



# National Economic & Social Impact Survey 2015

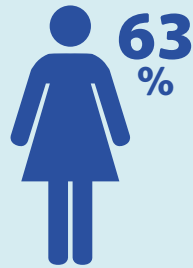
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"I can't continue  
to live like this"



# The respondent profile was compiled from the results of the 2015 Economic Social Impact Survey.

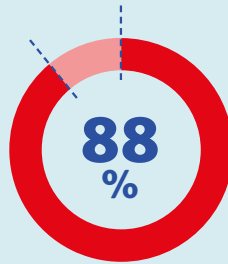
It represents a snapshot of the characteristics and life experiences of individuals who access Salvation Army Emergency Relief services.



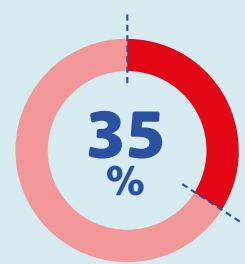
Female



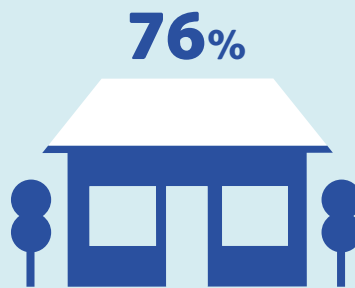
Average of 2.3 children per household



are reliant on income support payment



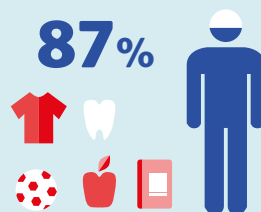
are recipients of Newstart allowance



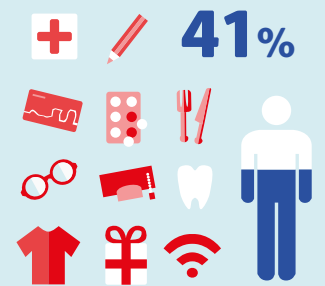
resided in rental accommodation



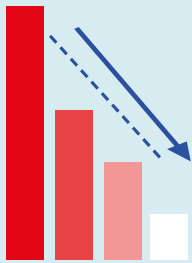
\$180/week paid in rent



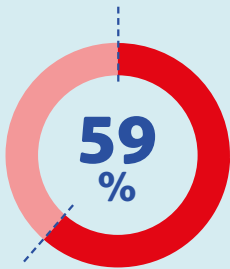
of adults experienced severe deprivation (unable to afford 5+ essential items)



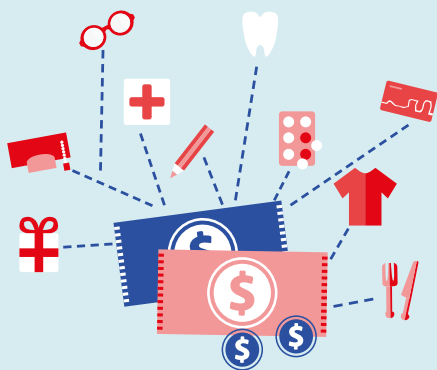
of adults experienced extreme deprivation (unable to afford 11+ essential items)



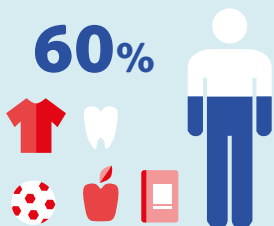
significantly lower scores on the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) compared to national average (by nearly 30 points)



reported that a physical/mental health issue prevented them from seeking employment



\$125/week left over to live on (\$17.86/day)



of children experienced severe deprivation (unable to afford 5+ essential items)

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# Executive Summary

This Economic and Social Impact Survey (ESIS) 2015 is the fourth consecutive report by The Salvation Army exploring the levels of deprivation and disadvantage experienced by those who access Emergency Relief (ER) services. Nationally, The Salvation Army operates an extensive network of emergency relief centres, corps, social programs and employment services to deliver comprehensive and inclusive responses to individuals and communities who experience disadvantage. The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of Emergency Relief (ER) services in Australia, and provides a safety net for many who are struggling to make ends meet.

Each year The Salvation Army contributes approximately \$20 million of internally generated funds to its Emergency Relief services. Annually, The Salvation Army provides ER to nearly 160,000 distinct clients across Australia and delivers over 320,000 episodes of ER support.<sup>1,2</sup>

ESIS 2015 provides a detailed analysis of 2,406 responses to the survey distributed through 262 Salvation Army ER and community support services across Australia during February 2015.

The results from the study reveal a bleak picture of entrenched and persistent poverty and disadvantage for a significant proportion of people who access Salvation Army ER and support services. Individuals and their families struggle to meet everyday expenses, essential items and financial commitments.

This ESIS report provides a voice to those most disadvantaged and disenfranchised within our communities, and advocates for a more just and equitable approach to addressing the needs and disadvantage experienced by many. This year, our research highlighted the dire circumstances and experiences of a number of specific groups. These included:

- Individuals and families experiencing housing stress and homelessness
- Individuals and families experiencing financial hardship
- Individuals and families in receipt of income support (in particular Newstart allowance, Disability Support Pension and Parenting payments)
- Single person households
- Adults and children affected by poverty and multiple deprivations.

ESIS 2015 illustrates that these struggling groups continue to experience ongoing levels of disadvantage and poverty. These marginalised and disenfranchised individuals and families are of deep concern to The Salvation Army.

*"The Committee for Economic Development of Australia has found that between 4 and 6 per cent of the population — or between 1 and 1.5 million — is classed as being in poverty, with little to no hope of getting out of that situation."<sup>3</sup>*

1. The Salvation Army 2015. Caring for people across Australia: The Salvation Army Community Support Services. [https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/Global/Who%20we%20are/publications/2014%20Community%20Support%20Services%20Report/A-Snapshot-of-The-Salvation-Army-Community-Support-Services\\_LR.pdf](https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/Global/Who%20we%20are/publications/2014%20Community%20Support%20Services%20Report/A-Snapshot-of-The-Salvation-Army-Community-Support-Services_LR.pdf)

2. The Salvation Army Service and Mission Information System (SAMIS) is a customised, in-depth and unique client management, data collection, information and reporting system used by most Salvation Army social programs across Australia.

3. The Committee for Economic Development of Australia (2015). Addressing Entrenched Disadvantage in Australia (2015). Accessed 21 April 2015, viewed at <http://adminpanel.ceda.com.au/FOLDERS/Service/Files/Documents/26005~CEDAAddressingentrencheddisadvantageinAustraliaApril2015.pdf>

*“Relative poverty in Australia (14.4% of the population) is higher than the OECD average (11.3%).”<sup>4</sup>*

ESIS 2015 respondents continue to encounter severe housing stress connected with inadequate economic resources. Results highlighted that individuals spent 59%<sup>5</sup> of their total income per week on accommodation expenses. Therefore, individuals spent \$180 per week on accommodation<sup>6</sup> and had less than \$125 a week left (\$17.86 per day) to live on.<sup>7</sup>

*“10% of Australians report that they cannot afford to buy enough food. This share has increased somewhat over the past years.”<sup>8</sup>*

Poverty is more than a lack of income; it is experienced across a number of dimensions and includes multiple deprivations. As outlined in previous ESIS reports, the children of survey participants continue to experience high levels of deprivation, including the lack of essential items and services due to their parent’s limited financial resources. The survey captures data for 2,864 children; of these, 60% of children were affected by severe deprivations (went without five or more essential items). This indicated that almost two-thirds of children missed out on basic necessities and were directly affected by their family’s lack of options and limited economic resources. Individuals reported that they had few options to improve their situation.

*“The multidimensional nature of poverty forces us to look at the multiple deprivations people experience together, as well as income poverty”*

— (Sabina Alkire, Director, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative).<sup>9</sup>

The ESIS 2015 report captures and highlights the experiences of many Australians impacted by poverty and disadvantage. It depicts a disturbing and bleak picture of the complex challenges and exclusions faced by many people in this marginalised group. Responses to these issues are complex and require strong commitment, leadership and fairness from all levels of government and the community to end entrenched poverty and persistent disadvantage. Consequently, The Salvation Army calls for a shift in social policy direction led by the Federal Government to address the causes of persistent and chronic disadvantage across our communities.

*“The number of Australians living in entrenched disadvantage is a disgrace and without a radical policy shake-up Australia will never reduce this number or the cost to taxpayers.”*

— (CEDA Chief Executive, Professor Stephen Martin).

This report advocates for a fair and just response for all Australians to ensure they can create the resources and develop capabilities to meaningfully engage and contribute in their communities. The Salvation Army is concerned that the current political and economic climate may have a detrimental impact on already disadvantaged individuals and their families. The question for the Australian community is, “How can we expect people to **continue to live like this?**”

4. OECD (2014). Society at a Glance 2014 Highlights: Australia OECD Social Indicators. Accessed 8 December 2014, viewed at <http://www.oecd.org/australia/OECD-SocietyAtaGlance2014-Highlights-Australia.pdf>

5. Equals accommodation expenses divided by rough estimate income.


6. Median

7. Median per week

8. OECD (2014). Society at a Glance 2014 Highlights: Australia OECD Social Indicators. Accessed 8 December 2014, viewed at <http://www.oecd.org/australia/OECD-SocietyAtaGlance2014-Highlights-Australia.pdf>


9. OECD Post 2015 Reflections: Keeping the multiple dimensions of poverty at the heart of development. Element 1, paper 1. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/POST-2015%20multidimensional%20poverty.pdf>

# Summary of Key Findings

- 


**88%** of respondents received income support payments

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- 


**76%** resided in rental accommodation, while **13%** of respondents were homeless<sup>10</sup>

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- 


Respondents paid **59%** of their income for accommodation expenses<sup>11</sup>

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- 


Respondents paid **\$180 per week**<sup>12</sup> in accommodation expenses

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- 


**78%** of respondents in private rental housing experienced extreme housing stress<sup>13</sup>

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Respondents had **\$125 per week**<sup>14</sup> to live on after accommodation expenses were paid (\$17.86 per day)

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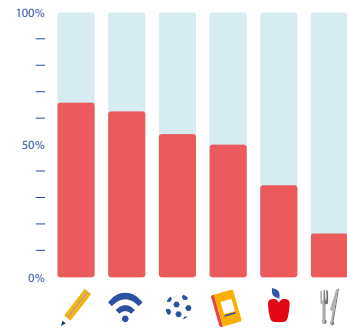
Due to financial hardship: **75%** of respondents indicated they had cut down on basic necessities, **59%** had either delayed or were unable to pay utility bills and **57%** had gone without meals

*“Three-quarters of my pension is paid on rent, I can’t continue to live like this and I feel extremely depressed with no quality of life. I am on the waiting list for housing commission, but they say it is a 10 year wait.”*

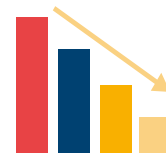
**87%** of adults and **60%** of children reported severe deprivations and went without five or more essential items in life<sup>15</sup>



Of the **2,864 children** represented, parents were not able to afford out-of-school activities (**65%**), an internet connection (**62%**) or fresh fruit and vegetables on a daily basis (**34%**)



All respondents experienced **significantly lower** scores on the Personal Wellbeing Index<sup>16</sup> compared to the National average (nearly 30 points)<sup>17</sup>



Newstart allowance recipients and people who were homeless **identified as the most disadvantaged groups**. They were more deprived than other subgroups, with higher level of extreme housing stress, and resulting in lower satisfaction in life (lower PWI score). People who were homeless also had poor social support compared to the other subgroups.



10. Unstable accommodation including homeless/temporary accommodation/couch surfing/caravan.  
 11. Equals accommodation expenses divided by rough estimate income.  
 12. Median per week  
 13. Extreme housing stress is defined as respondents using >50% of income.  
 14. Median per week  
 15. Essential items for adults and children are defined according to indicators of disadvantage developed by Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths (2007) and The UNICEF Child Deprivation Index. Severe deprivation is defined as missing out on 5 or more essential items.  
 16. PWI categories include: Standard of living, health, achievement, personal relationships, safety, community, future security, spirituality/religion, overall life satisfaction.  
 17. Respondent Personal Wellbeing Index mean = 45.93 compared to the National Wellbeing Index mean = 75.25



# Background

## About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international movement, recognised as part of the Christian Church, and one of the world's largest Christian social welfare organisations. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of Australia's largest providers of social services and programs for the most marginalised and socially excluded individuals in our community.

