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finding freedom.

Media Release

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The Salvation Army's Commissioner James Condon says, "The Salvation Army has nothing but praise for the incredible communities in the Blue Mountains, the Hawkesbury region and the Hunter Valley who faced devastating bushfires last October."

They ask everyone to keep those who have been severely affected, and are discovering how to rebuild their lives, in their thoughts and prayers as the anniversary approaches.

The Salvos are also pointing out they have two key resources for anyone to access who feels they need support – their 24/7 telephone counselling service ... Salvo Care Line (1300 36 36 22) and they also have a free DVD anybody can request "Still Standing" which features powerful stories of people who have survived natural disasters, including practical tips from Australia's leading trauma psychologist Dr. Rob Gordon.

The Salvation Army says it has nothing but praise for the incredible communities across the Blue Mountains, the Hunter Valley and the Hawkesbury region who dealt with the devastating bushfires of last October.

The Salvation Army Commissioner James Condon says the thoughts and prayers of The Salvation Army will be with communities in the Blue Mountains, Hunter Valley and Hawkesbury region as the one year anniversary approaches.

The Salvation Army also wants to point out that it has a special free resource for anyone who has been impacted by a natural disaster. The powerful DVD "*Still Standing – After a Natural Disaster*" is a free film – made by The Salvation Army – featuring three courageous Australians who have continued to rebuild their lives after shocking natural disasters.

Anyone in New South Wales who would like a copy of the DVD should simply call 13 SALVOS – that's 13 72 58 – or you can see the DVD online by going to salvos.org.au/stillstanding.

Psychologist Dr. Rob Gordon – Australia's leading trauma expert - is featured on the free DVD talking about the numerous stages of recovery after a natural disaster. He offers practical advice for adults and children on coping with post-disaster trauma. The DVD features many practical tips and suggestions for people to use as a resource. The DVD also has an interview with Barry Medwin who talks about how he rebuilt his life after both his wife and daughter were tragically killed in the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983.

One of the key messages in the DVD is that people should never be afraid to ask for help especially during the "endurance" phase of recovery after a disaster has happened.

The Salvos also want to highlight to the communities across the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury region and the Hunter Valley that their telephone counselling service is available 7 days a week. People may simply call Salvo Care Line any time on 1300 36 36 22.

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The Salvation Army estimates over 10,000 meals were served during the bushfire response in the Hawkesbury region, Hunter Valley and the Blue Mountains. 3,296 volunteer hours went in to 24 operational sites. 20 emergency service teams were deployed.

Commissioner Condon said, "We stand shoulder to shoulder with the communities across the Blue Mountains. The devastating and appalling fires were a shock to everybody. We ask people to continue to think about the people affected as they rebuild their lives and remember them in prayer. Our services are only made possible by the incredible generosity and compassion shown by the Australian public and business community."

"Without question, it takes years to recover from disasters of this magnitude. The generosity of the public to The Salvation Army – through our Bushfire Appeal – enabled us to raise and distribute \$11.5 million. Specifically, funds have been used to provide goods and services to help people with the rebuilding process. We have done and will continue to do all we can to help people recover ... with the dignity and respect they deserve.'

"Some people lost everything and were only left with the clothing they wore to school or work the morning the bushfires started. I was profoundly moved by the way Australia responded to the bushfires that swept across New South Wales," said Commissioner Condon.

"Despite the worst of nature on display, I have witnessed the very best of humanity as thousands and thousands of Australians gave generous financial support and assistance to those in need," he said.

The horrific October 2013 bushfires devastated areas in the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury area and the Hunter Valley. More than 350 homes were damaged or destroyed.

Major Bruce Harmer – Territorial Communications & PR Secretary for the Australia Eastern Territory of The Salvation Army - said, "Within four hours our Salvation Army Emergency Services Teams had set up 10 sites from Picton in the Blue Mountains to Port Stephens in the Hunter Region."

"We were continually astounded by the sheer courage of volunteer fire fighters and their incredible commitment as ferocious fires advanced. Salvo teams worked with fire fighters around the clock in 24 locations. We worked closely with the NSW Rural Fire Service. Many people did not reach out for support initially; however we have assisted many of those impacted by the fires throughout this year."

"There is no question that in these terrible situations, the damage that is done is just soul destroying. Our people provided simple support such as a drink and a hot meal and emotional support, which we know is helpful initially. Once bushfires subsided, we established a relief centre at Springwood Baptist Church to offer material needs, financial counselling and other support."

"What needs to be remembered is long after a crisis has passed, personal recovery continues. My message to people who were affected is if you still need help, let us know. Call our Salvo Care Line or get a copy of the free DVD. Obviously the rebuilding process is such a personal thing and it is such a huge journey."

Major Bruce Harmer added, "The Salvation Army's counselling team helped as much as possible. There was overwhelming demand. We were amazed at the massive response from the public. The generosity was just huge."

Salvos Stores and Family Stores in the Blue Mountains area received large amounts of donated clothing, household items and food. A thousand quilts were donated from across Australia and distributed to people who had lost their homes.

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Woolworths partnered with the Salvos to offer a point-of-sale donation facility – which raised more than \$4.5 million. Westpac helped raised over \$200,000. The Daily Telegraph – in partnership with the Commonwealth Bank, Crown Resorts and Qantas – donated funds that raised more than \$300,000. The WA Government donated \$250,000.

On behalf of those who were impacted by last year's bushfires, The Salvation Army would like to thank everyone who donated to the Bushfire Appeal.

Specifically:

- \$ 2.5 million was given to communities in gift cards to purchase food and other items;
- \$ 5.8 million has assisted with relief payments to meet people at their point of need through The Salvation Army's NSW Bushfire Recovery Centre and its ongoing work; and
- \$3.097 million is committed to the continuation of phase 2 and any other specific identified needs that emerge.

Commissioner James Condon said, "These bushfires have been tremendously costly financially and emotionally for the communities affected. Our simple message to the community is we stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with you. We know people will obviously continue to need support. Salvo Care Line is there to help – or our *Still Standing* DVD. If we can help, we will.

"We ask all Australians to continue to support these communities practically and prayerfully as many of them press into the difficult task of moving forward on their personal road to recovery."

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Further information and media enquiries to:

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