for family." – Respondent

Worries over Christmas			
Unable to afford:	The Salvation Army's emergency relief respondents	General Australian population*	Difference
Presents for children on Christmas Day	62%	15%	4.1x
A special Christmas Day meal	51%	12%	4.2x
Activities with their children over holidays	34%	7%	4.8x

* Extrapolated figures based on PureProfile results.



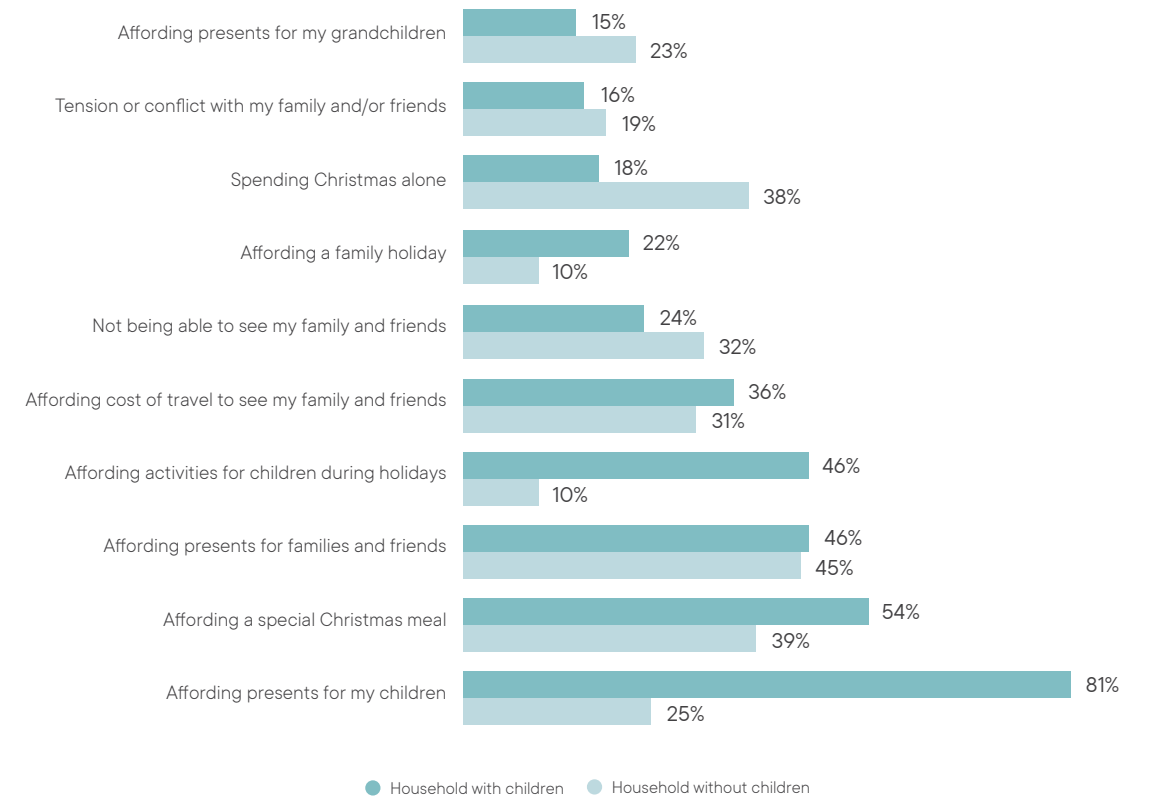
Households with children

Christmas time is an expensive time of year, and a real struggle for some low-income families. **Four in five (82%)** respondents from households with children were worried about affording presents for their children on Christmas Day, and this was most commonly a concern for single parent households. Of those with children, more than **more than half (54%)** were concerned they could not afford a special meal on Christmas Day for the family, while **nearly half (46%)** were stressed about affording activities with their children over the holidays. More than **four in five (83%)** respondents with children were worried about not having enough food to eat over the Christmas season and nearly **one in six (16%)** were concerned about tension and conflict with family and friends over Christmas. This indicates that the holiday season can be a financially and emotionally burdensome time of year, particularly for families in need.