The Salvation Army has a national annual operating budget in excess of \$700 million and provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

### Key services include:

- 
**Material aid and emergency relief**
- 
**Financial counselling and assistance**
- 
**Personal counselling and support**
- 
**Drug and alcohol support and treatment services**
- 
**Family and domestic violence support services**
- 
**Accommodation and homelessness services**
- 
**Out of home care**
- 
**Disability services**
- 
**Emergency disaster responses**
- 
**Education, training and employment support services**
- 
**Migrant and refugee services**
- 
**Aged care services**

The Salvation Army has an established reputation for providing these services across the spectrum of disadvantage, working with individuals and families impacted by poverty, deprived of opportunities and activities considered part of everyday Australian life. The Salvation Army works with individuals who, due to life experiences and events, have inadequate education and training, poor health, and a sense of powerlessness that compromises their capabilities and opportunities to fully participate in the community.

The Salvation Army is a large provider of Emergency Relief (ER) services in Australia, providing a safety net for many who are struggling to make ends meet. The Salvation Army contributes in excess of \$20 million of internally generated funds to support its 277 community support services and emergency relief centres across Australia.

Historically, ER services have provided crisis support and assistance for disadvantaged families and individuals through the provision of material aid (e.g. food, assistance paying bills), information, referral and advocacy. More recently, this practice has shifted whereby individuals present with increasingly complex needs and experience long-term financial hardship (e.g. low rates of income support, unemployment or retrenchment, housing stress and disability). In response, The Salvation Army ER services are delivered through Doorways, a philosophical framework that encompasses an integrated, holistic and capacity-building approach to service delivery. Doorways actively seek to address the underlying factors that lead to poverty, persistent disadvantage and marginalisation.

# Methodology

In 2015, The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory (AST)<sup>18</sup> and Australia Eastern Territory (AET)<sup>19</sup> conducted the fourth national ESIS survey. It highlights the impact of cost-of-living pressures on individuals and families who access emergency relief and community support through The Salvation Army's services.

The survey was designed to collect information about people seeking support and assistance and the levels of deprivation and exclusion, both economically and socially, experienced by these individuals. The questionnaire was refined from previous ESIS studies and this year included indicators of accommodation costs, housing stress, financial resources, disadvantage, social connectedness, and deprivation experienced by children.

## Survey questionnaire

The survey questionnaire comprised of four parts: respondent basic information and demographics, income and employment, financial situation, and social supports and wellbeing.

**Part One (Basic information)** was a set of demographic questions asking people to describe their personal and family circumstances, living situations and housing status.

**Part Two (Income and employment)** was a set of questions asking respondents to identify their current income situation, financial expenses and resources, and actions to source work.

**Part Three (Financial situation)** was a set of questions asking individuals to rate their perceived current and future financial situation. Individuals were asked to respond to list of 20 items representing those services, items, activities or opportunities that are

considered essential in Australia today according to the indicators of disadvantage developed by Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths (2007).<sup>20,21</sup> Participants were asked to indicate for each item whether or not they had the item. Another list of 18 items was specifically designed to capture information about essential items for children and were adapted from Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths (2007) and UNICEF Child Deprivation Index.<sup>22</sup>

**Part Four (Social supports and wellbeing)** was a set of statements requesting respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement against a seven and 10-point scale. The statements described how much support they received from other people and was based on the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey (Wave 11 Self Completion Questionnaire B17).<sup>23</sup>

## Survey process

The survey questionnaires were distributed nationally through 262 Salvation Army emergency relief and community support services during the period 2nd February to 20th February 2015. The questionnaires were paper based and participation was voluntary. The questionnaire was provided to individuals to complete. Centre staff and volunteers were encouraged to assist people if they required it.

18. The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory (AST) includes Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

19. The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory (AET) includes New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

20. Saunders, P., Naidoo, Y. & Griffiths, M. (2007) Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia. Social Policy Research Centre, Sydney, NSW.

21. Saunders, P. (May, 2007). Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage Project. Bulletin No.2: Deprivation in Australia. PRC Newsletter No. 96. Social Policy Research Centre, Sydney, NSW.

22. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. (2012). Measuring Child Deprivation: New league tables of child poverty in the world's rich countries. UNICEF, Italy.  
[http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.unicef-irc.org%2Fpublications%2Fpdf%2Frc10\\_eng.pdf&ei=d2\\_RVNxqNs7U8gXn-4KYAQ&usq=AFQjCNF159LsV PxiK4bjEGZlhb0ML7-huw&bvm=bv.85076809,bs.1,d.dGY](http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.unicef-irc.org%2Fpublications%2Fpdf%2Frc10_eng.pdf&ei=d2_RVNxqNs7U8gXn-4KYAQ&usq=AFQjCNF159LsV PxiK4bjEGZlhb0ML7-huw&bvm=bv.85076809,bs.1,d.dGY)

23. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute).

## Data Entry

Responses from completed questionnaires were manually entered into a secure database for qualitative and quantitative analysis. Emerging themes and key messages were coded and thematically identified according to participant responses. The survey data and respondent comments were analysed to examine the levels of deprivation and disadvantage experienced by individuals. Non-responses (NR) were excluded from the calculations (however figures will be reflected in each chart). Most questions had a low non-response rate (less than 10%); non-response rates higher than 10% should be read and interpreted with caution.



# Summary



The 2015 Economic Social Impact Survey was conducted nationally through 262 Salvation Army community support centres; 2,406 responses were received. Respondent demographics were representative of individuals who normally accessed Salvation Army ER services. Results highlighted similar and consistent themes of persistent disadvantage and poverty across our client group. Our research demonstrated respondents experienced: lack of suitable accommodation options, housing stress, barriers to employment, prolonged hardships, financial pressures, multiple levels of deprivation, poor personal wellbeing, and poor social support.

In this economically challenging climate, housing accessibility and affordability remains a critical issue for many low-income earners and income support recipients. Consequently, the survey this year examined the housing status, cost of accommodation and financial resources left over to live on. ESIS 2015 demonstrated some of the complexities and extreme challenges respondents faced to sustain tenure. Respondents paid 59% of their income for accommodation expenses<sup>24</sup>, which is twice the common benchmark of 30% used to measure housing stress in Australia.<sup>25</sup> In monetary terms, respondents indicated that they paid \$180 per week<sup>26</sup> in accommodation expenses and had \$125 per week<sup>27</sup> to live on (\$17.86 per day). Across all households, recipients of Newstart allowance had about \$27 to \$50 less per week compared to other sub-groups to live on after accommodation expenses were paid.

Due to financial hardship, 75% of respondents had cut down on basic necessities. Fifty-nine per cent had either delayed or were unable to pay utility bills and 57% had gone without meals. Fifty-six per cent of respondents indicated they felt worse off regarding their financial situation and almost a third felt negative about their prospects in the coming

12 months. Without effective intervention, life circumstances may remain unchanged for this cohort and they reported little optimism about escaping poverty and disadvantage in the foreseeable future.

Not surprisingly, 87% of adults reported severe deprivations as they went without more than five essential items in life, such as dental and medical treatment (68%) and a substantial meal at least once a day (25%). The majority of respondents did not have \$500 in savings in case of emergency (91%), were not able to afford a week's holiday away each year (87%), and were not able to afford home contents (87%) or car insurance (73%). For many disadvantaged Australians, The Salvation Army provides support and a safety net in their time of need.

A total of 2,864 children were represented in the survey, as children were present in 53% of households. It is of concern that children continue to experience the effects of poverty and impacts from their parent's limited financial resources. Results indicated that 60% of children presented with severe deprivations, and went without five or more essential items in life. In terms of their school needs, 54% of respondents were not able to afford for their children to participate in out-of-school activities and 50% were not able to afford up to date school books. Most were not able to afford out-of-school activities (65%). Narratives from respondents demonstrated a sense of guilt and stress given they could not provide these items for their children.

24. Equals accommodation expenses divided by rough estimate income.  
 25. NB: Measures of housing affordability is on the lowest 40% of households by comparable incomes.  
 26. Median per week  
 27. Median per week



It is of concern that these children will remain trapped in cycles of entrenched poverty, deprived of basic opportunities of education, social inclusion and community participation, if the main causes of poverty and disadvantage are not addressed.

On average, respondent's experienced significantly lower scores on Personal Wellbeing Index<sup>28</sup> (45.93) compared to the National average (75.25), a difference of 29.32. Homeless respondents recorded 28.17, the lowest PWI score. Single-headed households and recipients of Newstart allowance were also among those with significantly lower PWI subgroups. Overall, 42% of respondents reported poor social supports. In particular, asylum seeker/refugee, Disability Support Pension recipients, and people who were homeless or staying in temporary accommodation were the subgroups who were found to have a significantly higher proportion of poor social supports.

Almost three-quarters of respondents had been seeking employment for up to two years. This group experienced more extreme housing stress (75%), a higher level of deprivation (49% could not afford 11 or more essential items), and consequently lower satisfaction in life (PWI index of 43.03). Respondents reported many barriers to seeking and sustaining long term employment. Fifty-nine per cent reported that physical/mental health issues were the main barriers preventing them looking for work. Parenting and/or caring responsibilities (50%) were barriers for respondents who intended to look for work in the future and 32% of those who were looking for work found it difficult to re-enter the workforce.

The Salvation Army acknowledges that education and employment are a means to exit poverty and have a better life. However, some respondents will require additional support to overcome the challenges they face.

28. PWI categories include: Standard of living, health, achievement, personal relationships, safety, community, future security, spirituality/religion, overall life satisfaction.

## Demographics

A total of **n = 2,406** respondents completed the survey.

The majority of respondents were women (**63%**).

F1

Women represented 63% of respondents, the same proportion as last year's sample. This gender difference is also represented in ACOSS' 2014 poverty report.<sup>29</sup> The gender split may be attributed to women being the primary carers for children. With the cost of childcare, reduced employment and lack of flexible employment opportunities making women more reliant on others for income. Women may also demonstrate a greater willingness to access support services.

Eighty-two per cent of respondents were aged between 25 and 59 years of age.

F2

This would generally be considered an optimal age range for workforce participation;<sup>30</sup> instead this cohort represented the highest group accessing Salvation Army ER services. Similar results were recorded in previous surveys.

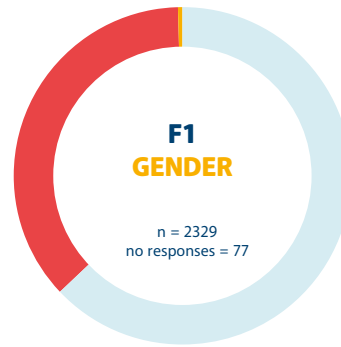
The majority of respondents resided in Victoria (29%) and New South Wales (27%) and lived in the city or main towns (61%).

Ninety-two per cent were Australia citizens.

