



# North Queensland monsoon and floods/Townsville floods

18 month progress report

— FEBRUARY 2019 —



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## Introduction

In February 2019, a monsoon event resulted in severe and unprecedented flooding in the city of Townsville and on the north-eastern coast of Queensland. Around 3,000 homes were damaged in Townsville, with almost 1,000 uninhabitable. Significant impact was also reported in North-West Queensland with 'catastrophic' loss of stock in the Richmond and Mount Isa areas. As a result of this event, disaster declarations were placed in many areas across northern Queensland.



**6184**  
MEALS PROVIDED



**10**  
DAYS ACTIVE



**4**  
SITES SUPPORTED



**7**  
TEAMS ACTIVATED



**350+**  
VOLUNTEER SHIFTS



**1400**  
WORKING HOURS

## The Salvation Army emergency response

On 1 February 2019, The Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES) received a request for assistance from Townsville City Council to support community members sheltering in evacuation centres during this significant monsoon event. The service provided by SAES teams was primarily emergency catering support. SAES teams served meals to residents from more than 20 suburbs where homes had been inundated with floodwaters.

As heavy rains increased and flood waters continued to rise, SAES were active in the immediate response from 1-10 February 2019. SAES were activated in four areas - Heatley, Cranbrook, Alligator Creek and North Shore - serving over 6,000 meals during this period.

The overview of the SAES response includes:

- Meals provided – 6,184
- Days active – 10
- Sites supported – 4
- SAES team activated – 7
- Volunteer shifts completed – over 350
- Working hours – over 1,400

The Salvation Army's two corps buildings in the city both suffered minor damage from the monsoon event. While there was a surge in need for their services, many local Salvation Army staff and volunteers also had to deal with flooding in their own homes and manage the impact of this on their families. Despite this, they worked together in Townsville and the surrounding areas to provide meals, logistic and volunteer support. The Salvation Army Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS) team were also activated to provide additional care to staff and volunteers from The Salvation Army.

*“What The Salvation Army does in emergency situations is not just about the SAES teams, but a whole range of Salvation Army services and expressions that support each other to help the local community. These include local corps who play the key role, divisional support, Doorways, media, fundraising and communications – all Salvation Army expressions together serving the local community. Our focus is on giving help and hope where it's needed most and meeting people at their point of need.”*

Major Topher Holland, General Manager Strategic Emergency and Disaster Management  
(5 February 2019)



## Emergency response moves to disaster recovery

On 5 February 2019, the Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS) formally requested disaster recovery support from The Salvation Army as per our Standing Offer Arrangement with the Queensland Government to provide disaster relief and recovery support services to the community. The first request was for 13 Salvation Army personnel to deploy and support Community Recovery teams in Townsville for four-to-five days, with a possibility of extension.

The Salvation Army continued to extend support, deploying staff from around Australia to uphold our partnership agreement with the Queensland Government. Disaster Recovery teams, spread across five hubs, assisted hundreds of local residents with immediate financial support through supermarket, EFTPOS and universal gift cards. They also provided a listening ear, emotional support and encouragement to people, many of whom had lost everything in the floods.

The Salvation Army deployed a total of 77 personnel into recovery hubs and outreach services within Townsville between 6 February and 26 March 2019.

To initiate and support the recovery response, The Salvation Army released funds from our disaster reserve which allowed our Disaster Recovery teams to provide immediate assistance to impacted people on the ground. The Salvation Army also launched a nation-wide emergency appeal so Australians could easily donate to support impacted people and communities in recovery.

The role of Salvos within recovery hubs in the immediate disaster recovery phase was to collaborate

with agencies on the ground (Community Recovery being the lead agency). Salvos provided immediate assistance in the form of universal gift cards (EFTPOS cards) and store vouchers to impacted people who were particularly vulnerable, disadvantaged and unable to receive other forms of assistance or emergency payments. Presenting needs and issues included homelessness/accommodation issues, food and clothing being destroyed and loss of power to homes.

*“It’s not a lot for people who have lost so much, but people are just so grateful to receive something in their hands here and now,” said Major Sue Hopper, Acting Area Officer, North Queensland. “Many are overwhelmed and can’t believe what we’re giving them. A few of the men have cried too, with one woman telling me that her husband never cries.”*

Many Salvation Army personnel who deployed into Townsville to help with the recovery response were impacted by the conversations they had with those affected.

Lieutenant Chris Ford, Gladstone Corps Officer, shared how his team gave dignity to residents who were struggling with so much. *“We’re advocating for those who’ve gone through trauma, and for those who have to deal with this on top of other life situations that are ongoing,”* he said.

