

Moving forward

The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory

NSW bushfire disaster 12-month report 2014





Moving forward with determination

Commissioner's letter

The Salvation Army's response to the NSW bushfires: a 12-month report

Twelve months on from the devastating bushfires of October 2013, I reflect on the amazing ability of communities to remain resilient when confronted by adversity and individuals who display a determination to rebuild their lives following personal tragedy. Such is the environment in communities decimated by these bushfires.

The Salvation Army has stood shoulder to shoulder with people in the Blue Mountains, the Hawkesbury region and the Hunter Valley during their time of need. We have supported and encouraged hundreds of people as they faced the challenge of rebuilding their lives.

The support we have provided has been as diverse as the needs that are presented, ranging from a cuppa and a debriefing chat to assisting with the funds to support the rebuilding of homes levelled by the fires.

I want to acknowledge the extraordinary generosity of the Australian public and our business community. Even while the bushfires continued their destructive path, we sent out urgent requests for financial support on behalf of those affected by the fires. The response from the Australian public and business sector was immediate, sustained and, not surprisingly, extremely generous.

I am proud of my people for the efforts they have made to assist those affected by the fires, but I'm equally proud of every Australian who stands ready, willing and able to deliver support to fellow Australians in times of need.

We are indeed a generous people and on behalf of those negatively affected by the bushfires of October 2013, I sincerely thank you for responding so positively to our requests for financial assistance.

I want to assure you that The Salvation Army will continue to support the communities of the Blue Mountains, the Hawkesbury region and the Hunter Valley toward rebuilding their lives. We are moving forward, yet remain committed to these communities for as long as it takes.

James Condon
Commissioner
The Salvation Army
Australia Eastern Territory



“They were like little angels that just came out of the smoke.”



Carol and Kevin Blakelock are moving forward thanks to a rebuild grant from The Salvation Army. Photo: Adam Hollingworth

Moving forward with rebuild grant

Carol Blakelock was on holidays when she received the devastating call on 17 October last year from a neighbour. She was in disbelief – the Winmalee family home she and her husband Kevin had lived in for 40 years had been lost in the bushfires.

Married for 44 years, the Blakelocks raised their four children in their Blue Mountains home, west of Sydney. At the time the fires hit, Carol and Kevin were caravanning in South Australia, visiting one of their sons and his family. On receiving the news, they threw everything into their caravan and drove for two days.

Arriving back in what remained of their street, they were greeted by The Salvation Army. “They were like little angels that just came out of the smoke,” says Carol. “For the first week the [Salvation Army Emergency Services] van was there. It would come and it would go through the smoke.”

In those initial days, Carol recalls The Salvation Army workers reminding people to do simple tasks like eating a meal. “And not only that. They’d come in amongst all the rubble with you, and they would just stand with us.”

Carol and Kevin were given immediate support through the Army’s recovery relief centre at Springwood Baptist Church. They could access basic necessities such as food, clothing, toiletries and bedding. However, in those early days, Carol said they didn’t feel comfortable accepting help, as she was still working and earning a wage.

“We probably didn’t have the insight to know what would happen down the track,” she says. “At the time we thought ‘no, we are fine’. It was the Salvos who wanted to support us as much as they could, knowing that the journey that we were going to be taking was a rocky one. They wanted to give us the support at the beginning to give us the strength to move on.”

The Blakelocks were then surprised to receive approval for a rebuild grant. Once again, they felt there were people worse off and struggled to accept the

grant. “It was just incredible,” says Carol. “Because I said ‘I don’t think we’ll qualify’. And the look on their [the grant committee] faces was ‘well if you don’t, who does? You’ve lost everything’. A whole weight had lifted off our shoulders, because we knew we would be able to get the fire shutters.”

The decision to rebuild was a “no-brainer” for Carol and Kevin. “It was a blink I guess. What do we do? Of course we’ll build. It’s home,” says Carol.

Both retired now, Kevin had owned a stationery shop in Springwood for 23 years, and Carol had worked in health care as a Nurse Unit Manager. Since the fires, the Blakelocks have found a friend in Salvation Army Recovery Team Leader Tracey Greenaway. Carol has recently joined Tracey’s patchworking class, (pictured below) which she thoroughly enjoys. “Quilting – it was always on the bucket list,” says Carol. The Blakelocks plan to be in their new house by early 2015.