Sixteen per cent of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

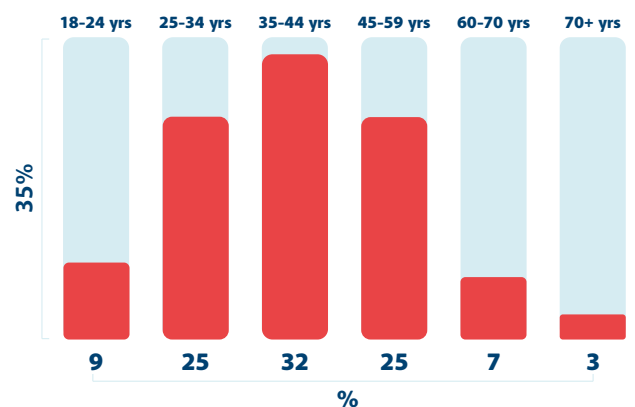
These figures are significantly higher than the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' population in Australia (3%).<sup>31</sup>

29. ACOSS (2014). Poverty in Australia 2014 (4th ed.). Australian Council of Social Services. Accessed 24 April 2015, viewed at [http://www.acoss.org.au/images/uploads/ACOSS\\_Poverty\\_in\\_Australia\\_2014.pdf](http://www.acoss.org.au/images/uploads/ACOSS_Poverty_in_Australia_2014.pdf)  
 30. ABS 2013. Labour force participation. Accessed 4 May 2015, viewed at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4125.0main+features1110Jan%202013>  
 31. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, cat. No. 3238.0.55.001. Accessed 19 August 2014, viewed at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>

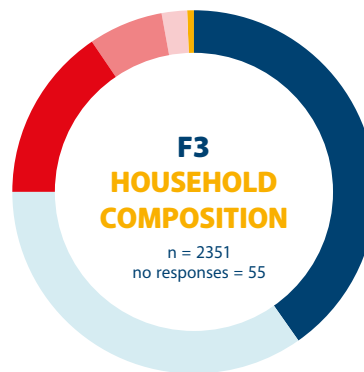


63% Female  
 37% Male  
 0% Transgender

## F2 AGE RANGE



n = 2144, no responses = 262



40% Single, with children  
 35% Single, no children  
 15% Couple, with children  
 7% Couple, no children  
 2% Group (unrelated adults)  
 1% Related adults

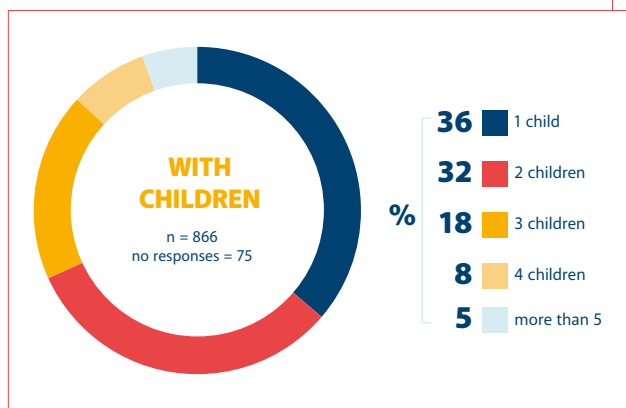
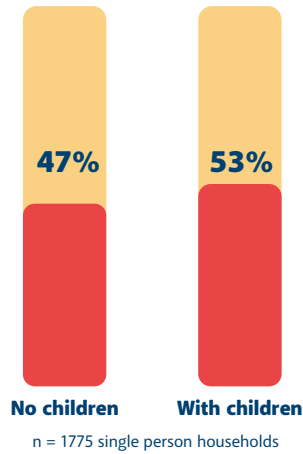
## F4 CHILDREN



There are **1,232 households** with children  
**2,864 children** are represented in these households  
 There is an average estimate of **2.3 children** per household



### F5 SINGLE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS



### Families and households

There were a total of 2,864 children represented in the sample across 1,232 households.

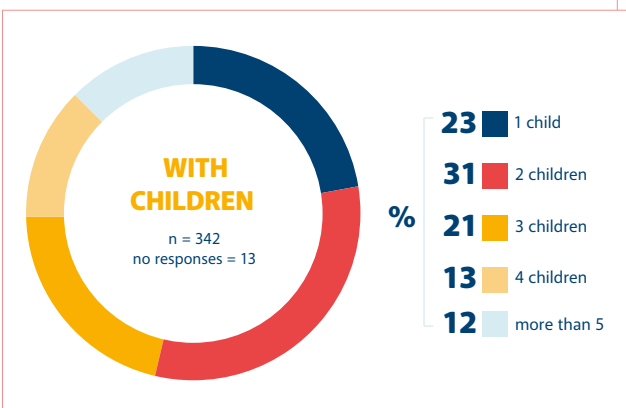
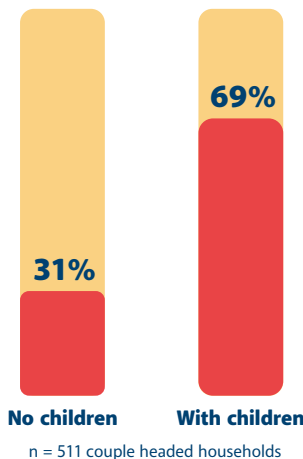
Seventy-five per cent were single person households and of these, 53% had children.

F5 Single person households experienced lower satisfaction in life (PWI index) and were more deprived compared to couple-headed households. Limited income, restrictions and barriers to employment, parental responsibilities, housing affordability and basic living expenses are likely factors to compound the effects of poverty, personal wellbeing and experiences of financial hardships for this group.

Twenty-two per cent of respondents were couple headed households and, of these, 69% were households with children and 31% with no children.

F6 Couple headed households were one of the subgroups who experienced extreme levels of housing stress. This may be attributed to lower rates of income support allowance for individuals, while still paying similar levels of accommodation and living expenses as compared to family households.

### F6 COUPLE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS





## Income & Employment

Eighty-eight per cent of respondents were recipients of various income support payments:

- 35% Newstart allowance
- 29% Disability Support Pension
- 25% Parenting payments.

For the minority of respondents income sources included:

- 5% were employed
- 4% were retired
- 3% had no income.

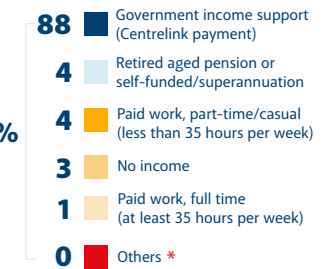
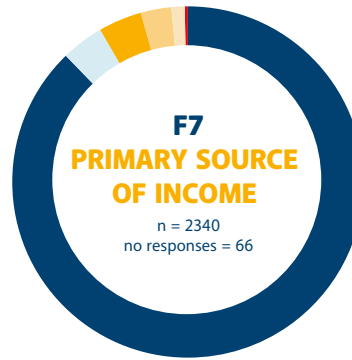
F8

A large proportion of respondents who access ER services were in receipt of income support. This suggests that for many households, payments are insufficient to adequately live on, especially as living expenses and accommodation costs continue to increase. For many respondents, accessing community support services is a safety net and way to manage on limited means.

F8

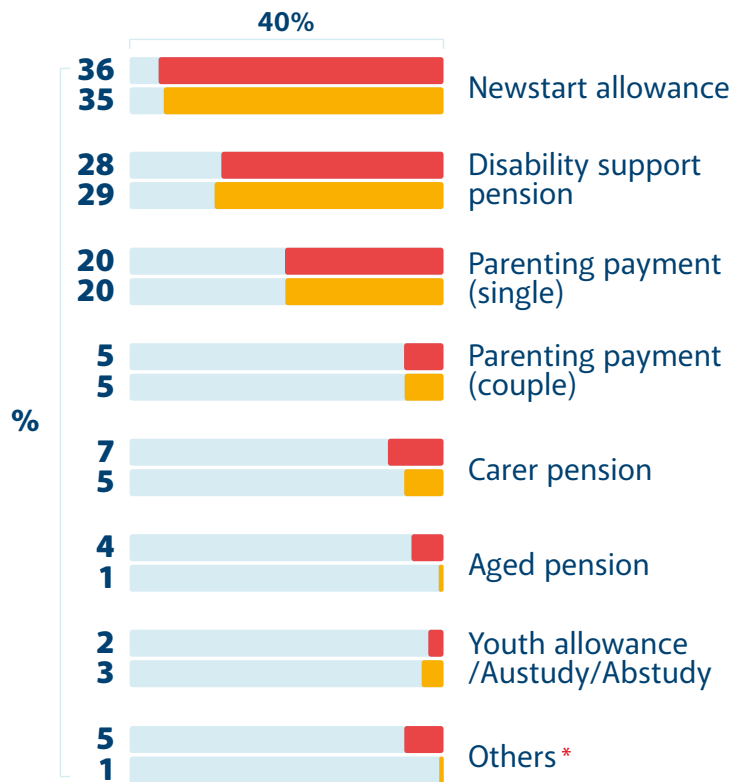
The proportion of individuals in receipt of income support is very similar to the results in previous ESIS reports and the wider Salvation Army client demographic data.

*"I have a neck injury, but want to work. Never have I ever been so destitute in my life. Funny what life has in store for us. Ever since I had a workplace accident (not being my fault) and injured my neck, my life has gone downhill a considerable amount... from having everything (family, friends) to having nothing, what an eye opener."*



\* Disability insurance, worker's compensation, one-off wage, partner, overseas invalid pension

## F8 INCOME SUPPORT



2014 (n= 2253, no responses= 232)  
2015 (n= 2031, no responses= 25)

\* Includes non-specified, Family Tax Benefit, Sickness allowance, Veterans Affairs, Widows Allowance

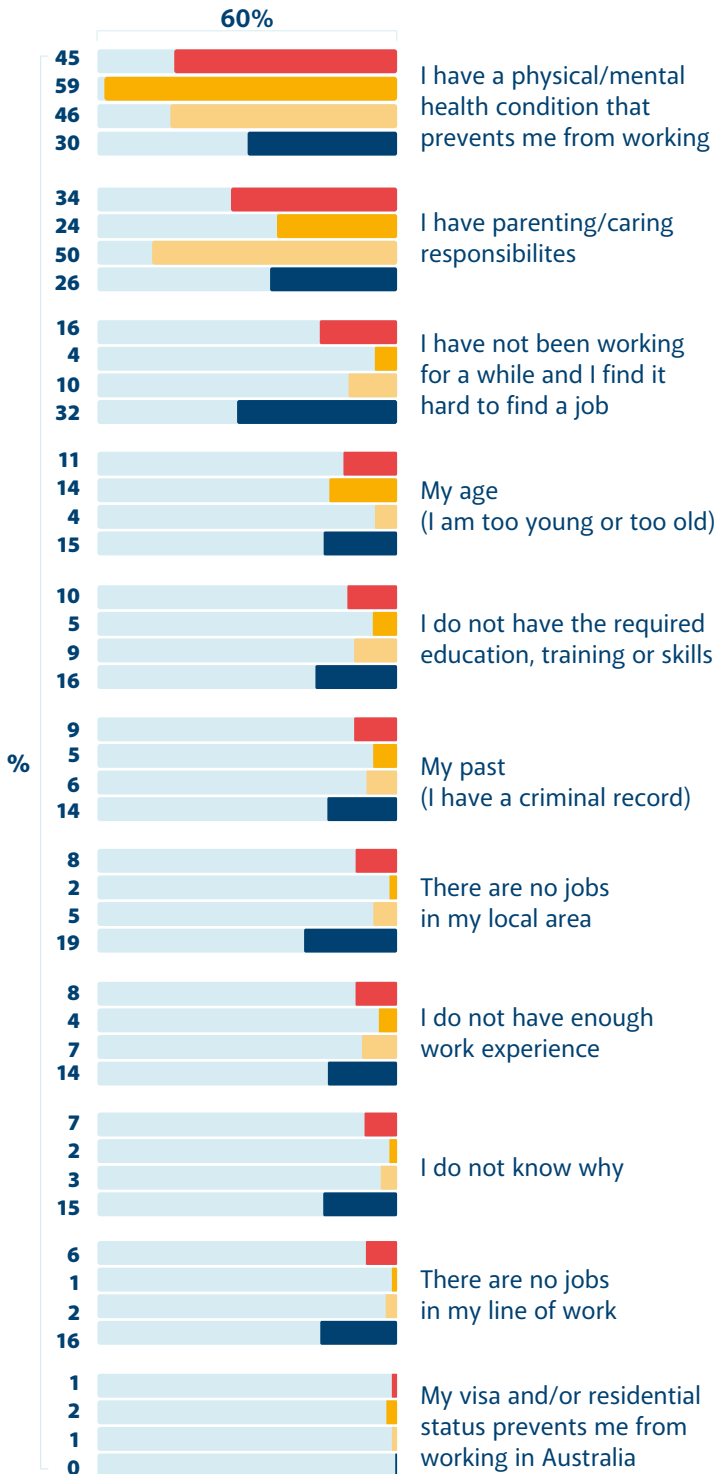
*"It is difficult to find more hours to work. As a single mother of one I am struggling. I have so many issues that can't be sorted out financially. Even though I am working it seems I am not getting anywhere. Paying all the unseen bills has made my health really bad. In the past two years my daughter and I have moved houses three times. I feel very insecure."*





*"I experience discrimination from employers and the public because of my disability."*

### F9 BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



■ All who responded (n= 2039, nr= 367)  
■ Not looking for work (n= 654, nr= 75)  
■ Not at the moment, but maybe in the future (n= 710, nr= 20)  
■ Yes looking for work (n= 675, nr= 126)

\* nr = no responses

### Barriers to Employment

Respondents identified many challenges and barriers to seeking and sustaining employment. Of those who responded (n =2,039), one-third were actively looking for work, one-third were not currently looking for work although may do so in the future, and one-third were not looking for work.