On 25 March 2019, recovery hubs in Townsville transitioned into information centres and the presence of The Salvation Army was no longer required by Community Recovery in the hubs.



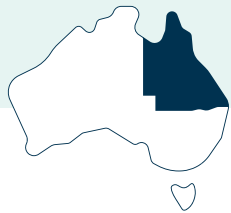
**77**  
VOLUNTEERS



**48**  
DAYS ACTIVE



**\$1,682,372**  
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



**\$356,470**  
QLD GOVERNMENT SUPPORT



**600+**  
REFERRALS



**3688**  
HOUSEHOLDS ASSISTED

## The Salvation Army's response in numbers

- 77 volunteers, officers and employees were deployed across 48 days, providing recovery assistance and support to people and communities impacted by the North Queensland floods, with some being deployed on multiple occasions
- The Australian public generously donated \$1,158,053 to The Salvation Army to support those affected by this disaster. The Salvation Army released \$524,319 from disaster reserves to assist with relief and response
- The Salvation Army provided \$1,682,372 in financial assistance to flood affected people and families:
  - Universal (EFTPOS) gift cards - \$1,094,772
  - Woolworths cards - \$578,200
  - EFT payment - \$2,000
  - Donated gift cards - \$7,400
- The Queensland Government provided \$356,470 to help cover costs of deploying volunteers
- A total of 3,688 households were assisted
- In addition, over 600 referrals were made to additional services such as counselling Doorways, Moneycare, chaplains, pastoral support, corps and other agencies for further support

*"We know from experience that when a disaster of this magnitude hits, it takes many months, even years, to recover. The Salvation Army is committed to standing alongside communities in Townsville for the long haul. We will work with other agencies to provide financial assistance, counselling and case management – journeying with individuals and families to provide personalised support for as long as it takes."*

Queensland Divisional Commander, Lt-Colonel David Godkin. (6 February 2019)

## Red Shield Defence Services – A different type of mission and support

Based at Lavarack Barracks, the Townsville Red Shield Defence Services' Sallyman team had a very different story to tell of the extreme flood weather event that affected the Townsville community in early 2019.

While the mainstream Salvation Army Emergency Services responded by supporting, accommodating and feeding people in the flood affected areas, the mission of the Sallyman team – within the context of their regular mission – was to support the Australian Defence Force (ADF) members, their families and the general defence community while they supported others.

At the commencement of the ADF's response to the flood event in 2019, the Sallyman team was also deployed as part of the Department of Defence 3rd Brigade's emergency response plan.

The Sallyman team, already providing support to the ADF community, were able to promptly respond with the ADF within 30 minutes. This included:

- Supporting teams of soldiers/units in sandbagging
- Supporting teams that were tasked with evacuation warnings
- Providing support alongside chaplaincy teams, padres and unit commanders at evacuation centres for displaced ADF families
- Locating any other areas of need around Townsville to support the ADF and civilians

The team was kept busy for 15 consecutive days – both day and night – with two trucks supporting during the day and one-to-two trucks supporting at night.

The challenges were great and the impact of the flooding was felt by all, particularly Sallyman team member Major Garry Johnson whose own home was flooded. Despite this, he insisted on continuing to support the team and serve those in the ADF community.

Some much-needed reinforcement was also provided by an additional team member, Vaughan Agnew, who joined the Sallyman team from the Adelaide Red Shield Defence Services. The team was also grateful for the support provided by Chandell Derham (from Defence Families Australia) who provided baked goods to the evacuation centres, which was a huge morale booster for everyone.

Through coordination with their National Team Leader, Chief Commissioner Major Brett Gallagher, the Sallyman team were provided much needed physical, emotional, mental and spiritual support to the ADF community.

*“We thank God that despite the tragedy and impact on the community, we were ready and able to respond practically and minister to those in the community we were serving by showing the love of God through our rolled up sleeves (saturated and wet to our socks) and being a calm non-anxious presence in the challenges we all faced in our journey together.”*

Red Shield Defence Services, Townsville officer in charge, Major Nigel Roden





## Recovery support worker

In May 2019, The Salvation Army received a government grant to recruit a part-time recovery support worker. This position was for two days per week for an initial period of six months, with the opportunity for review and possibility to extend the contract as needs required. The purpose of the role was to deliver ongoing support to impacted North Queensland flood community members in the Townsville region.

Tamara Forde was the successful applicant and commenced employment on 19 August 2019. In her role, Tamara attended human and social recovery meetings and provided case work and financial assistance to impacted people.