Moving forward with support

After bushfires devastated large areas of the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury region and the Hunter Valley in October 2013, The Salvation Army launched its bushfire appeal. The Australian public generously donated \$11.5 million which has been distributed to assist those affected by the disaster.

In the days and weeks following the fires, 20 Salvation Army Emergency Services teams were active in 24 locations across the affected areas. More than 400 volunteers worked around the clock, serving about 10,000 meals.

With the Blue Mountains suffering the most devastation, The Salvation Army set up a relief centre at Springwood Baptist Church. Those who had experienced total loss were able to access groceries, clothing, toiletries, bedding, EFTPOS gift cards and other basic emergency essentials at the centre. People were also able to access various social services, including counselling and legal aid.

As people's needs changed over the ensuing months, the response adapted to a more local-based recovery service. The Salvation Army Bushfire Recovery Centre was set up on 25 March in Raymond Road, in the middle of Springwood's business district. A Recovery Team Leader was employed to oversee the day-to-day running of operations.

The centre has provided a place for people to attend interviews for grants, to process paperwork and for the co-ordination of The Salvation Army's outreach work. Home and on-site visits were also available. Most importantly, the centre has been a safe place for people to visit should they require emotional or physical assistance with their rebuilding process.

Phase 2 grants have been a significant part of the recovery process for many people who experienced total loss. With grants available from \$300 to \$30,000, a Community Advisory Board was established to oversee approvals, ensuring it was done in a rational and thoughtful manner. The board consists of representation from appropriate community services, including community welfare, churches, council and local community members. In consultation with

this board, an application process for grants was developed and refined.

The Salvation Army has also continued working with those who were affected by fires in the Hunter Valley. For people from Catherine Hill Bay and Salt Ash who also lost homes in the bushfires, the same support has been offered. Salvation Army personnel in their local areas have been able to meet with them to access their needs before referring them on to the Bushfire Recovery Centre in Springwood.

Volunteers given red-carpet treatment

In July, around 200 volunteers who had assisted The Salvation Army in their recovery effort were honoured at a special volunteer lunch.

The event was organised by members of the Salvation Army church in Springwood, who really wanted to honour the people who had volunteered their time to help those affected by the bushfires.

The event, which was held in a barn located at the Springwood Salvation Army church, was a surprise for guests who arrived to a red carpet.

Volunteers from Springwood Baptist Church, the patchwork quilting group who helped run the Bushfire Quilt Appeal, as well as other people from the community, were invited.

Various Salvation Army senior leadership, who oversee NSW, ACT and Queensland, were present on the day to give honour and thanks to the volunteers.

It was a fantastic day for all who attended, with everyone sharing in a beautiful lunch and receiving a certificate of appreciation.

Moving forward through generosity

On 17 October 2013, The Salvation Army bushfire appeal was launched and the response was overwhelming. Australians generously donated \$11.5 million, ranging from individual donations to large corporate partnerships.

Woolworths showed their support offering point-of-sale donation facilities, matching every dollar donated by the Australian public. In total, Woolworths' overall contribution to the bushfire appeal was \$4.5 million.

Westpac donated \$200,000 to the appeal, allowing the public to donate through special codes set up at their branches nation wide.

On 26 October, The Daily Telegraph, in partnership with the Commonwealth Bank, Crown Resorts and Qantas, donated \$1 from every paper sold to the appeal. With the support of Channel 10, who provided free advertising for the paper, more than \$300,000 was raised.

The Western Australian Government also showed their support with a donation of \$250,000 to the appeal.

Nation-wide donations were made to The Salvation Army via our website and 13 SALVOS. Additional donations were received through Westfield centres, Target outlets, Bunnings Warehouse and other independent fundraising initiatives.

Without this support, The Salvation Army would not have been able to offer such a strong response to the disaster. These funds have provided for ongoing practical and significant assistance to those who needed it most.