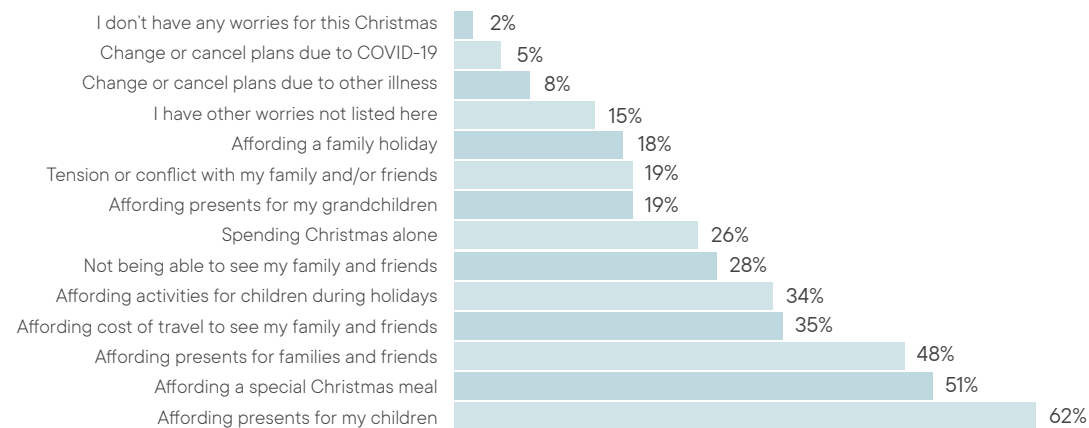
"I won't have any money for Christmas presents for my kids or money for food." – Respondent

"I love Xmas if I had the money to buy for all my 5 children and grandchildren, but I'm on a low income, paying bill[s] and can't afford much but dinner for the table." – Respondent

Worries this Christmas and household type



Worries this Christmas
(All respondents, n = 1445)

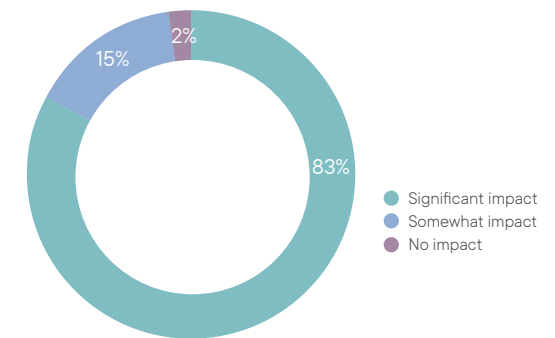




Rising cost of living

Many people experience financial stress over Christmas and, as a result, Christmas is one of the busiest times of the year when people turn to community organisations for help. In the past 12 months, the cost of living for people has increased substantially, and inflation is expected to peak at 7.75 per cent in the December quarter of 2022.ⁱⁱ This places additional strain on many Australians, however, people on low incomes are most disadvantaged. **More than four in five (83%)** respondents reported that the increased cost of living expenses will significantly and negatively impact their household this Christmas. Households with children will be the worst affected.

Impact of cost of living
(All respondents, n = 1443)



Significantly impacted by cost of living and household type



ⁱⁱ Reserve Bank of Australia. (2022). Minutes of the Monetary Policy Meeting of the Reserve Bank Board. (October 2022). <https://www.rba.gov.au/monetary-policy/rba-board-minutes/2022/2022-10-04.html#:~:text=The%20Bank's%20central%20forecast%20was,of%20the%20September%20quarter%20CPI>



Main challenges over the Christmas season:



Affording enough food to eat (77%)



Paying household utility bills (55%)



Affording petrol, fuel or public transport (51%)



Being unemployed (41%)



Paying the mortgage or rent (39%)

