



Catering for all emergencies

As the fire season gets nearer the teams of the Salvation Army's Emergency Services prepare themselves for another busy fire season.

It was around the time of the first Ash Wednesday fires in 1985 that the Salvation Army in South Australia was first approached to help in the supply of food to the CFS volunteers on the fire ground. In those days it was coffee, cordial, sandwiches and biscuits served from the boot of a car driven to the fire fighters. It was a case of doing the best you can with the facilities at hand with as many volunteers as you could muster. After this 'trial by fire' the Salvos quickly progressed to fitting out box trailers with hot water and a BBQ plate, giving the volunteers and service people a typical Australian summer hot meal in the midst of the mayhem.

These days the Salvos have a range of purpose built food trailers and two large vans, fully equipped with commercial kitchens that produce two courses of around 1500 hot and cold meals to the volunteers and service people on the ground per day. Over many years, The Salvation Army has established themselves as an important part of the state's emergency disaster response. These larger vans are always a welcomed sight at the staging areas of most major incidents such as the Bangor and the Sampson Flat fires. Feeding the many volunteers involved in these incidents is a huge logistical issue and one that becomes a higher imperative the longer the first crews have been on the fire ground. The vans are totally independent and well stocked in order to supply the large number of meals per day with menus that include a range of vegetarian and gluten free options.



The Salvation Army Emergency Services Catering Van

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Staffing these food vans are a host of volunteers managed by The Salvation Army. Around eighty live in the Adelaide area and fifty in the SA regional areas. Many have roles within The Salvation Army and volunteer their personal time to help out in these emergencies. They commit to long hours of work to keep the many CFS, SES and other Emergency Services Agencies fed and like the volunteers in the thick of it they have their fair share of stories to tell.

Murray Jackson is the current South Australian Operations Co-Ordinator of The Salvation Army Emergency Services. *"Our role is not only to feed them. They come to us covered in filth and sometimes after witnessing destructive scenes like burning animals and families in distress. We all try to have a smile on our faces and let them know and see that we are there for them".*

Margaret Banning, a regular Salvo volunteer, has been involved in leading many of the emergency service teams and supplying hearty meals for many emergencies. The CFS, SES and the South Australian Police all mingle around the van to share a cuppa and food with some well-earned down time. *"There are never any complaints and the gratitude and courtesy shown by all the men and women of the services is always our best tribute".*

At the 2015 Sampson Flat fire she recalls the faces of the young volunteers, of similar ages to her grandchildren. *"They were so exhausted that some could barely hold on to their coffee cups. They enthusiastically and always politely accepted food and then settling back to eat quietly, although, some looked as though they would fall asleep at any moment with their bread roll still in their hands. They had been giving their all in helping others".* Their actions are a blessing that touches the spirit.

Sharon Brinkley, Regional Manager of the Metro Community Support Services, works mostly in her office at City Salvos but volunteers whenever more help in the van is urgently needed. She prefers the general assistance of the van rather than the cooking. *"Cleaning up around the tables you have a chance to meet and chat to the volunteers. You quickly learn the ones that want to be left alone in their thoughts and those who want and need to speak about what they have just seen and experienced".* These experiences are seldom shared with outsiders. *"A few minutes spent listening to their stories before they head home or back out to their tireless work certainly gives me inspiration and a great personal reward. Hopefully it gives them a rest and comfort after their brave efforts".*



We get a lot of the public wanting to help and asking if they can provide meals. Over the years, necessity has dictated strict guidelines and adherence to Government requirements and standards requiring tight controls on food preparation and handling. We are under great scrutiny regarding food handling and are subject to inspection even during the incidents we attend. All our volunteers are provided with appropriate training. This is understandably a hard concept to swallow for close communities in the regional areas that are used to banding together to help out where they can to get the job done.

The service also assists with training events and special programs partnering with all the emergency agencies and there are many more volunteers and management teams that work and require training all year round. *“Obviously the fire season is one of the most taxing and we have to prepare and be skilled well in advance so that we are ready to respond quickly and be able to keep going for extended periods in hot conditions”* says Murray Jackson. There is no shortage of hard work and long hours in the food van and covering shifts for the 24 hour emergency cycle is quite taxing. *“When you feel you cannot peel another carrot along comes a group of blackened faces and red eyed volunteers who have been working all night and somehow your own tired and aching limbs seem meaningless”*. These catering teams are often the last to leave as they usually feed the last of the crews as they head for home. Then comes the long arduous tasks of cleaning all the surfaces, emptying the oils and stowing all the equipment away for the drive back to base ready for the next emergency.

It is The Salvation Army’s continued role of helping people in crisis and supporting the brave volunteers and associated services that provide their best to our communities. *“God bless them all”*.



Some of the volunteers at the recent Sampson Flat fires

You can find more about The Salvation Army Emergency Service at
<http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/Who-We-Are/our-work/Emergency-services/>

For any South Australians who are affected by fire or unexpected life events the Affordable SA App provides the ability to easily connect with the services and support you may need throughout South Australia. The Affordable SA App is free to download. Simply search for Affordable SA and complete the download or contact the Affordable SA Helpline 1800 025 539 for assistance.