Salvation Army NSW bushfire appeal – as at 17 October 2014

Revenues	\$ Amount
Bushfire appeal	11,490,783
Donated gift cards	61,680
Total income	11,552,463

Expenses	\$ Amount
Gift cards – purchased (EFTPOS, IGA)	2,440,000
Gift cards - donated	61,680
Disaster relief payments	5,948,662
Management costs including staff and resources	142,307
Continuing operations (committed)	2,959,814
Total expenses plus commitments	11,552,463



Left: Woolworths offered point-of-sale donations for customers, matching all donations dollar for dollar.
Top Right: Managing Director of ABC Tissues (Quilton), Henry Ngai (right) and wife Jenny, who donated \$100,000 to the bushfire appeal and 450 cartons of tissues
Bottom Right: The Salvation Army Chief Secretary Colonel Richard Munn, centre, accepts a cheque for the bushfire appeal from a consortium of benefactors who supported The Daily Telegraph appeal. (From left) Ten Network CEO Hamish McLennan, Qantas CEO Alan Joyce, Crown chairman James Packer, The Salvation Army's Colonel Richard Munn, CBA CEO Ian Narev, News Corps NSW executive general manager Brett Clegg and The Daily Telegraph editor Paul Whittaker.

Moving forward after losing everything

It was a typical Thursday morning for the Hughes family on 17 October last year.

Peter and Caitlin, both self-employed, had been working from their home offices in Winmalee. Peter, a mortgage broker, was preparing for an appointment with a client later that day. Caitlin, an artist and art teacher, was getting ready for a class. Their two children were at pre-school.

By 3pm, bushfires had swept through and their home and businesses were gone.

“Pretty much within the same day we had no home and no job,” says Caitlin. “There’s no sick pay, there’s no stress leave and there’s no family or carers allowance when you work for yourself.”

Thankfully, the couple were able to save important work files. However, Caitlin lost all her art materials, tools and a number of completed works that had been sold.

It wasn’t until about a week after the fires that Peter and Caitlin sought any kind of assistance. Initially, they registered with the Disaster Recovery Office. It would be a number of weeks later that they would come into contact with The Salvation Army through the relief centre set up at the Springwood Baptist Church.

The couple were relieved to be able to access EFTPOS cards to purchase essentials, as well as being provided with clothing, food, bedding, toiletries and toys for their children. However the assistance they have received with the Phase 2 rebuild grant and, in particular, the two business grants, has been most significant for them. “It’s just taken the pressure off. That’s the main thing. It’s taken some of the pressure off the businesses as well,” said Caitlin.

With the Phase 2 business grant, Peter has been able to get his business,

Hughes Financial, back on its feet. The grant has gone towards the internal office partitioning of the new office that Peter has recently started leasing. For Caitlin, the business grant has enabled her to replenish her tools and materials, as well as allowing her to hire a teaching space several days a week.

“Really, it’s amazing to think that people donated that much to make such a significant contribution to our ability to consider rebuilding.”

Supporters of various charities, Peter and Caitlin never thought they would be the ones asking for assistance.

“We donate in various ways to different things. You see yourselves as the donator. I don’t think we’ve ever received any assistance prior to the fires,” said Peter. Caitlin said: “We [my family] used to do the Red Shield Appeal when we were younger. It’s interesting to think that it kind of comes around. Really, it’s amazing to think that people donated that much to make such a significant contribution to our ability to consider rebuilding.”

The Hughes family are planning to rebuild on their block and hope to be in their new home by the end of 2015. “We would like to thank The Salvation Army, a lot,” said Peter. “We’re very grateful.”

Peter and Caitlin Hughes stand on the foundations where their Winmalee home once stood.
Photo: Adam Hollingworth



Moving forward with grants

The Salvation Army was initially able to provide people with basic necessities through various gift cards that were either donated or purchased from appeal funds. This was part of Phase 1 of the recovery effort.

As part of Phase 2, various grants were available to people who had been significantly affected by the bushfires. Grants were given based on assessment from the Phase 2 Community Advisory Group.

There have been a wide range of grants available to bushfire affected people in Phase 2:

Rebuild: Available to those who owned the home that was destroyed and are going to rebuild.

Set up: Available to those who were renting the home that was destroyed; those who have decided not to rebuild and are going to rent or purchase another property; or adult children or individuals who were paying board for a room, granny flat, etc.

Kids Camp: Available to children up to the age of 18 who would like to participate in a non-school camp. This could include sports camps, creative arts camps or holiday camps.

Training: Available to those who have decided to go back into the workforce as a result of the bushfires. This grant is applicable if there is a need to update certificates or skills to get back into the workforce, or for training to enhance employment prospects. This grant is also available to those who have obtained an Owner Builders Certificate to rebuild their home.