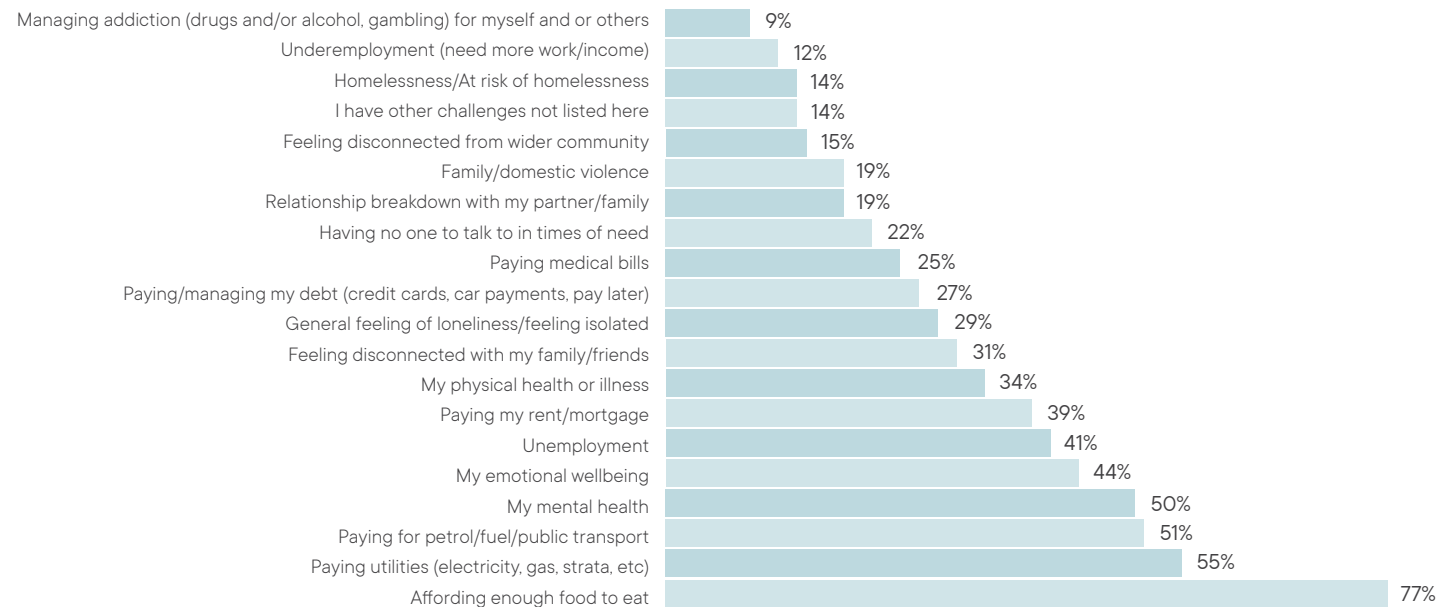
Financial hardships

Christmas is usually a festive time, eating and sharing food with family and friends. Yet not everyone will have enough money to put food on the table and feed their families this Christmas, with many respondents forced to skip meals or go without. Food security was a main concern for most respondents, with **more than three in four (77%)** worried about affording enough food to eat this Christmas – this was **six per cent** higher compared to the same time the year before. This situation was worse for single parent families,

where **four in five (82%)** are worried they will not have enough food this Christmas. A confronting situation. Some respondents expressed shame and guilt for not being able to provide for their families. A tough position for anyone to be in.

"[I'm] concerned as to how I'm gonna be able to afford gifts and food for my kids, as I'm barely making it through the week." – Respondent

Challenges this Christmas
(All respondents, n = 1445)





Most respondents contended with a range of adverse life circumstances and many reported difficulties managing to afford essential bills. **More than half (55%)** were worried about affording household utilities. **More than half (51%)** would experience challenges affording petrol, fuel or public transport and **nearly four in ten (39%)** were worried about paying the rent or mortgage this Christmas season. These figures were higher for households with children, indicating that families with children experienced additional financial strain and pressure during Christmas time.

Overall, **nearly nine in ten (89%)** respondents will struggle to pay at least one of their essential bills this Christmas, **two per cent** higher compared to the year before. These findings highlight people are struggling financially to pay the bills and afford enough to eat as the prices of essential household items continue to rise.

"The Salvos made a huge difference, being able to eat, when rising bills accrued. Helped with medications for my children when I've had no money. Having someone to talk to when needed." – Respondent

Christmas is an expensive time of year for Australians. Approximately **one-quarter (27%)** reported they were worried about managing or paying back debts, **three per cent** higher than the year before. **One in four (23%)** worried they will resort to payday lenders, credit cards and Buy Now Pay Later loans this Christmas. Paying for health and medical bills was also a concern for **one in four (25%)** respondents. **Four in ten (41%)** reported they were stressed about unemployment and a further **12 per cent** were worried about

underemployment and will need additional work over the holiday season. It is no wonder why many people on low incomes are really struggling to make ends meet. The situation for many this Christmas is dire.