**For individuals looking for work, 51% of respondents had been unemployed for up to 12 months and 32% had not been working for a period of time and found it hard to find a job.**

**Fifty-nine per cent of respondents who were not looking for work reported physical/mental health issues as the main cause of not seeking employment.**

F9

Of statistical significance, mental and/or physical health conditions were the major barrier preventing respondents from entering the workforce. As observed in previous ESIS reports, there was a genuine willingness to seek employment, however respondents were hindered by their current health situation or caring duty, or lack of job opportunity that suits their current health conditions or caring duty.

**Fifty per cent of respondents who may be looking for work in the future identified parenting and caring responsibilities as the main barrier preventing them from working.**

F9

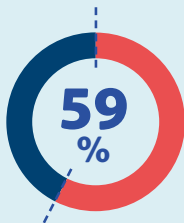
For many respondents, parenting responsibilities were a significant barrier, either preventing individuals entering, remaining in or seeking employment. The cost and availability of childcare, coupled with the availability of part-time work during school hours, may contribute to some of these challenges, particularly for single parents gaining employment.

## Accommodation & Housing

The majority of respondents (76%) resided in rental accommodation:

- 41% in private rental
- 35% in public/government/community housing.<sup>32</sup>

While 13% of respondents were homeless, the figures have remained relatively static. This may imply that homelessness remains a critical issue affecting many impoverished individuals across our service.

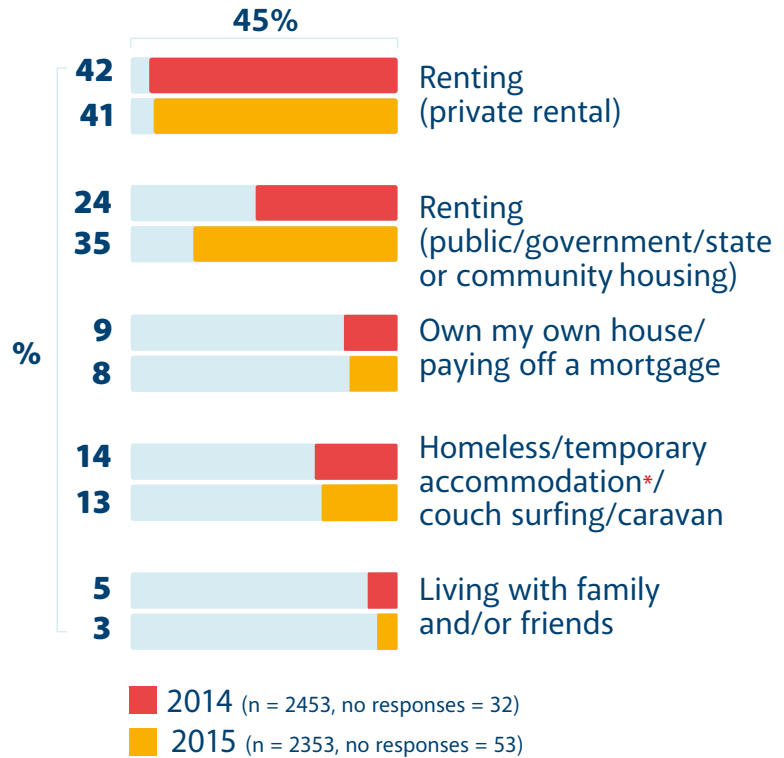


Respondents reported they paid 59% of their income to accommodation expenses.<sup>33</sup>

For the average Australian, housing costs have been calculated to represent 20% of average gross income (in 2011-12).<sup>34</sup> This cohort of low-income earners and income support recipients pay 59% of their income to accommodation expenses, which is three times higher than the average Australian, and twice the common benchmark of 30% used to measure housing stress in Australia.<sup>35</sup>



### F10 HOUSING STATUS



\* hotel/motel, crisis accommodation, shelter, boarding house

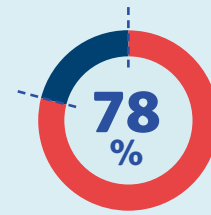
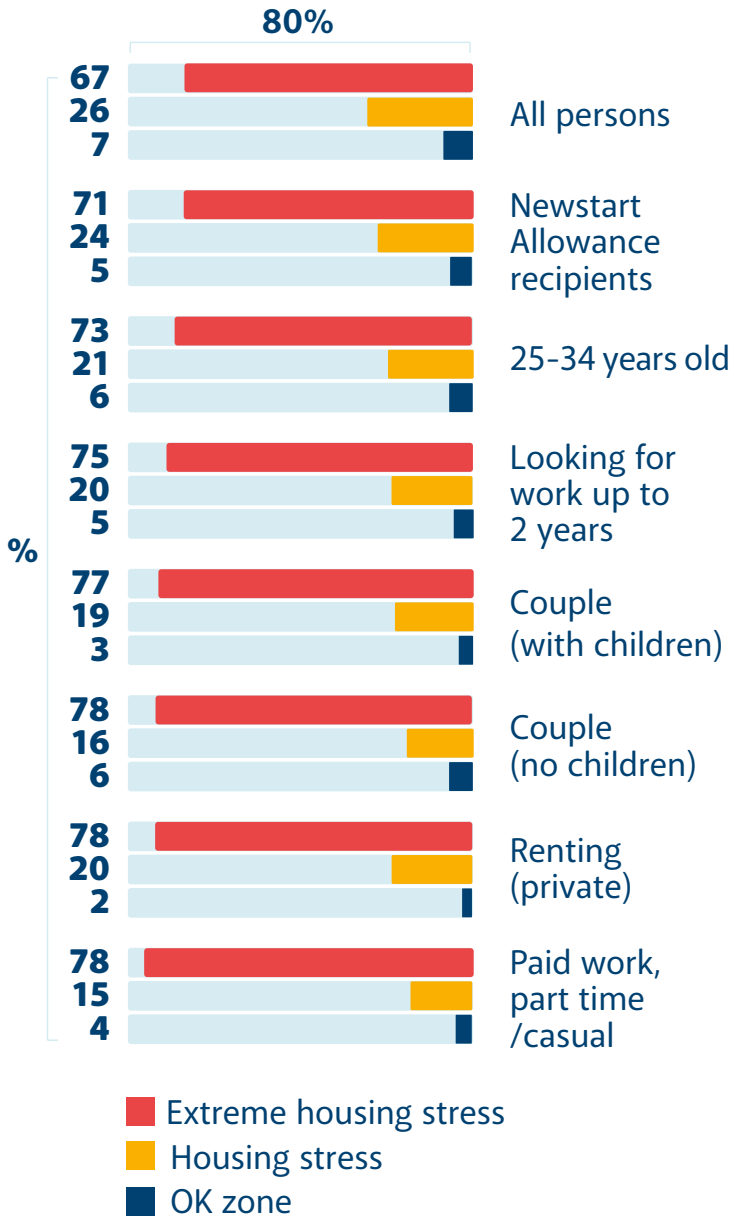
*"I have just turned 18 and am 16 weeks pregnant. My partner of three years left me and I have been kicked out by my mum and am couch surfing."*



32. We observed a significant increase in the percentage of those renting the public/government/state or community housing in 2015 compared to the 2014 survey. However results were likely due to changes in the way we record the information and may not reflect the significant increase in the number of public/government rentals.



### F11 SUBGROUPS WHO EXPERIENCED EXTREME HOUSING STRESS



Seventy-eight per cent of respondents in private rental experienced extreme housing stress.

Subgroups that were also at high risk of extreme housing stress included: the part-time/casual workers (81%), couples without children (78%) and with children (77%), 25 to 34-year-olds (73%) and Newstart recipients (71%). Some of these subgroups were also present in other measures of deprivation and disadvantage. Given that respondents paid 59% of income towards accommodation expenses, this has caused respondents to experience financial hardships, with many doing without essential items, including cutting down on basic necessities and regular meals.

F11

This suggested the increasing costs of accommodation posed financial strain on individuals, due to a greater proportion of income spent on the cost of accommodation. As a result this subgroup experienced high levels of financial stress and needed to access community services for emergency relief and material aid.

33. Equals accommodation expenses divided by rough estimate income.

34. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) 4130.0 - Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2011-12.

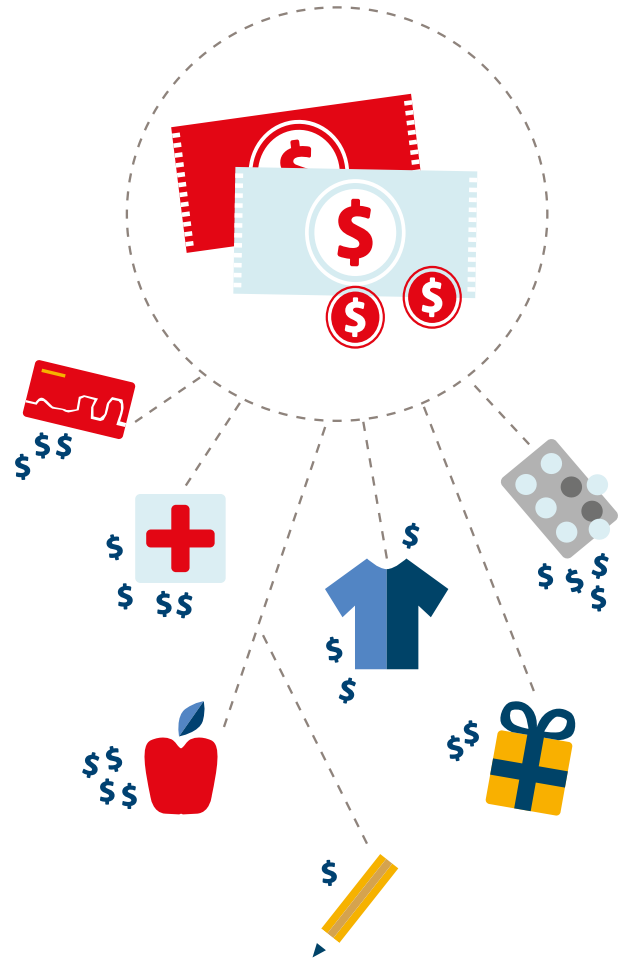
35. NB: Measures of housing affordability is on the lowest 40% of households by comparable incomes.



**Respondents paid \$180 per week<sup>36</sup> in accommodation expenses.**

Housing costs for the public/government/state or community housing averaged \$119 per week, compared to more than double (\$305 per week) for households in private rental.<sup>37</sup> This obviously varies depending on housing type, state, metropolitan and rural areas.

As private rental costs rise and public housing stocks diminish, homelessness and housing affordability remain the most significant challenge impacting clients, The Salvation Army's work and the sector as a whole. More affordable housing is critical to ensure more sustainable accommodation options to relieve housing stress, financial strain of accommodation costs and causes of homelessness.