Respite: Available to those who haven't had a break away from the area since the fires. It is also available for grandparents raising grandchildren, or those who are caring for an elderly relative at home or those with young children with special needs.

Counselling: Available to anyone who would like to access counselling services, either individually, as a couple or as a family.

Phase 2 grants provided as at 17 October 2014

Grant type	Number of grants	\$ amount of grant	Total \$ amount of grants
Rebuild	110	30,000	3,300,000
Set up (owners moving out of area)	61	20,000	1,220,000
Set up for house renters	16	20,000	320,000
Set up for boarders	34	5,000	170,000
Kids camp	41	300	12,300
Training	41	600	24,600
Respite	109	600	65,400
Counselling	72	600	43,200
Total	484	-	5,155,500

In the coming months, as we move in to Phase 3 of our recovery, we will further assess what needs have not previously been met. We are committed to continuing to stand beside those who were affected for as long as it takes as they rebuild their lives.



Moving forward in community

Twelve months ago Tracey Greenaway was a stay-at-home mum, spending her days caring for her family and running a patchwork class in her Blue Mountains community of Springwood. A member of the local Salvation Army church, Tracey has served on their Emergency Services team, responding to every bushfire in the Blue Mountains since 1994.

Then the October 2013 bushfires hit, and life hasn't been the same since. In normal circumstances, Tracey would have responded to the call of duty, serving meals to emergency services personnel and those affected. However, with her own home under threat, she was not able to assist and felt helpless. "I couldn't leave my house because the hazard-reduction burn was still active. So for those first few days I just felt totally useless," says Tracey.

Tracey knew she couldn't sit by and do nothing. Hundreds in her community were mourning the loss of their homes. Initially, she put her patchworking skills to use, launching the Springwood Winmalee Bushfire Quilt Appeal on her personal blog. More than 1000 quilts were donated from all over Australia and were handed out to those affected by the fires. "I'm a community-spirit type of person. And our community is relatively small, so you need to be involved," she says.

As The Salvation Army settled in for a long-term recovery response, the decision was made to employ Tracey as a Recovery Team Leader, based at the Bushfire Recovery Centre in Springwood. "The whole basis of this position is to help meet the needs of the people. We're about meeting people's needs as they go through recovery," says Tracey.

A large part of the work that Tracey is doing is helping distribute the funds raised through the bushfire appeal. It is also helping people to take the next step in the recovery process. It could be anything from referring people to other services, to helping them to fill out paperwork around rebuilding, or researching building options.

Tracey brought her own unique set of skills to the role, with a hobby of hers being collecting house plans. She also designed and owner-built her home.

Tracey says the past 12 months has been life-changing. "Never in a million years would I have thought that I'd be sitting here today doing this," she says. "I just never thought that this would be happening. Never ever. We always expect bushfires, but I never thought I would be in this position."

"It just seems normal to me that you would want to help. I couldn't not help."

For almost a decade, Tracey has previously been employed by The Salvation Army, where she worked closely with Salvation Army churches and particularly with young people, in training and encouraging them to grow in ministry. While the work that Tracey finds herself in now with The Salvation Army is dramatically different, she is seeing the blessings of the work she is in now. "It's good at this stage because I'm starting to hear the really good stories. I had someone call me as they were walking out the door of the real estate agent to tell me that they'd signed for a new house. To hear someone excited about the new house when you've seen them totally gutted, that's really exciting."

While it has meant some significant changes to her family life, Tracey's husband and their two girls have been supportive of her role. "I would rather know that this work was being done ... because you have to do something. One day I might be the person finding it very hard to ask for help," says Tracey.

Tracey has taken on the role of Recovery Team Leader for the NSW bushfires to help her community move forward.
Photo: Adam Hollingworth



Family fun day unites community

Hundreds of Blue Mountains residents turned out for a family fun day on 18 October at Winmalee High School.

The community event was for residents from Winmalee, Hawkesbury Heights, Yellow Rock and Springwood who were affected by the 2013 NSW bushfires. The day was held following the 12-month anniversary of the fires on 17 October.

The Salvation Army was privileged to work with other local organisations and the local council to organise the event. It gave the community an opportunity to come together to create some fun memories.

