



National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army)

May 2025



About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at: <

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>>





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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children. Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

The Salvation Army is a worldwide movement known for its acceptance and unconditional love for all people. We love unconditionally, because God first loved us. The Bible says, “God so loves the world” (John 3:16, RGT). As both a church and charity, we believe all people are loved by God and are worthy of having their needs met. Everyone is welcome to find love, hope, and acceptance at The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory wishes to acknowledge that members of the LGBTIQ+ community have experienced hurt and exclusion because of mixed comments and responses made in the past. The Salvation Army is committed to inclusive practice that recognises and values diversity. We are ensuring our services affirm the right to equality, fairness, and decency for all LGBTIQ+ people, rectifying all forms of discriminatory practice throughout the organisation.

We seek to partner with LGBTIQ+ people and allies to work with us to build an inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe environment in every aspect of Salvation Army organisation and services. Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected.

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: salvationarmy.org.au/about-us





Executive summary

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee (the Committee) in relation to the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army).

In this submission, The Salvation Army draws on our experience providing disaster response through Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES) and highlights the important and impactful contribution of volunteers to disaster recovery.

This submission responds broadly to the terms of reference and covers:

- the barriers to onboarding spontaneous volunteers for disaster response;
- how young people's interaction with volunteering can differ to the general population and barriers to volunteering;
- the importance of volunteers with specialised skills and qualifications; and
- keeping volunteers safe.

The Salvation Army recommends further and ongoing consultation, through the design and implementation of the Climate Army, to ensure established volunteering pathways are enhanced and preserved in tandem with engaging and incentivising new volunteers.



1 Volunteering and The Salvation Army's climate disaster response

- 1.1 Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES) has just under 2,000 volunteers engaged and ready to be deployed following a climate disaster. In 2024, The Salvation Army deployed volunteers to 3,653 disaster response and recovery shifts Australia-wide, including 134 volunteers to Cyclone Jasper alone. As a Christian movement, volunteering is at the heart of The Salvation Army's service and program delivery.
- 1.2 The Salvation Army works collaboratively with state and local governments, emergency services, community leaders and other disaster response organisations to deliver timely and experienced SAES support to communities impacted by climate disasters. Our volunteers deliver support including around-the-clock catering for firefighters, police and other emergency agencies, pastoral care, longer-term and specialised recovery support for impacted community members, food relief and much more. In 2024, SAES volunteers served over 91,000 meals and provided recovery assistance to 31,600 people impacted by a climate disaster.
- 1.3 In our experience, volunteer delivery of disaster recovery services amplifies the benefits to the individuals and communities receiving assistance. Community members remark they experience a deeper connection when aided by a volunteer as they know the volunteer is there purely to support and walk alongside them, rather than their circumstances being a work obligation for an employee.

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“It means so much to community members knowing that they [the volunteer] choose to be there, that they care, that they're there to help and that's their purpose. It speaks volumes.”

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- A Salvation Army Doorways Caseworker

Barriers to volunteering during disasters

Spontaneous volunteers

- 1.4 During the immediate impact of a disaster, there is often an influx of individuals who wish to volunteer in a clean-up effort. Lengthy onboarding processes requiring critical safety checks and training can prevent community members from formally volunteering in the immediate disaster and discourage future participation.
- 1.5 Certifications, such as working with children checks and food handling certificates, are critical to the assistance that we provide but fulfilling these requirements during or shortly after a disaster is not practicable.





- 1.6 There is a need for the certification of skills and competencies to be verified before a disaster so volunteers can be quickly onboarded and deployed when they are needed. SAES engages and onboards volunteers year-round nationally to ensure they have the appropriate training and skills to assist during a disaster.
- 1.7 People are motivated to sign up to volunteer during imminent and immediate disasters, and the Climate Army could offer a program that can harness and store this passion for later disaster deployment that would benefit both individuals and organisations.

Young people

- 1.8 While the focus of the Climate Army is to increase the volunteering of young people, it is important to recognise that young people are already well represented in volunteering broadly and volunteer at a similar rate to the general population.¹ Young people can also experience additional barriers which discourage or preclude volunteerism. Where young people have competing study and work commitments, they will find it hard to commit time to volunteer opportunities. For many young people, this difficulty is compounded by the unpredictable hours of casual work and the highly unpredictable nature of climate disasters.
- 1.9 Ultimately, it is important to note that young people approach volunteer work from a different perspective. At an early point of their professional lives, volunteering also offers the opportunity for young people to develop skills and experience that could be transferred into other walks of life. It is key that younger prospective volunteers are informed as to how volunteering experiences can be best translated to both nationally recognised qualifications and certifications and soft skills beneficial to seeking paid employment.