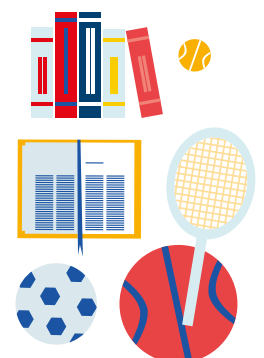


**Respondents indicated that they had \$125 per week<sup>38</sup> to live on after accommodation expenses were paid (\$17.86 per day).**

Given already limited financial resources, individuals and families have less than adequate money to live on each week, leading to further disadvantage, poverty and higher levels of deprivation.

NB: Total income includes all income support entitlements, including Rental Assistance.

*"I live week by week paying rent and bills with no money left over for much else... I have no money to do any fun activities with my daughter and feel bad to always have to say no."*



36. Median per week  
 37. ABS 2012. Yearbook Australia 2012. Housing costs: Housing Occupancy and Costs, Australia (4130.0). Accessed 4 May 2015, viewed at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1301.0~2012~Main%20Features~Housing%20Costs~130>  
 38. Median per week

### T1 - LIVING ON GOVERNMENT INCOME SUPPORT

Household composition	On Newstart allowance		On other income support	
	Accommodation expenses (\$)	Money left to live on* (\$)	Accommodation expenses* (\$)	Money left to live on* (\$)
Singles with no children	150	100	150	150
Singles with children	160	100	200	150
Couples no children	175	67	200	101
Couples with children	212	98	250	125

\*Median figures per week as stated by respondents, rounded up to the nearest whole number.

T1 Across all households, Newstart allowance recipients had the least money to live on after accommodation expenses were paid (approximately \$27-\$50 less per week). Consequently, Newstart recipients had to live on as little as \$9.57 per day and still had to pay for utilities, food, transport, health, medical, pharmaceuticals, education, clothing, and basic entertainment. These figures demonstrate the inadequacy of Newstart allowances for individuals and families to afford basic living costs in Australia. Furthermore, this demonstrates that without sufficient financial resources to adequately live on, disadvantaged individuals and their families are likely to remain trapped in long-term in poverty.

*"...We are left with \$50 for the fortnight. We find it really hard but we seem to manage with the help of The Salvation Army. Without them we would be on the street... I take it day by day."*

**Overall, 67% of respondents experienced extreme housing stress,<sup>39</sup> paying more than 50% of their income for accommodation.**



39. Extreme housing stress is defined as respondents using >50% of income; Housing Stress: usage of 30-50% of income.



## Financial situation

**Fifty-six percent of respondents reported they felt worse about their current financial situation compared to this time last year and 29% reported they felt negative about their prospective financial situation in the coming 12 months.**

For many respondents, their financial situation is less likely to change and they may remain stuck in their situation without significant intervention.

*"I felt as though I had control over my life, household and finances until recent changes in my circumstances have meant that I have felt as though I lost everything including my family and have literally had to start rebuilding my life from the ground up."*



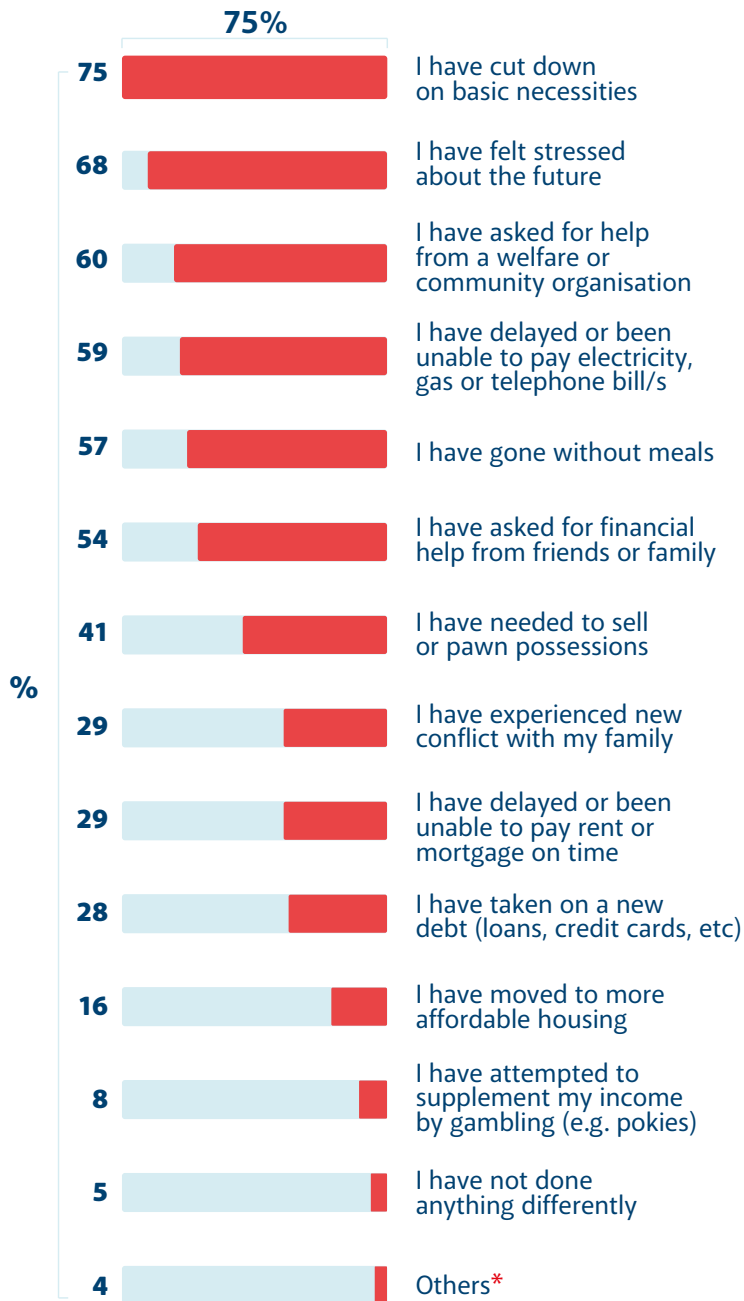
*"My social anxiety is worsened by my financial situation. My level of self-worth is very low. The Salvation Army has been and continues to be very, very important to me through the help in housing (Flagstaff and Open Door housed me for most of 2014), food and support. Otherwise I would be homeless, more depressed and anxious, and likely have to resort to crime just to survive."*



*"Having my husband walk out and leave us with no money or support crushed our family. Then lots of other things on top have made life hard...but thank God for the Salvos."*



### F12 FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS EXPERIENCED OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS



n= 2240, no responses = 166

\* Better control of expenses, become homeless, involved in criminal activity/went to jail, getting extra income, improving chance of employment, improving physical/mental health, in-debt, taken out super, financial counselling/refinancing, prostitution

### Financial hardship

The majority of respondents experienced some form of financial hardship and disadvantage. Due to financial hardship:

- 75% of respondents indicated they had cut down on basic necessities
- 68% are stressed about their future
- 59% had either delayed or been unable to pay utility bills
- 57% had gone without meals
- 41% had sold or pawned their possessions.

F12

Over the last 12 months, respondents with limited resources have had to make concessions due to their financial situations. Sixty per cent of respondent's accessed community support services when in need and 54% have asked for financial help from friends. Many respondents described the necessity to access ER services due to financial hardships. Some respondents described other measures to combat financial stress, such as: 28% took out new debts and 8% tried gambling in the attempt to supplement their income.

"I don't feel that helpful, useful or hopeful about who I have become. Not sure I'll be here next year."





### Essentials of Life

The Essentials of Life scale provided an indication of the levels of deprivation experienced by the respondents' household. The list consisted of 26 items considered essential to everyday life for Australians.

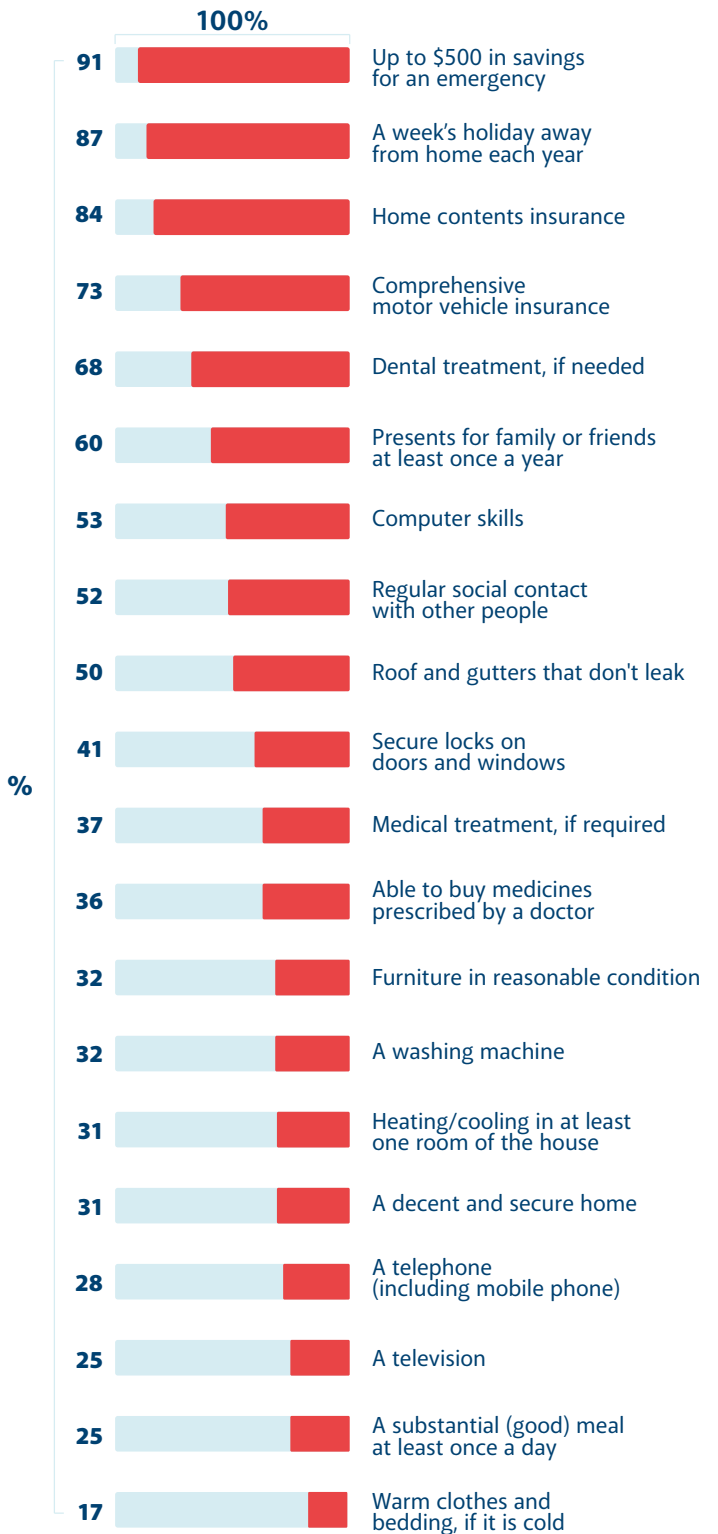
#### Overall, respondents went without:

- \$500 savings in case of an emergency (91%)
- Dental treatment (68%), medical treatment (37%) and buying medicine prescribed by a doctor (36%)
- Buying a gift for a friend or family member at least once a year (60%)
- At least one substantial meal a day (25%).

Respondents were significantly impacted by their lack of financial resources. Respondents cut down on essential items in life, including access to medical and health services, household appliances and social and recreational activities. In particular, 52% went without social contact with others, 32% had to do without a washing machine and 31% went without heating/cooling in at least one room due to financial hardship. Limited financial resources led to severe deprivation experienced by respondents.