The day started with a blessing of the fleet of local fire brigades, police, ambulance and State Emergency Services, carried out by the Blue Mountains Rural Fire Service Chaplain, Reverend Keith King. There was plenty on offer throughout the day, including live music, face painting, jumping castles, food stalls, kids craft, medieval battles, animal petting zoos and an artwork display, all carefully patrolled by “storm troopers” and “vikings” roaming the event.

Local fire brigades and emergency services personnel, including The Salvation Army and SES, were also on site providing information about preparing for the upcoming fire season.



Salvation Army Emergency Services personnel were on hand at the family fun day.
Photo: Adam Hollingworth

Moving forward one step at a time

The Salvation Army is committed to standing by those affected by a disaster for as long as it takes to see healing and restoration. Over the past 12 months, there has been significant progress made in the communities affected by the 2013 NSW bushfires, but there is still more to be done.

The allocation of funds set aside for Phase 3 of the recovery process, which will come into effect in early 2015, will be used to meet the needs of people where they are at in rebuilding their lives.

Many people are getting to the stage of acquiring a new house, either by rebuilding on their existing land or purchasing another property. For others who aren't at this stage yet, they will still be paying to rent a property.

This funding could include rental assistance for people who are still waiting to rebuild or purchase a new property, house furnishing, or counselling to complete the healing process.

To assure these final funds are distributed in the best way, the Community Advisory Board will give consultation and approval over all grant applications.

The Bushfire Recovery Centre will remain in the centre of Springwood until the end of March 2015. At this time, it will be relocated to the Springwood Salvation Army church building. It will continue to operate as a bushfire recovery centre for as long as it is required.

The Salvation Army, however, will continue to operate all its services in the Springwood communities and surrounding areas, working with vulnerable people every day and meeting their needs.

Moving forward strategically

The Salvation Army in Australia has been responding to disasters and other crisis situations since 1887. Every event is unique, but there is always a trail of destruction which often means months, and sometimes years, of working together with communities to bring restoration and healing.

Natural disasters – whether it's bushfires, floods, earthquakes or cyclones – are becoming much more common and severe in Australia, so The Salvation Army is seriously looking at the way it responds and the increasingly vital role that it plays in the wake of these events.

Salvation Army officer Major Topher Holland has recently stepped into the new role of Territorial Director for Strategic Disaster Management for NSW, ACT and Queensland.

His role will focus on strategically co-ordinating The Salvation Army's response to future disasters through planning, training and resourcing, as well as community building.

Major Holland will develop a territorial disaster management team, which will work with Salvation Army personnel and other emergency services to further improve short-term and long-term response, a strategy based on a “prevention, preparedness, response, recovery” model.



The More family (from left) Quentin, Yvonne, Peter and Ashley outside their new home being built in Glenbrook. Photo: Adam Hollingworth

Moving forward with gratefulness

It's hard to imagine someone finding positive situations in a disaster. But for Peter More and his family, they've done just that. Just 12 months ago, Peter, his wife Yvonne, and their four children came to terms with a very harsh reality – their family home in Winmalee and everything they owned had been lost in the devastating bushfires. All that remained of their home was the foundation brickwork.

For 19 years, Peter, a high school teacher, would spend every holiday and most weekends working on their home. "I felt a great sense of satisfaction providing such a lovely place for us all to live."

The Mores were one of the first families to come into contact with The Salvation Army on that fateful day of 17 October 2013. Fifteen-year-old Ashley, who is a cadet with the Rural Fire Service, was on the job when he heard the terrible news. The Salvation Army's NSW Rural Fire Service chaplains, Majors Ian and Kerry Spall, were at the Winmalee Rural Fire Station at the time the news came through. They were able to be with Ashley until he was reunited with his family.

In the weeks following the fires, the Mores were able to seek assistance at the relief centre in Springwood, accessing the basic necessities on offer and various social services to assist with the next step moving forward.

The Mores have decided to move to Glenbrook, situated in the Lower Blue Mountains, where they have already purchased a block of land and demolished the existing house. "We'd always thought that we'd eventually like to move further down the mountains. So when the bushfire happened, it was a fairly easy decision to make," said Peter. The Mores had a Phase 2 rebuild grant approved, giving them the confidence to start rebuilding despite having trouble selling their old block.