Barriers to volunteer participation

- 1.10 There has been a steady decline in both volunteers and total volunteered hours throughout Australia.² This decline was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, where many older volunteers reduced their participation, and some have not returned.
- 1.11 Though this decline is seen across all age groups, young people aged 18-34 were the cohort most likely to report financial reasons as a barrier to volunteering.³ As many young people, particularly students, struggle to make ends meet, spare time from studies is increasingly likely to be used to partake in paid employment.⁴ Many young people rely on this income to cover essential expenses and may face financial hardship if they were to forego paid employment to volunteer.

¹ The Centre for Volunteering (2023). *Snapshot of Volunteering in Australia: Exploring the state of volunteering across Australia* <https://www.volunteering.com.au/snapshot-of-volunteering-in-australia/>

² Volunteering Australia (March 2024). *Key Volunteering Statistics*. <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering-Australia-Key-Volunteering-Statistics-2024-Update.pdf>

³ Biddle, N., Boyer, C., Gray, M., & Jahromi, M. (2022). *Volunteering in Australia: The Volunteer Perspective*. Volunteering Australia. <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>

⁴ Universities Australia (2018) *2017 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey*. <https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/180713-2017-UA-Student-Finance-Survey-Report.pdf>



Recognising and incentivising volunteering

1.12 The Salvation Army is broadly supportive of endeavours to recognise and incentivise the important and impactful work by volunteers.

Nationally recognised qualifications and skills

- 1.13 Due to the nature of support provided by SAES, many of the volunteers deployed during and after a climate disaster occupy skilled roles. These immediate response volunteers require specialised training such as food handling, equipment safety, large vehicle operation, and child safety awareness. As disasters can occur anywhere, at any time, training and certifications must always remain current, with many qualifications and skills requiring ongoing development. This cohort of volunteers require continued engagement throughout the year to ensure their readiness to respond to disasters and emergencies.
- 1.14 Currently, SAES does not engage spontaneous volunteers during disasters due to the training required to be ready to respond at short notice and the importance of obtaining current police and working with children checks. A national initiative to standardise and recognise volunteer skills and readiness could be an effective way to encourage portability of qualifications and streamline onboarding processes for mobilisation during disasters.
- 1.15 Though many volunteer roles do not require specialist skills or experience, all volunteering participation provides the volunteer with transferable skills, knowledge, and experience, that deserve to be recognised. The Salvation Army is supportive of recognising the skills gained through volunteering but caution the creation of any additional barriers to volunteering through creating an expectation of volunteers to hold a qualification.
- 1.16 There may be benefits from the Climate Army funding and encouraging interested volunteers to obtain transferable qualifications, such as first aid training and food handling, to both benefit the individual volunteer and enhance the effectiveness and skills of volunteer cohorts.

Volunteering safely

- 1.17 The Salvation Army provides volunteers the same workplace health and safety protections as employees, and all volunteers are insured. The Salvation Army also extends some Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services, including counselling sessions, to volunteers.
- 1.18 Climate disasters are inherently distressing events. The clear display of climate risks, and the human impacts it has, is something that can have significant mental health effects for volunteers of all ages. It is essential that when engaging young people for these efforts that they, and where appropriate their parent or guardian, be sufficiently informed of and prepared for the requirements of their volunteer work.
- 1.19 Both the mental and physical safety of volunteers is a key concern of The Salvation Army and must be central to the development of the Climate Army.



Incentivising volunteering

1.20 Volunteers add value to their communities and reduce the costs of disaster recovery efforts through donation of their time. As economic constraints reduce both continued volunteer participation and deter new volunteers, the cost of volunteering can be unachievable for many. Ways to reduce financial burdens of taking time away from paid employment, such as incentivising employers to provide paid volunteering leave to employees, should be considered in addition to any training or qualification incentives.



2 Conclusion

- 2.1 The Salvation Army thanks the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for the opportunity to provide a written submission.
- 2.2 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory

May 2025