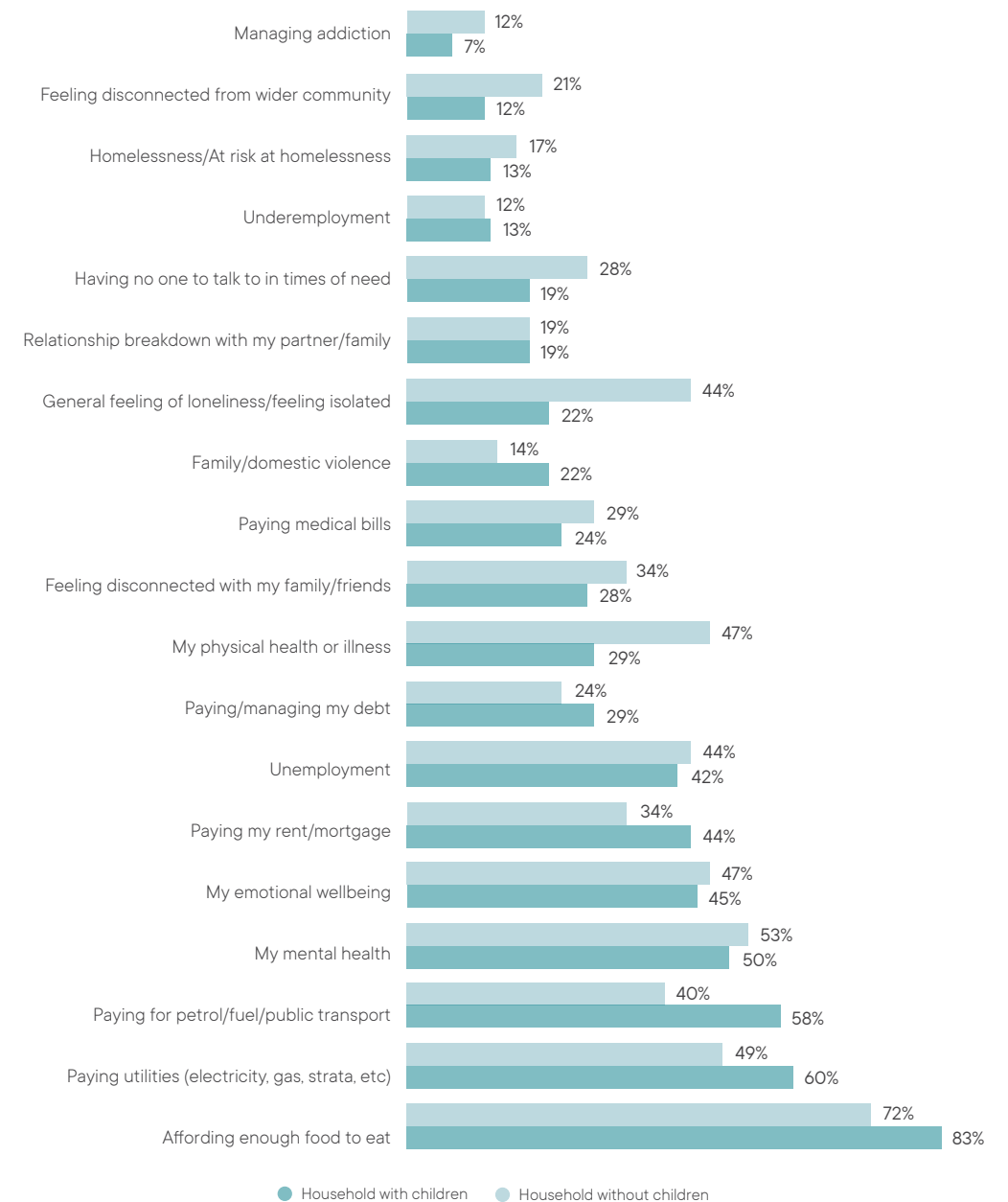
Similar to last year's findings, the number and extent of challenges experienced by Salvation Army respondents over Christmas time were considerably higher compared to the general Australian population. Most noticeable were challenges affording basic essentials such as food, household bills and the rent. Compared to the general public, respondents were more than **three and a half times** more likely to be concerned about affording enough food, **nearly twice** as concerned about paying their utilities and **one and a half times** more worried about affording their rent or mortgage. Respondents were **nearly six times** more worried about unemployment this Christmas, compared to the general public, which highlights the importance of finding and maintaining work.

"[The Salvos] helped me when I really needed it, and it made the difference between whether we eat or not." – Respondent

Worries over Christmas			
	The Salvation Army's emergency relief respondents	General Australian population ⁷	Difference
Affording enough food to eat	77%	21%	3.6x
Paying utilities (e.g. electricity, gas)	55%	30%	1.8x
Unemployment	41%	7%	5.8x
Paying the rent or mortgage	39%	25%	1.5x

⁷ Extrapolated figures based on PureProfile results.

Challenges faced this Christmas and household type



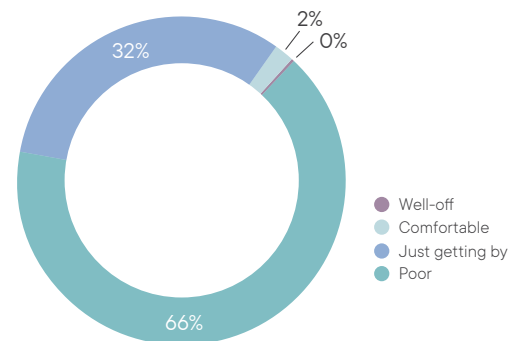


Shortage of money this Christmas

Experiences of financial hardship were common among respondents, with **two in three (66%)** expecting their financial situation to be poor this Christmas and **nearly one in three (32%)** were just getting by. Of these, single parent households were most financially disadvantaged. Almost all **(99%)** respondents reported they expected to have a shortage of money or financial difficulties this Christmas. To make ends meet this Christmas, respondents reported they will:

- **Seek help from community organisations (54%)**
- **Skip meals or go without food (51%)**
- **Sell or pawn something (32%)**
- **Ask for financial help from family or friends (22%)**
- **Take a loan from a payday lender or use a credit card (15%)**

Financial situation this Christmas
(All respondents, n = 1445)



Eighty-five per cent of respondents reported they will reach out to The Salvation Army for help this Christmas, highlighting the need for many people over the holiday season.

