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Media Release

“I can't continue to live like this”

New research shows bleak reality of life for marginalised Australians

SUMMARY AT A GLANCE: Disturbing new research from The Salvation Army paints an alarming picture of what is happening right now to many marginalised Australians.

Over 2,400 people - visiting 262 Salvation Army centres around the nation - were surveyed for the latest Economic and Social Impact Survey (ESIS). Most respondents were between the ages of 25 and 59.

Results show that on average people had just under \$18 a day to live off to buy everything they needed after accommodation expenses. 25% (1 in 4) went without at least one substantial meal a day.

87% of adults and 60% of children surveyed reported severe deprivation (and went without more than five essential items in life). 75% of respondents had cut down on basic necessities. 57% had gone without meals.

56% of respondents said their current financial situation was worse than last year. It is now estimated 2.5 million Australians live below the poverty line – including 603,000 children.

Results from the survey also showed couples with no children (on Newstart Allowance) not only experienced extreme housing stress but also had just \$9.57 a day to live off after accommodation expenses had been paid.

STORY IN FULL: An extraordinary report being released by The Salvation Army today (Wednesday May 27th) - in the lead up to its annual Red Shield Appeal - paints an alarming picture of what is happening to many marginalised Australians right now.

Of the 2,406 people surveyed, on average people had just under \$18 a day to live off ... to buy everything they needed and cover all expenses after their accommodation expenses were paid.

The \$18 a day would need to cover expenses such as food, health, medical, clothing, education, entertainment and utility costs. The Salvation Army says it is deeply disturbing that respondents had just \$125 per week to live off to fund everything after accommodation had been paid.

The 2015 *Economic and Social Impact Survey (ESIS)* report reveals what The Salvation Army says is clearly “a bleak picture of entrenched and persistent poverty for a significant proportion of people who access Salvation Army services”.

A large sample size of over 2,400 people - who visit 262 Salvation Army centres across the nation - were involved in the study.

The majority of children in the survey experienced multiple levels of deprivation, with 60% of them missing at least 5 items considered normal and necessary for a child in an economically advanced country like Australia. 56% of respondents said their financial situation was worse than last year. Most people surveyed were aged between 25-59 years.

The new Salvation Army report calls for “a further shift in social policy direction led by the Federal government to address the causes of persistent and chronic disadvantage across our communities.”

The disturbing findings also revealed:

- 87% of adults and 60% of children reported severe deprivation – and went without 5 or more essential items in life.
- Due to massive financial hardship, 75% of respondents had cut down on basic necessities, 57% had gone without meals and 59% were unable to pay utility bills or had delayed them.
- 78% of respondents in private rental housing experienced *extreme* housing stress.
- Of the 2,864 children represented in the survey, 65% of parents were not able to afford out of school activities.
- 62% of parents could not afford an internet connection and 34% could not afford to give children fresh fruit or vegetables daily.

It is now estimated a staggering 2.5 million Australians live below the poverty line. This includes over 600,000 children.

Major Bruce Harmer from The Salvation Army said, “Our biggest question for the Australian community is ‘**How can we expect people to continue to live like this?**’ We are deeply alarmed at the results of this survey.”

“This report shows very high levels of deprivation. This survey has captured data for 2,864 children. 60% were affected by severe deprivations – missing at least 5 essential items for children. The report clearly shows just how marginalised many Australians who come to The Salvation Army are.”

Major Bruce Harmer added, “The Salvation Army is concerned that issues around poverty and deprivation are often reduced to questions of a job or welfare crisis. The foundations of a virtuous and worthy society are social inclusiveness, adequate support for those who are disadvantaged, personal safety and the ability for all members to engage fully in society.”

“Respondents in the ESIS 2015 survey indicated that their situations have not changed significantly. They felt isolated and excluded from the mainstream community. However, they reflected a desire to have the opportunities and experiences the rest of the community had, such as employment opportunities, adequate housing and the ability to provide for their families.”

“Many experienced significant barriers to achieving these basic outcomes and breaking the cycle of poverty. For those seeking employment, many faced challenges entering the workforce and sustaining long-term employment. The majority of respondents said a lack of relevant skills and experience, current physical and/or mental health issues, and parenting or caring responsibilities were barriers preventing them seeking employment,” said Major Harmer.

“Entrenched poverty and persistent disadvantage are complex social issues. Without sufficient financial investment from governments and the community to adequately fund support services, the situation for disadvantaged individuals is likely to remain unchanged or further deteriorate.”

“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 major study has been released in the run up to the annual Red Shield Appeal - the national doorknock is this weekend 30th/31st May. This year's national fundraising goal for the Red Shield Appeal doorknock is \$9.5 million.

Statistics show that in a typical week The Salvation Army provides 100,000 meals for hungry people, 2,000 beds for homeless people, distributes up to 8,000 food vouchers, provides refuge to 500 victims of abuse and much more.

People wanting to volunteer for the Red Shield Appeal Doorknock can call 13 SALVOS (13 72 58) or register online at salvos.org.au/volunteer.

People may also wish to donate to the Red Shield Appeal by calling 13 SALVOS (13 72 58), online at salvos.org.au, in person at any Westpac branch or by posting a cheque to Reply Paid 87088 Silverwater NSW 2128.

For more information or media comment, please contact:

The Salvation Army Media Office – (02) 9266 9820 (diverts after hours)

Some of the key findings at a glance:

- **It is now estimated 2.5 million Australians live below the poverty line – including 603,000 children.**
- 2406 individuals - visiting 262 Salvation Army Community Support Centres - were interviewed.
- The Salvation Army calls for a further shift in social policy direction, led by the Federal Government to address the causes of persistent and chronic disadvantage across our communities.
- On average respondents had \$17.86 per day to live off after accommodation expenses were paid (or \$125 a week).
- Results from the survey also showed couples with no children (on Newstart Allowance) not only experienced extreme housing stress but also had just \$9.57 a day to live off after accommodation expenses had been paid.
- 75% of respondents had cut down on basic necessities, 59% had delayed or were unable to pay utility bills and 57% had gone without meals.
- The survey captures data for 2864 children – 60% - were affected by severe deprivation (at least 5 essential items).
- Of the 2864 children represented, 65% of parents were not able to afford out of school activities, 62% couldn't afford an internet connection and 34% couldn't provide fresh fruit/vegetables on a daily basis.
- 87% of adults and 60% of children reported severe deprivations and went without at least 5 essential items in life.
- 78% of respondents in private rental housing experienced extreme housing stress.
- 82% of the respondents were aged between 25 to 59.
- 56% said they felt worse about their current financial situation compared to this time last year.
- 68% went without dental treatment and 37% went without medical treatment.
- 25% went without at least one substantial meal a day.
- The Salvation Army says one respondent's comment "I can't continue to live like this" describes the situation for too many disadvantaged Australians, and the need for effective system, social policy and interventions to break the cycle of poverty.