After the initial six month period, a contract extension was offered by DCCSDS to continue the role for a further three months to 30 June 2020.

Upon further consultation with DCCSDS it was requested that The Salvation Army consider a further 12-month contract extension for the role until 30 June 2021. This was so case work could continue in conjunction with DCCSDS and the community rebuild project "Making a House a Home Again". Tamara has continued in the role under this new contract.

## Community Rebuild Project

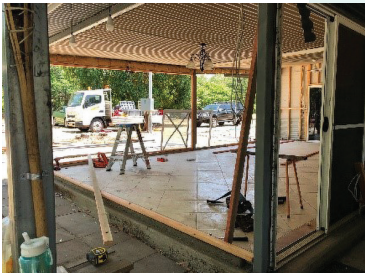
The Salvation Army partnered with other agencies in Townsville to launch the Community Rebuild Project to help affected residents who were unable to repair their damaged properties to a safe, habitable and pre-disaster condition.

Partner agencies in the Community Rebuild Project include:

- The Salvation Army
- Townsville Combined Churches
- St Vincent de Paul
- Rotary Clubs of Townsville
- Community Information Centre (CIC)

In October 2019, the Community Rebuild Project sourced a government grant and The Salvation Army partnered with The Oasis Townsville – a referral and support hub for military veterans – to run 'Operation Townsville Assist' (which later became "Making a House a Home Again").

Floss Foster, Director of The Oasis Townsville and Project Manager for "Operation Townsville Assist", said five houses were chosen for repair during the pilot project, which finished just before Christmas 2019.



## Community Rebuild Project

“When we kicked off Operation Townsville Assist late last year, we really wanted to get at least two or three families back in their homes before Christmas,” she said. “We repaired five houses in five weeks – a total of 1,339 hours in volunteer labour – saving property owners over \$55,000 in labour costs.”

Teams of military veterans installed kitchens, gyprock, vanities and wardrobes, painted and did any minor work needed to allow families and individuals of the five affected houses to return home.

The Salvation Army’s Associate State Emergency Disaster Management Coordinator for Queensland, Captain Leanne Stevens, said she’s been blown away by the support of The Oasis and the veteran defence force volunteers involved. *“The amount of time they have provided for this project is astronomical,”* she said. *“The savings of dollars because people didn’t have to pay labour is incredible.”*

The pilot project of “Operation Townsville Assist” was a great success. Floss Foster says, *“There are still lots of people in the community that haven’t connected with any services and there are a few people starting to approach us now that have had no flood relief or assistance to date.”*



## Case study

Bailey\* first contacted Salvation Army recovery support worker, Tamara, in October 2019.

Water had risen to over a metre throughout Bailey's unit and didn't recede for several days – making it completely uninhabitable. The rate of the rising flood water did not leave much time to salvage many items and she lost most of her belongings.

Bailey sought support from The Salvation Army because she was not eligible for other disaster recovery grants as her property was insured. However, the insurance claim was in dispute between the unit's body corporate and the insurance company.

It was deemed that certain damage was pre-existing and needed to be fixed before the insurance company would repair the flood damage. As a result, Bailey had to borrow money from her family, friends and the bank to cover the additional repair works.

Though the matter was escalated to the Ombudsman, the payout was substantially less than the insured amount and did not cover the cost of all repairs needed.

Tamara referred Bailey's case to the Townsville Rebuild Project for assistance with repair costs and

an additional referral to Rotary Flood Appeal for assistance with furniture, window coverings and whitegoods. Bailey also received assistance with the internal painting of the unit and replacement of the kitchen.

The repairs are still ongoing 19 months after the event with COVID-19 now impacting local trades and providers.

Bailey has moved eight times since February 2020. She is renting a room as furnished accommodation was too expensive and the insurance company had ceased supporting rental costs. Bailey hopes that all repairs will be completed by October 2020 so she can finally move back home.

Throughout this time Tamara has continued to support Bailey with referrals for psychosocial support, advocacy with a legal team, advice on the insurance claim and assistance with the replacement of linen and kitchen appliances.

*"I would like to thank the project for your support, I had no idea how to go forward with getting work done. I am so appreciative,"* Bailey said.

*\*Name has been changed to protect privacy*

## Future plans

The initial grant funding for the "Making a House a Home Again" project came to an end on 30 September 2020, with all the grant funding committed and expended for the project.

The Salvation Army has received additional generous support from corporate and philanthropic donations, which has allowed us to extend the project until 30 June 2021. The project will continue to operate under the guidance of the Community Rebuild Project and the recovery support worker.