*"I am consistently struggling week to week on financial a basis, even with vouchers...I go without meals most nights to ensure my kids have enough."*

### F13 THE ESSENTIALS OF LIFE - WHAT I DO WITHOUT



n= 2406, no responses = 0

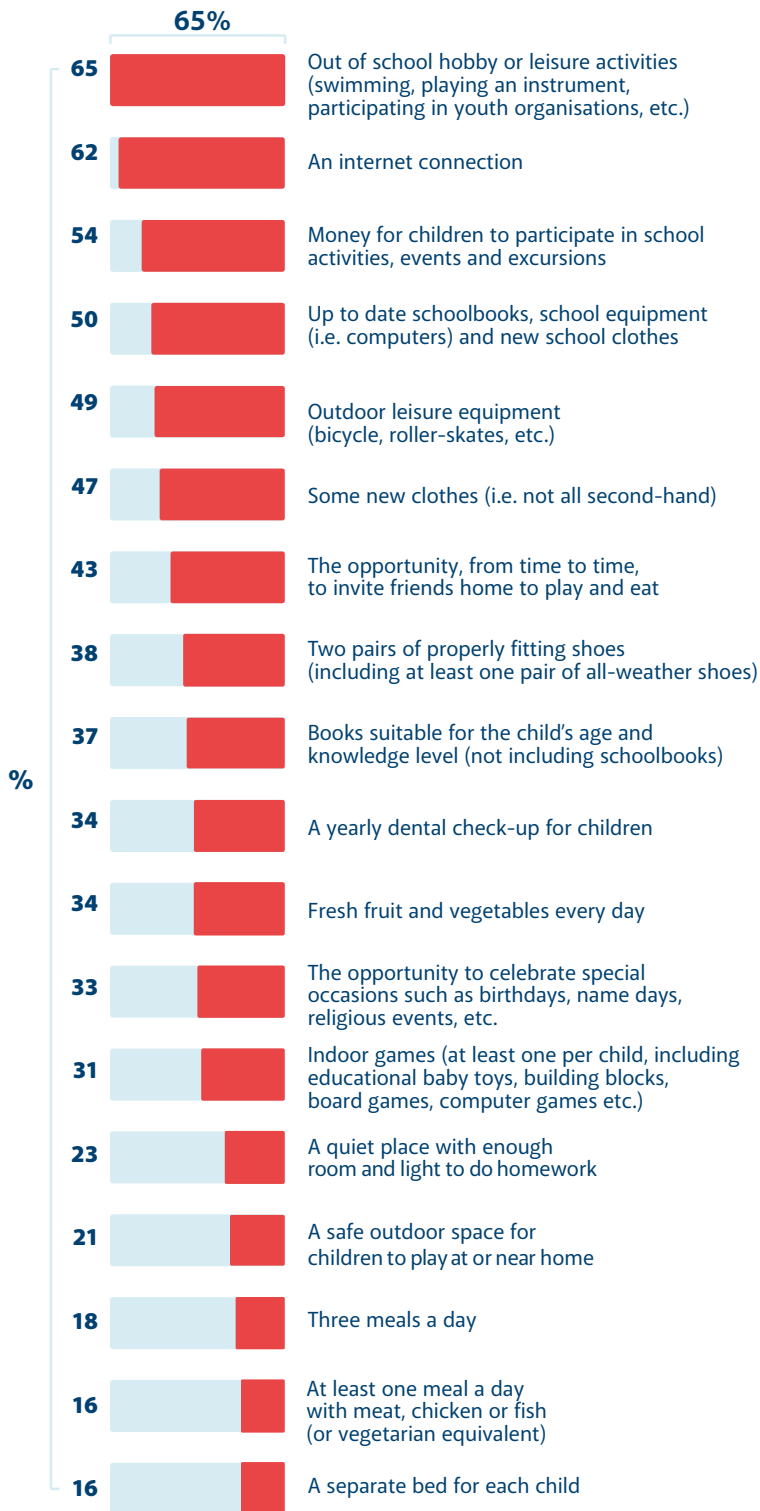
\* No responses depict those respondents who answered to none of the items listed

*"I am in a lot of debt and am currently unable to register my car or pay my bills."*



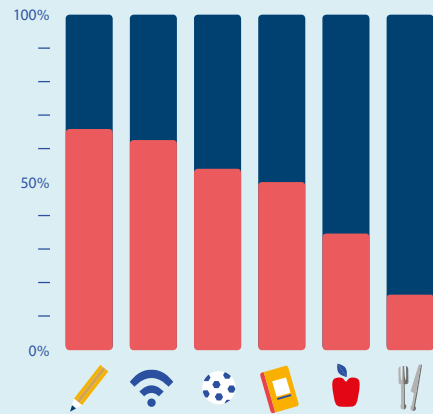


### F14 THE ESSENTIALS OF LIFE - WHAT CHILDREN DO WITHOUT



n= 1217, no responses = 15

\* No responses depict those respondents who answered to none of the items listed



#### The children of respondents went without:

- Out-of-school activities (65%) and an internet connection (62%)
- Money to participate in school activities (54%) and up-to-date school books (50%)
- Fresh fruit and vegetables daily (34%) and three meals a day (18%)

Results indicated that a significant proportion of children of those receiving ER assistance experienced severe deprivation and went without five or more essential everyday items. Singles with children were the most deprived cohort in the sample. Due to lack of finances, children were excluded from educational, social and recreational activities. This highlights the financial challenges and pressure of raising children with limited financial means for many disadvantaged Australians. The impact of financial hardship on children's education, academic performance, and social connections is alarming.

F14



### Levels of deprivation

Overall, 87% of households reported they experienced severe levels of deprivation and went without five essential items of life.<sup>40</sup> Approximately 46% of households indicated at least 5-10 deprivation items (severe deprivation)<sup>41</sup> and 41% indicated 11+ deprivation items (extreme deprivation)<sup>42</sup>.

For those respondents who had children, 60% presented with severe levels of deprivation and went without five or more essential items.<sup>43</sup>

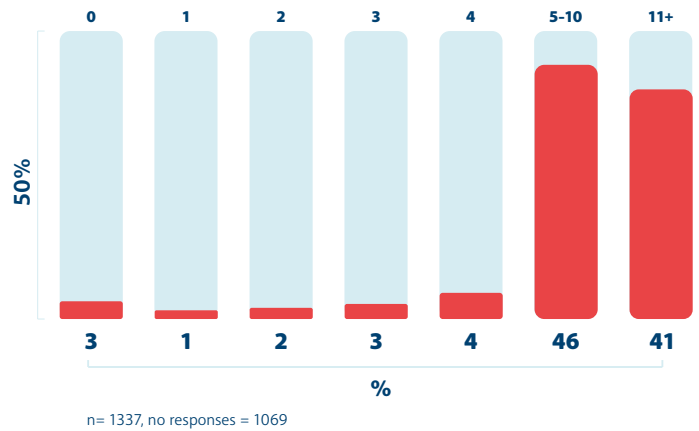
*"I am quite lonely here. No family. I barely eat more than one meal a day. I'll do anything to make my kids happy."*

Most deprived households were people with unstable accommodation (couch surfing, temporary accommodation, living with family/friends), homeless, no income, Newstart allowance, and also those that were looking for jobs.

F17

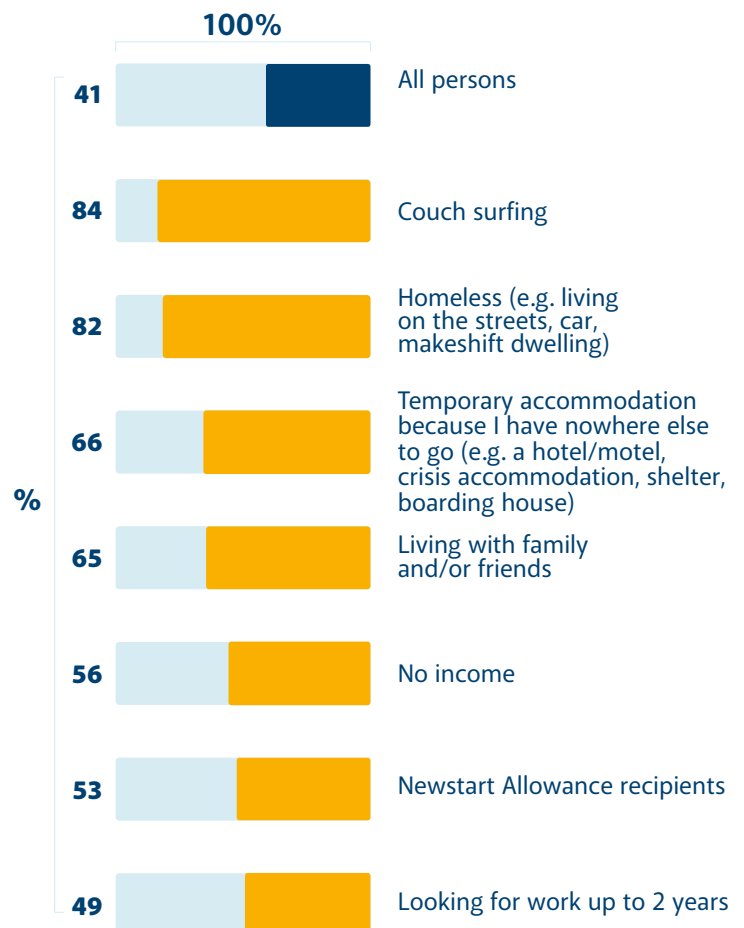
40. Essential items for adults are defined according to indicators of disadvantage developed by Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths, (2007).  
 41. Severe deprivation is defined as missing out on 5 or more essential items.  
 42. Extreme deprivation is defined as missing out on 11 or more essential items.  
 43. Essential items for children are adapted from UNICEF Child Deprivation Index and Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths (2007). The UNICEF Child Deprivation Index define deprivation as lacking two or more of 14 items considered normal and necessary for a child in an economically advanced country. ([http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc10\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc10_eng.pdf)). We define severe deprivation as lacking five or more of the children essential items considered normal and necessary for a child in an economically advanced country based on both Saunders, et al (2007) and UNICEF Child Deprivation Index.

### F15 PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE DEPRIVED OF ESSENTIAL HOUSEHOLD ITEMS



*"I feel that I let my children down by not being able to provide a home for them."*

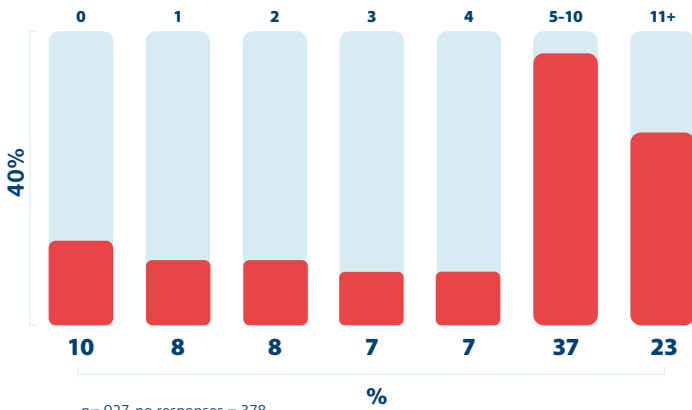
### F17 PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS WHO EXPERIENCED EXTREME DEPRIVATION IN EACH SUBGROUP





### F16

#### PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO WERE DEPRIVED OF ESSENTIAL ITEMS FOR CHILDREN

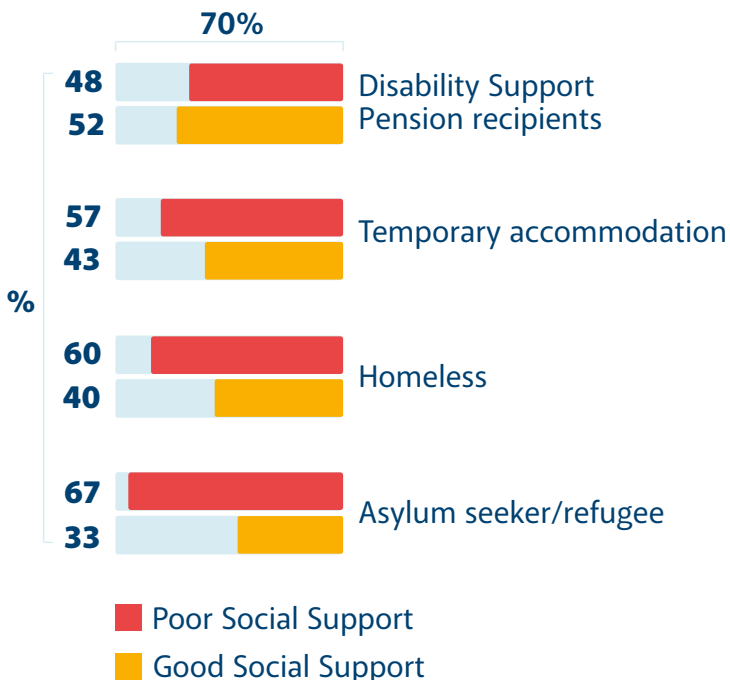


n= 927, no responses = 378

\* Based on essential items for children adapted from Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths (2007) and UNICEF Child Deprivation Index

### F18

#### SUBGROUPS WHO EXPERIENCED POOR SOCIAL SUPPORT



*"I don't know if I can continue living anymore. Everyone battling to keep themselves together, but I have given up the fight I have no one and nothing... all I have is the distant memory of a better life I had in the past."*

## Social support and wellbeing

Social Support measured how much support respondents received from other people, and was measured by two indicators<sup>44</sup>: Social Exclusion<sup>45</sup> and Social Connectedness<sup>46</sup>. Overall, 42% of respondents (n= 1,853) reported to have a poor social support. Certain subgroups were found to have significantly higher proportion of poor social supports, including: asylum seeker/refugee, Disability Support Pension recipients, Homeless, and respondents with temporary accommodation.