Worried about being homeless this Christmas

Not everyone can access safe and affordable housing, and, for some this year, they will have no place to stay this Christmas. **Fourteen per cent** of all respondents were worried about being homeless this Christmas, **six per cent higher** compared to the same time the year before. The highest was for couples with children, with **nearly one in five (18%)** concerned they may be homeless this Christmas. Housing remains precarious for some this Christmas season, where there is a fine line between housed and homelessness.

Respondents worried about being homeless this Christmas **increased 6%** compared to last year



Health and wellbeing

The strain of Christmas can be a struggle for many Australians. **Half (50%)** of respondents were worried about their mental health this Christmas season, nearly double compared to the general population (**27%**). The physical health of respondents was also a concern for more than **one in three (34%)** this Christmas. Many respondents shared difficulties they were having such as affording medication, struggling with a disability and managing deteriorating mental health coming up to Christmas. This created additional health stress for many respondents, making Christmas a less than joyful experience.

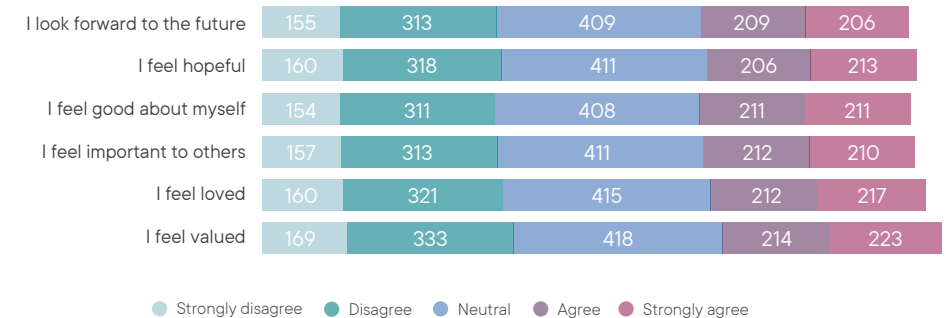
Challenges this Christmas			
	The Salvation Army's emergency relief respondents	General Australian population*	Difference
My mental health	50%	27%	1.8x
My emotional wellbeing	44%	23%	1.9x
My physical health or illness	34%	22%	1.5x

"[I] go without my essential medication to pay for my son's and I only eat one meal a day now to scrape by so will go without food for a few days in a row to cover his costs. My lack of medication will cause it to be worse and severe daily pain increased in turn affects my quality of life." – Respondent

* Extrapolated figures based on PureProfile results.

Many respondents held negative views of themselves and did not feel valued by others. **Forty-four per cent** of respondents reported that they did not feel important to others, feel valued (**37%**) or loved (**33%**), and **more than half (51%)** reported they did not feel good about themselves. Approximately **four in ten (43%)** did not feel hopeful and (**39%**) did not look forward to the future. This suggests a bleak outlook for many respondents this Christmas.

Perceptions of self
(All respondents, n = 1453)



● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Neutral ● Agree ● Strongly agree



Isolation and loneliness

Christmas time can intensify feelings of social isolation and loneliness, particularly when a person has no one to share those special occasions with or is disconnected from family or friends. **Nearly three in ten (29%)** respondents were worried about being lonely and isolated over Christmas. A further **one in four (26%)** were worried about spending Christmas alone, particularly those from single person households (**43%**). These rates were considerably higher compared to **nearly one in ten (9%)** of the Australian population.

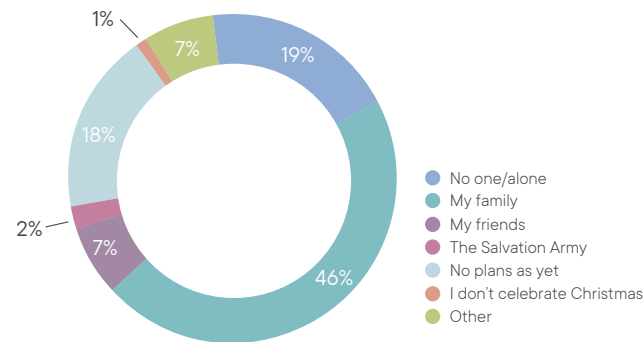
When asked about who respondents were spending Christmas with, approximately **one in five (19%)** will spend Christmas alone and a further **18 per cent** had no plans for Christmas. These figures were higher compared to last year, highlighting that more people will spend Christmas alone this year. The situation was worse for those aged 55 years and older, who were more likely to be spending Christmas alone compared to younger people. Males were more likely to be spending Christmas alone compared to women. Overall, respondents aged 55 years and older were more likely to experience a feeling of isolation and general loneliness and were more worried about spending Christmas alone compared to younger groups and those with children.