Reflecting on where they would have been without The Salvation Army's support, Peter says, "I think we'd still be much more traumatised by what happened. I feel like we've got over the trauma to a large extent. It would

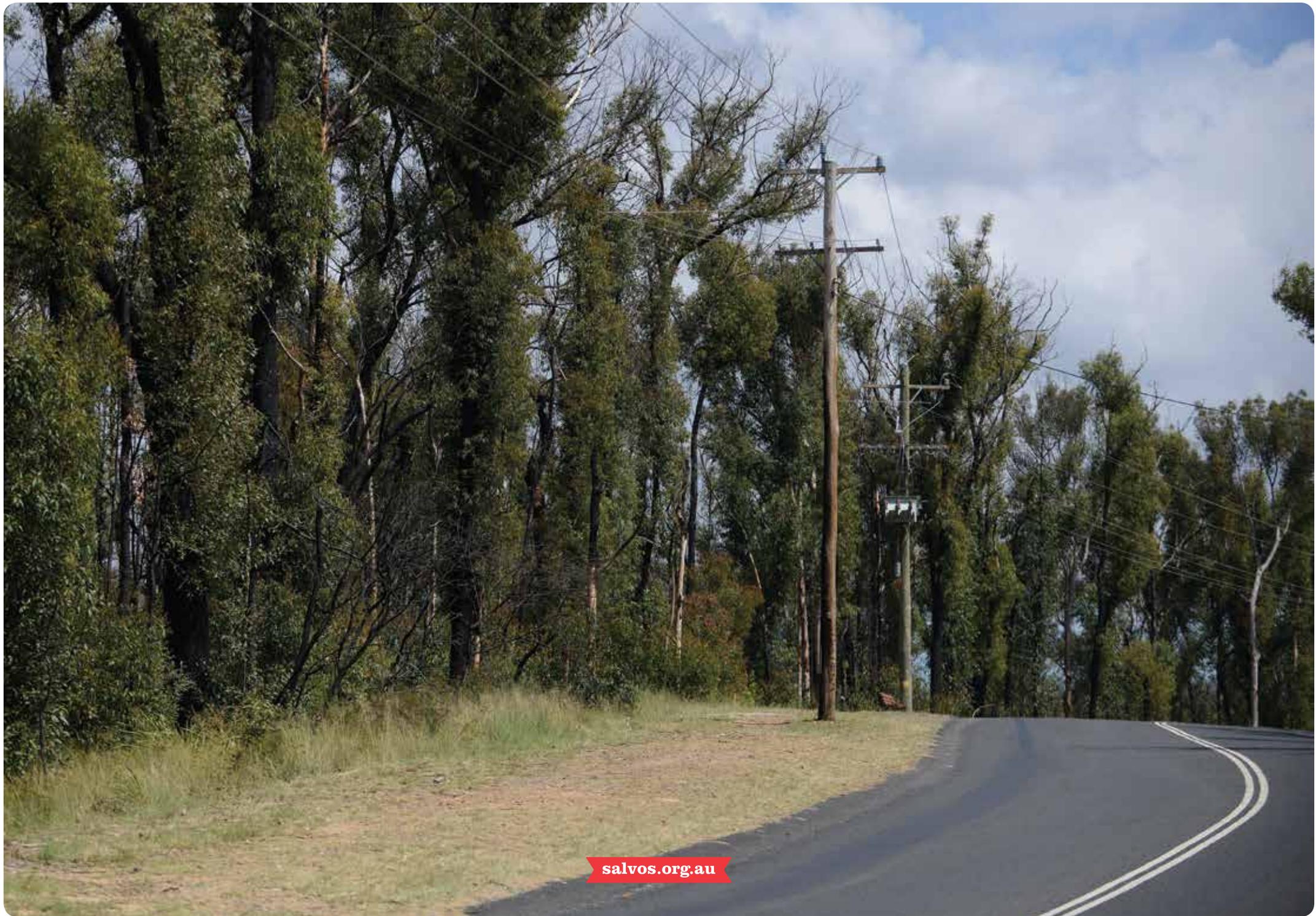
have taken a lot longer to recover emotionally if we hadn't had the support of The Salvation Army.

“What am I most grateful for? I think people’s desire to help. Their desire to give of themselves and their resources to help us get back on our feet.”

“They really made an effort to help us in lots of different ways. That really was tremendous. It meant we could get through that difficult period much more easily. I think, too, there are a lot of good memories. It’s been a lot more of a positive experience than it would have been otherwise. It would have been a really negative experience.”



The More family in the days following the bushfires. Photo: Shairon Paterson



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