*"I am lonely for my family but it is not safe or wise to be around them."*

*"I have no friends or family."*

**Respondents who were homeless<sup>47</sup> experienced high levels of social exclusion (74%), poor social connectedness (46%) and poor social support (60%).**

**Sixty-seven per cent of asylum seekers experienced poor social support.**

**Overall, 44% of respondents identified they often feel very lonely. Those who are significantly more lonely compared to the other subgroups were:**

- **Recipients of Disability Support (52% being lonely)**
- **Single with no children (49% being lonely).**

44. [http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/hilda/Stat\\_Report/statreport-v7-2012.pdf](http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/hilda/Stat_Report/statreport-v7-2012.pdf)

45. Statements for Social Exclusion were: "People don't come to visit me as soon as I would like", "I often need help from other people but can't get it", "I don't have anyone that I can confide in", "I have no one to lean on in times of trouble", "I often feel very lonely"

46. Statements for Social Connectedness were: "I seem to have a lot of friends", "There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down", "I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me", "When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better", "When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone"

47. Homelessness is defined as living on the streets, car, or makeshift dwelling.

## T2 - COMPARATIVE DATA ESIS 2015 AND AUSTRALIAN PERSONAL WELLBEING INDEX

### Normative Ranges Calculated from Individual Data

	ESIS 2015			Australian Unity Wellbeing Index*		
	n	mean	SD	n	mean	SD
PWI (include safety)	1885	45.93	23.34	55764	75.25	12.45
Standard Living	2155	41.06	27.35	57620	77.82	17.04
Health	2146	41.71	28.57	57616	74.68	19.67
Achievement	2135	38.91	28.57	57284	73.59	18.42
Personal Relationships	2093	45.25	32.13	57366	79.43	21.23
Safety	2099	57.23	33.14	57476	79.02	17.82
Community	2132	53.83	31.62	57302	71.00	19.73
Future Security	2123	45.95	29.60	56802	71.02	19.74
Spirituality/Religion	2135	41.50	29.86	20529	72.93	23.77
Life Satisfaction	2165	43.65	27.03	57585	77.66	17.10

\*<http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/instruments/wellbinf-index/pwi-a-english.pdf>



*"I am a mother with mental health issues...it leaves you feeling isolated and judged by others."*

*"...when life does become overwhelming it's easy to stay inside and away from everyone."*

Personal wellbeing was measured according to respondents' standard of living, health, achievement, personal relationships, safety, community, future security, spirituality/religion, and overall life satisfaction.

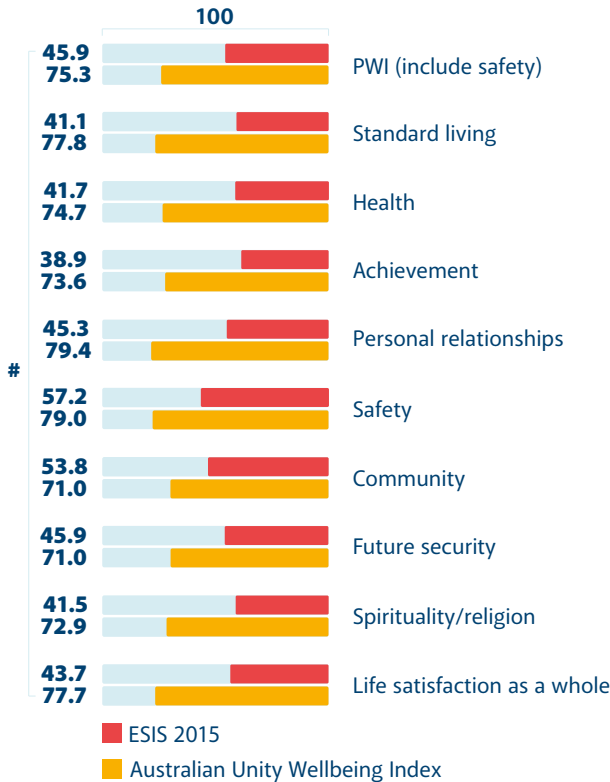
**Respondents (n=1,885) experienced significantly lower scores (45.93) on the Personal Wellbeing Index<sup>48</sup> compared to the National average (75.25), a difference of 29.32 points.**



48. PWI categories include: Standard of living, health, achievement, personal relationships, safety, community, future security, spirituality/religion, overall life satisfaction.



### F19 PERSONAL WELLBEING INDEX COMPARISONS



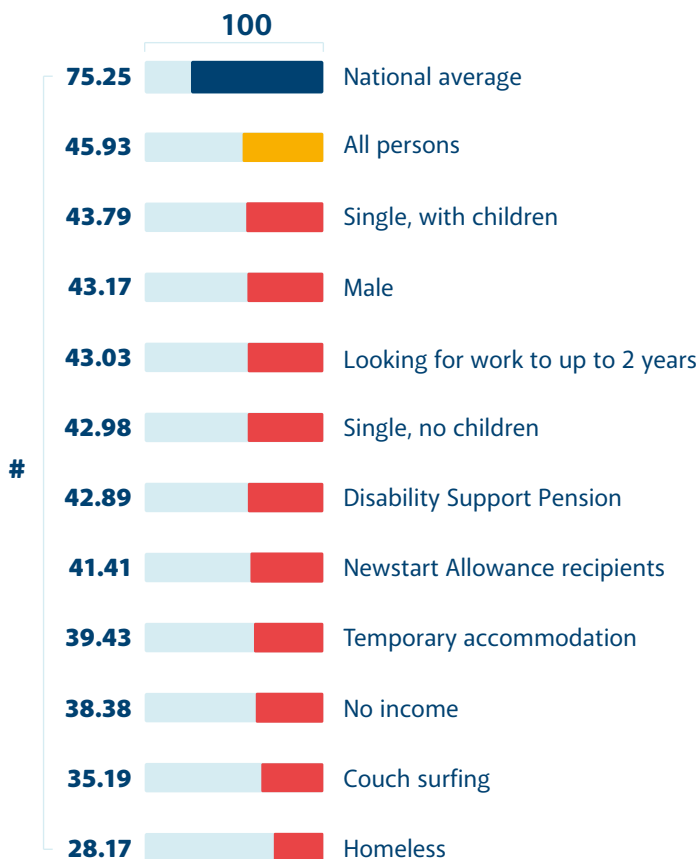
F19

Across each domain, respondents scored significantly lower on personal wellbeing compared to the national average, by approximately 30 points. This indicates that respondents perceived themselves to have significantly poorer quality of life, standard of living and had significantly lower overall life satisfaction compared to average Australians.

F20

Across each domain, particular subgroups demonstrated significantly lower scores on the Personal Wellbeing Index. Respondents with the lowest rates of personal wellbeing were subgroups from: homeless, couch surfing or had temporary accommodation, had no income or were Newstart recipients and were single (with or without children); and were more than 30 points less, compared to the national average. This suggested that our respondents, in light of their current life circumstances, experience very poor levels of life satisfaction and personal wellbeing compared to the wider Australian population.

### F20 SUBGROUPS WHO EXPERIENCED LOW PERSONAL WELLBEING INDEX SCORES



## Effects of Financial distress

Respondents identified four key factors that contributed to their experiences of financial distress. Respondents had limited control or influence over these factors and their impact was further compounded by personal circumstances.

**The main causes of financial distress among the people surveyed included:**

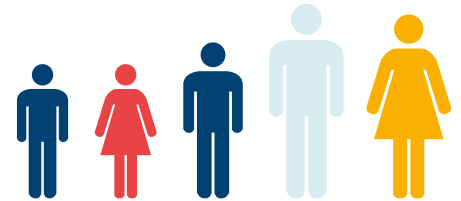
- Housing affordability
- Difficulties balancing working and parental care responsibilities
- Challenges of being a single parent
- Barriers to employment.

**Levels of financial distress were further compounded due to personal situations. These included:**

- Partner absent
- Death of a loved one
- Feeling unsafe due to violence or bullying from partner/ex-partner
- Partner with alcohol and/or drug addictions, and/or mental health problems
- Personal health problems or caring for a child, partner or family member with special medical conditions
- Overwhelmed with responsibilities.

*"Never have I ever been so destitute in my life."*

*"We have 5 adults and 5 children sharing a two bedroom unit."*



*"I have been in a bad relationship with my kids' father. He drinks and doesn't help with the kids financially, physically or emotionally."*



*"My wife died and left us alone with nobody to look after us. It's a lonely world out here."*

*"My husband has epilepsy and one daughter has autism. I feel like a prisoner. I can't have time for myself."*

*"I feel that I let my children down by not being able to provide a home for them."*



*"My loneliness is killing me and I can't stay alone anymore."*

*"I wish I never came into this world. If I could turn back my life I would."*

*"When my partner and I told people close to us we were broke and struggling...it was like we had Ebola, no-one came near us."*



*"Before I was sleeping in parks, train stations and people's couches but now I have a home and it's slowly building up. I am going to make it."*

### Other emotional impacts due to financial distress included:

- Loneliness
- Poor social life
- Low self-esteem
- Loss of hope/lack of motivation to move on
- Feeling disappointed with self
- Feeling desperate and/or suicidal.

Despite such grave personal situations and experiences of financial distress, some respondents managed to improve their living through self-effort, determination and with the help of others. Close relationships with another person and keeping a positive outlook appeared of great benefit. Such optimistic perspectives were inspirational given the life experiences and personal circumstances described by some respondents.

Overall, ESIS 2015 consistently highlighted that a significant number of people have limited financial resources available and struggle to meet their everyday expenses and financial commitments. The results also indicated that financial distress was further compounded by personal situations, with many individuals experiencing high degrees of social disconnection and exclusion. Of concern are those individuals who also experience severe and extreme levels of deprivation, which have further compromised individual and children's living standards and inclusion in the Australian community.

## Discussion

The Salvation Army has an extensive history working with individuals, families and communities who are impacted by poverty, deprivation and exclusion. The Salvation Army maintains a strong advocacy position and supports a just and equitable approach to addressing the causes and effects of disadvantage and entrenched poverty. The Economic and Social Impact Survey 2015 is a snapshot of the experiences, attitudes and realities of poverty for the individuals and families who The Salvation Army supports.