Three in ten (31%) were feeling disconnected from family and friends, and **one in five (22%)** were concerned with having no one to talk to in times of need. A further **one in five (19%)** reported additional

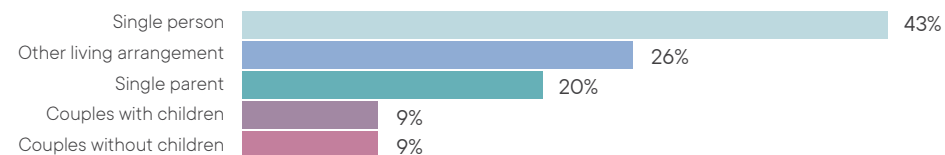
concerns regarding relationship breakdowns with family and **15 per cent** felt disconnected from their wider community. These rates were at least **two to three times** higher compared to the general Australian population. A bleak picture for many this Christmas.

"The Salvos helped me in times of struggle and knowing we are not alone ... They always seem to have the answer to my prayers and thoughts and worries and I always leave with a huge sense of relief ... I don't have such a heavy burden to carry." – Respondent

Who people plan to spend Christmas with
(All respondents, n = 1453)



Spending Christmas alone and household composition
(All respondents, n = 1409)



Challenges this Christmas

	The Salvation Army's emergency relief respondents	General Australian population*	Difference
Feeling disconnected from family and friends	31%	11%	2.8x
General feelings of isolation and loneliness	29%	12%	2.4x
No one to talk to in times of need	22%	7%	3.1x
Relationship breakdown with family	19%	8%	2.4x
Feeling disconnected from wider community	15%	7%	2.1x

Incidences of loneliness, disconnection and relationship breakdown were considerably higher for The Salvation Army respondents compared to the wider Australian population. This highlights people who access Emergency Relief centres have experienced higher incidences of isolation, with fewer resources available in difficult times, and higher rates of family breakdown compared to the general population.

The Salvation Army is there for all Australians, especially for people in their time of need.

"You guys saved my mum from a very dark place with stress, worry, anxiety and more. The financial assistance was overwhelming, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart." – Respondent

* Extrapolated figures based on PureProfile results.



Other life challenges this Christmas

Managing physical health or illness, paying medical bills and experiences of family violence were difficulties respondents reported they will struggle with this Christmas. Others reported natural disasters had impacted their households, losing their home and personal belongings. For some, their life circumstances placed them at further disadvantage and exacerbated experiences of hardship.

- **Managing physical health or illness (34%)**
- **Paying medical bills (25%)**
- **Family and domestic violence (19%)**

"We also lost everything we own in the flood and I'm having trouble getting back on top." – Respondent

"The Salvos made a huge difference ... helped me keep a roof over my head and essential bills paid. Thank you!!" – Respondent

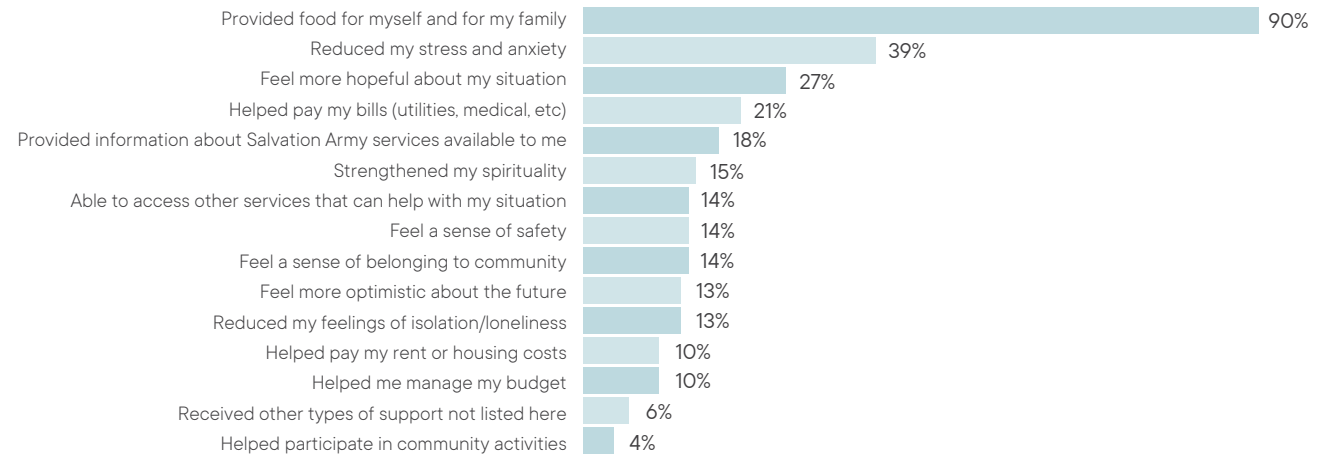
Seeking assistance from The Salvation Army

Christmas is one of the busiest times of year for The Salvation Army. Many people seeking support are managing a range of challenges and hardships and need a helping hand at times. **Nearly three in four (73%)** of respondents attended The Salvation Army due to financial difficulties and **nearly all (99%)** received some form of practical, social and emotional support. The main areas people received assistance through The Salvation Army included:

- **Provision of food (90%)**
- **Helping in reducing stress and anxiety (39%)**
- **Support to feel more hopeful (27%)**
- **Referrals to other Salvation Army services (21%)**
- **Provided information about Salvation Army services available to help (18%)**

Types of support provided by The Salvation Army

(All respondents, n = 1453)



"I wouldn't have been able to eat if it wasn't for the Salvos." – Respondent

Many respondents shared examples of how The Salvation Army has made a significant difference for them personally or for their household. The majority provided feedback about how support helped them put food on the table and feed their families. Some described how assistance from The Salvation Army reduced their stress and anxiety by providing financial assistance or paying an outstanding utilities bill. Several shared about feeling a sense of belonging and were more hopeful about their situation.

"I actually cannot start to describe the difference that The Salvation Army has made in our family at times of need. They take the time to listen without judgement and made me feel that I'm not alone and have helped in any way they could. I don't know what I would have done without them. I find it extremely difficult to ask for help and even more so since my Stroke, but The Salvation Army has been like talking to a friend and their help has felt like the world giving my family a warm hug during difficult and dark times. AMAZING people ... thank you for ALL you have done for my family and everyone else that has come to you in need!" – Respondent



Community member strengths

Some of the findings demonstrated great resilience and internal strength of a number of community members. There was still a sense of hope and Christmas spirit, despite many experiencing financial hardship and adverse challenges. Even though almost all respondents had worries over Christmas, **nearly four in ten (38%)** reported they were looking forward to Christmas. Rates were slightly higher for households with children.

Nearly three in ten (29%) reported some positive sentiments about their feelings towards Christmas, including a time for *family, happy and joyful*. **Forty-six per cent** of respondents will spend time with family and **one in fourteen (7%)** were spending time with friends over Christmas. These figures suggest that approximately **half** of respondents will have someone close to them to share the festive season with this year. For those who were spending time with family for Christmas, they were **four times** more likely to be looking forward to Christmas, compared to those spending Christmas alone.

When asked about themselves, **nearly four in ten (39%)** respondents felt loved, and approximately **three in ten** felt valued (**32%**) and important to others (**29%**). Furthermore, **one in five (30%)** felt hopeful and **one in three (34%)** looked forward to the future, higher rates than the same time the year before. This is encouraging evidence to suggest that despite adversity, people had a positive regard of themselves and by those around them and remained hopeful and optimistic about the future.

38%

were looking forward to Christmas

34%

looked forward to the future

32%

felt valued by others

30%

felt hopeful

29%

felt important to others



Conclusion

This research report highlights some of the challenges and difficulties people who access The Salvation Army's Doorways Emergency Relief centres will experience this Christmas season. It emphasises the significant impact the rising cost of living is having on many households, making it increasingly difficult for low-income earners to afford basic essentials such as food, rent and utility bills this Christmas. The added financial pressure at Christmas time can be too much for families, concerned they won't be able to afford a present for their children, or a special meal at Christmas.

Experiences of hardship were evident, with most describing their situation as poor or just getting by this Christmas. With limited income and resources, Christmas can be a tough time. This year, the situation for many households is dire. Some will be forced to sell or pawn items or take out a loan because of a shortage of money. The report highlights that many respondents grappled with other life challenges including worries about their housing situations, mental health and unemployment this Christmas.

This year, respondents reported food insecurity as a main issue, with more than **three in four (77%)** worried they won't be able to afford enough food to eat this Christmas, the situation worse for single parent households (**82%**). **Half** will skip meals or eat less because of a shortage of money and were worried they would not have a special meal for Christmas. It is concerning that even on a special occasion when most are celebrating, many families will go without.