This research illustrates the struggles of people with limited economic and social resources, and high levels of deprivation and disadvantage. The research contains confronting insights into the financial strain from expending the majority of their income on housing and the challenge to maintain an adequate standard of living with minimal income and resources. For many people, this means they need to seek support through The Salvation Army's services for food and basic necessities. ESIS 2015 confirms the continuing disadvantage of this group as outlined in previous reports.



This year, The Salvation Army further examined respondents' experiences regarding a number of key issues. These included:

- Housing affordability
- Financial resources
- Barriers to employment
- Effects of financial hardships on parents and their children, and
- Emotional and social wellbeing.

In particular, three main themes emerged from the study. These included:

- 1. Inadequacy of income support and insufficient financial resources**
- 2. Entrenched poverty and experiences of severe and extreme deprivation**
- 3. Access to suitable and affordable housing.**

The context in which this survey has taken place remains one of uncertainty, given the impact from regulatory and funding changes within the community sector. The Salvation Army is concerned about the social impact of these changes on issues such as housing affordability, unemployment, income support measures, and children living in poverty.

The Salvation Army maintains that the current social policy setting and social systems do not provide adequate support to impoverished individuals and families, as this marginalised cohort continues to remain trapped in entrenched in poverty.



## Housing and homelessness

Housing affordability remains a national issue. Increasing private rental costs, competition for properties and diminishing public housing stock leave few options for those on low incomes. Survey respondents encountered repeated pressure and housing stress connected with inadequate economic resources. Results confirmed that respondents paid \$180 per week on accommodation expenses,<sup>49</sup> which represented 59%<sup>50</sup> of their total income per week. This is twice the common benchmark of 30% used to measure housing stress in Australia.<sup>51</sup> Many respondents reported that high rental costs, inadequate and sub-standard housing conditions contributed to the cost of living pressures that caused them significant financial stress. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents in private rental experienced extreme housing stress.<sup>52</sup> A renewed effort by government and the community is urgently needed to ensure that every Australian has access to safe, secure and affordable housing.

ESIS revealed 13% of respondents were homeless, significantly higher compared to the national average. On any given night in Australia, 1 in 200 people are homeless (in excess of 105,000 individuals). In 2013–14, an estimated 254,000 Australians accessed specialist homelessness services, an increase of 4% from 2012–13.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, in 2013–14, the number of clients couch surfing or living without tenure increased 26% compared to 2012.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the demand for specialist services and crisis accommodation continues to increase and requires adequate resourcing to effectively provide a continuum of housing responses to those in need.

*"I am house hunting [because] couch surfing isn't much fun. I have a 5-year-old that resides with her dad temporarily till I get a home of my own."*

*"I am homeless and living in the car... I just want a home."*



49. Median per week

50. Equals accommodation expenses divided by rough estimate income.

51. NB: Measures of housing affordability is on the lowest 40% of households by comparable incomes.

52. Extreme housing stress is defined as respondents using >50% of income.

53. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014. Specialist homelessness services: 2013–2014. Cat. no. HOU 276. Canberra: AIHW. Accessed 22 April 2015, viewed at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129549998>

54. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014. Specialist homelessness services: 2013–2014. Cat. no. HOU 276. Canberra: AIHW. Accessed 22 April 2015, viewed at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129549998>

### Poverty and disadvantage

In a recent report by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, poverty was described as a long-term issue, with approximately 25% of people who exit poverty returning to being poor within two years.<sup>55</sup> Groups at high risk of falling into long-term poverty include: individuals who do not complete secondary education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those over 65, those with a long-term health problem or disability and those who live in unemployed households. Similarly, our research also reflected that these subgroups were at high risk of remaining trapped in poverty and long-term disadvantage.

In Australia, 2.5 million people live below the poverty line (including more than 603,000 children).<sup>56</sup> The Salvation Army is concerned that recipients of income support live below the poverty line as income supports do not meet daily costs of living. Income support allowances have not increased in line with inflation, which only compounds issues of deprivation, entrenched poverty and the extent of income inequality among disadvantaged groups.<sup>57</sup> The Salvation Army advocates for an increase in the current income support allowances to provide an adequate standard of living.

Our research demonstrates that individuals continue to experience financial hardship, and have been forced to cut down on basic necessities (75%) and rely on the support of community organisations just to survive (60%). Furthermore, after accommodation expenses, respondents were forced to live on \$125 per week,<sup>58</sup> just \$17.86 per day. Those receiving Newstart allowance were even more disadvantaged and reported to have as little as \$9.57 a day to live on. This hardship is further reinforced by 56% of respondents indicating they felt they would be worse off in the coming 12 months. The question for the Australian community is, "Why are circumstances not changing for individuals and groups who are the most marginalised and disadvantaged in our community?"

*"The cost of living increases constantly while [my] income remains the same, so I'm getting poorer by the day."*



55. The Committee for Economic Development of Australia (2015). Addressing Entrenched Disadvantage in Australia (2015). Accessed 21 April 2015, viewed at <http://adminpanel.ceda.com.au/FOLDERS/Service/Files/Documents/26005~CEDAAAddressingentrencheddisadvantageinAustraliaApril2015.pdf>

56. ACOSS (2013). Poverty in Australia 2012 (3rd ed.). Australian Council of Social Services. Accessed 25 November 2014, viewed at <http://www.acoss.org.au/policy/poverty/>.

57. Australian Government Productivity Commission (2013). Deep and persistent disadvantage in Australia. Accessed 19 August 2014, viewed at <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/staff-working/deep-persistent-disadvantage/key-points>

58. Median per week

## Deprivation

Research results provide an insight into the levels of deprivation experienced by 2,406 adults and 2,864 children and young people in their households. Overall, 87% of households and 60% of children experienced severe levels of deprivation and went without more than five essential items in life.<sup>59</sup> Fifty-three per cent of respondents were single persons' households with children, which proved to be one of the most disadvantaged subgroups. Respondents were unable to afford essential items for their children, including: out-of-school activities (65%), an internet connection (62%) and fresh fruit and vegetables every day (34%). Without these basic life essentials, The Salvation Army is concerned that the future prospects for these children are likely to diminish and lead to increased poverty, lack of opportunity and chronic disadvantage.

Many respondents took the opportunity to comment about the level of financial assistance and help provided by the government. Individuals reliant on income support reported that the levels of payment were inadequate for them to maintain a basic standard of living. Recipients of Newstart allowance, Disability Support Pension and Parenting payments were the most disadvantaged, managing with the least amount of money to live on per week. These individuals experienced the highest levels of deprivation and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army is concerned that issues regarding poverty and deprivation are often reduced to questions of a job or welfare crisis. However, this is also an ethical question about the type of society Australians want. The foundations of a civil society include social inclusiveness, adequate support for those who are disadvantaged, personal safety, empowerment and the ability for all members to engage fully in society. However, for many respondents there was a disconnection and marginalisation from their communities.



## Employment

Respondents in the ESIS 2015 survey indicated that their situations have not changed significantly in the past 12 months and they felt isolated and excluded from the mainstream community. Yet, they reflected a desire to have the opportunities and experiences the rest of the community has, such as employment opportunities, adequate housing and the ability to provide for their families. Many experienced significant barriers to achieve these basic outcomes. For those seeking employment, many faced challenges entering the workforce and sustaining long term employment. The majority of respondents identified a lack of relevant skills and experience, current physical and/or mental health issues, and parenting/caring responsibilities as barriers to preventing them seeking employment. In addition, poverty, poor housing, lack of transport, lack of flexible work opportunities, cost of childcare, limited educational and work based experiences were also significant impediments to securing and maintaining employment. The current structures supporting employment do not appear to take into account some of the complexities and challenges faced by these marginalised and disadvantaged individuals. In fact, in some instances they actually impede rather than facilitate employment opportunities.

59. Essential items for adults are defined according to indicators of disadvantage developed by Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths, (2007) and The UNICEF Child Deprivation Index. Severe deprivation is defined as missing out on 5 or more essential items.

### **Asylum seekers and refugees**

ESIS 2015 explored the experiences of asylum seekers/refugees currently living in Australia. Despite low sample numbers (n= 29, 1% of all respondents), this cohort represented views and experiences of serious levels of disadvantage and marginalisation. Under visa conditions, the vast majority of asylum seekers have no rights to work or study, and receive little or no income support. The results indicate an urgent need to provide appropriate financial resources and social connections to these families to address their fundamental human rights and reduce the levels of deprivation experienced by their children.



### **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples**

Similar experiences and levels of disadvantage and deprivation were also reflected for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. Sixteen per cent of respondents (n=365) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. These figures are more than five times higher than the proportion of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples population in Australia (3%).<sup>60</sup> The Salvation Army is concerned that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to endure socio-economic disadvantage, marginalisation and entrenched poverty. As a result, The Salvation Army supports processes led by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples to inform economic and social policy development to reduce entrenched disadvantage and support improved outcomes for all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.





### Personal wellbeing

In terms of personal wellbeing, respondents fared very poorly compared to the wider Australian population. Across each domain, respondents experienced significantly lower scores on Personal Wellbeing Index<sup>61</sup> (45.93) compared to the National average (75.25), by 29.32 points. These results indicated that respondents have significantly poorer quality of life, standard of living and overall life satisfaction, as compared to the wider population. The most notably affected were respondents with no fixed or transitory accommodation scoring 28.17 (including homelessness, couch surfing, temporary tenure). Respondents who were homeless<sup>62</sup> also experienced high levels of social exclusion (74%), poor social connectedness (46%) and poor social support (60%). These results confirm that adequate housing is fundamental to personal wellbeing, providing a sense of stability, security and permanency. Individuals and families who are homeless are deprived of these fundamentals.

Overall, effects of financial distress were observed across a range of cohorts. Furthermore, respondents identified factors that contributed to their experiences of financial stress, such as housing affordability, challenges of single parenthood and barriers to employment. These are structural issues that respondents had little control over or influence to change. The degree of financial distress was further compounded by personal circumstances, such as lack of support from partner or family, death of loved ones, alcohol and/or drugs or mental health issues, and care responsibilities. In general, these circumstances had negative emotional impacts on respondents which led to feelings of extreme loneliness, low self-esteem, desperation and loss of hope.

61. PWI categories include: Standard of living, health, achievement, personal relationships, safety, community, future security, spirituality/religion, overall life satisfaction.

62. Homeless is defined as living on the streets, car, make shift dwelling.

## Conclusion

Entrenched poverty and persistent disadvantage are complex social issues that require an effective system and social policy setting to address the long term causes underpinning persistent and chronic disadvantage. Without sufficient financial investment from governments and the community to adequately fund support services, the situation for disadvantaged individuals is likely to remain unchanged. It will further deteriorate.

*“Addressing such entrenched disadvantage would improve the lives of many Australians and lead to a more prosperous nation as a consequence of increased workforce participation and greater social cohesion.”* <sup>63</sup>

The 2015 Economic Social Impact Survey report has highlighted the experiences of deprivation and poverty of those seeking assistance from The Salvation Army. These individuals and families are highly disadvantaged and marginalised due to their significant lack of financial and social resources. For many individuals and families, this has led to compromised social connections and networks, and limited access to services and activities. These findings compel The Salvation Army to continue to advocate for these individuals, and work to alleviate the burden of social and economic disadvantage at every level.

The Salvation Army is concerned that a respondent’s comment, **“I can’t continue to live like this”**, describes the situation for too many disadvantaged Australians. The Salvation Army believes that all Australians should enjoy the same opportunities to work, have an adequate standard of living and participate fully in the community. ESIS has demonstrated that there are a significant number of people who do not have these opportunities and who continue to experience disadvantage, deprivation and social exclusion on a daily basis.



*“I never lose hope and have to try to maintain some positive aspect; otherwise I and others like me just would not make it through these times. Hope and positivity are the only things you have to hold on.”*

63. The Committee for Economic Development of Australia (2015). Addressing Entrenched Disadvantage in Australia (2015). Accessed 21 April 2015, viewed at <http://www.ceda.com.au/research-and-policy/policy-priorities/disadvantage>



*"Salvos were a great help to me at a time when I needed help the most...  
Thank the Lord for The Salvos."*



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