The findings demonstrated **nearly half (48%)** of respondents were not looking forward to the Christmas season, and **two in three (66%)** expressed negative sentiments about upcoming holidays, many using terms such as *stressful, anxiety and expensive*, suggesting the majority struggled with the holiday season. Social isolation and general feelings of loneliness were also evident for approximately **three in ten (29%)** respondents, many disconnected from family, friends and their community. **Nearly one in five** had no plans or were spending Christmas alone this year.

Conversely, **nearly four in ten (38%)** were looking forward to Christmas, and **nearly three in ten (29%)** expressed positive sentiments about Christmas. Encouragingly, despite adversity, some respondents were more hopeful about the year ahead. Approximately **three in ten** reported a sense of positive self-perceptions and felt important and valued by others.

The Salvation Army will continue to support people experiencing hardship and disadvantage this Christmas. All Australians can help create a sense of community, share hope and contribute to building a brighter future by helping others less fortunate this festive season.

"The Salvos have helped me put food in my cupboards and fuel in my car and presents to my kids ... Just always there for me and my family which [is] a sense of relief when you are so stressed about making ends meet." – Respondent



Case scenario

It's been a tough year for Jenny¹⁰ and the kids. It's felt like one thing after another, and the bills just keep piling up. Jenny does her best as a single mum, looking after Mateo (7yo) and Ryan (9yo), but it is not easy on a limited income.

There's only so much money to go around, and Jenny is careful what she spends it on. Food has got so expensive. Jenny always makes sure the boys are fed and she frequently goes without meals or eats less food when the budget is tight. Jenny would like to buy meat more often for the boys, but just can't afford it. But they make do. There's not much in the fridge or the cupboards at the moment, and Jenny knows she'll go hungry this weekend.

The car has broken down again. The mechanic has said it's a "ticking time bomb", and it's only a matter of time before it stops running altogether. With everything wrong with the car, it'll cost more to fix than it's worth. Jenny said she was stuck, she can't afford to repair it, and at times can't afford to put petrol in it. The kids missed nearly forty days of school last semester because the car was off the road, or she had no money for petrol. It's affecting the kids' education and they struggle to keep friends because they are not at school. "It feels like a dark cloud is following me" and with Christmas coming, Jenny was feeling very stressed.

Jenny was worried she wouldn't be able to afford presents for Mateo and Ryan this Christmas and felt guilty because she didn't want to let them down. It was just overwhelming. She desperately wanted her

children to wake up on Christmas morning, excited to open a special present that Santa had left, just for them. Jenny had to make some hard decisions soon, fixing the car or presents and food on the table for Christmas. It was a no-win situation.

Jenny needed help. She never asked for help before, but she really needed it now. Jenny reached out to the Salvos. She'd heard good things about them from another mum at school. Jenny didn't really know what to say, but the Doorways Emergency Relief staff at the Salvos were so welcoming and kind. Elsa and Jenny talked over a cuppa and she shared how hard it has been raising two boys on her own. It's been tough, living week to week. When big bills arrive, like the electricity bill or the car breaks down it just "pushes me over the edge".

Elsa provided Jenny a gift card for her groceries, a fuel voucher and a box of fresh fruit, vegetables and pantry staples. This would see Jenny through the week. Elsa also invited Jenny to their Christmas event next week. Each year the Salvos put on a special Christmas lunch for the community. Elsa said there would be a food hamper waiting and presents for children for Christmas. Jenny was also referred to a Doorways case worker who would provide more in-depth support. Jenny couldn't believe it, she was so relieved, and hopeful for the first time in a long time.

¹⁰ Case scenario is reflective of the experiences many people face who access TSA for assistance. Names and some details have been changed to respect the privacy of individuals. The image is a stock photo—the model is not associated with this case scenario.



Links

For more information:

Events this Christmas

[Events | The Salvation Army Australia](#)

Needing help at Christmas

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/christmas/need-help-this-christmas/>

Volunteering over Christmas

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/christmas/get-involved-this-christmas/volunteer-this-christmas/individual-community/>

Donating this Christmas

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/donate/make-a-donation/donate-online/?appeal=nadiahub>

References

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022, July 1). Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/australia-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-population-summary>.

ⁱⁱ Reserve Bank of Australia. (2022). Minutes of the Monetary Policy Meeting of the Reserve Bank Board, (October 2022). <https://www.rba.gov.au/monetary-policy/rba-board-minutes/2022/2022-10-04.html#:~:text=The%20Bank's%20central%20forecast%20was,of%20the%20September%20quarter%20CPI>.

