

In the Disaster Zone

Update on Cyclone Yasi relief effort by The Salvation Army

Cyclone Yasi was the largest and most powerful cyclone to hit Queensland in living memory. When it made landfall in North Queensland about 1am (AEDT) on February 3 it began to carve a path of destruction and devastation across far north Queensland that will take months and years to recover from.

The hardest hit communities were Cardwell, Tully, Innisfail and Mission Beach which suffered massive destruction. But in the aftermath of the cyclone, destruction was caused by major flooding and storm surges in towns as far afield as Townsville, Ingham, Giru and Cairns.

The cyclone left 150,000 homes without power and thousands were made homeless as their houses were literally pulled apart by the cyclone's force. Water supply across the affected areas has since been compromised, leaving many towns with a shortage of drinking water.

Right from the start of the disaster, The Salvation Army was on hand to assist. The following diary of events was compiled by Captain Meaghan Gallagher and Major Bruce Harmer from The Salvation Army's Central and North Qld Division:

3rd February

"...Just starting to assess the damage and see what is required and where. Waiting for power to be restored in many areas of Far North Queensland.

In Cairns:

- SAES [Salvation Army Emergency Services] are feeding emergency services crews.
- Centennial Lodge, which provides crisis accommodation for the homeless, had to be temporarily evacuated but the residents are now back in the building. There is damage to the front and back gates, but the rest of the building is fine.
- All other Salvation Army buildings in Cairns are fine and the officers are safe.

In Innisfail:

- SAES teams are working and this morning provided breakfast.
- An SAES worker is on his way up the coast and will call in at the worst-affected areas of Mission Beach, Cardwell and Tully to assess what can be done there.

In Mt Isa:

The Salvation Army has been keeping a close eye on Mt Isa as the cyclone approaches that area, and will respond as the situation develops.

In Townsville:

- Major Bruce Harmer and his family, Captain Carole Smith, and a local family spent the night of 2 February, when cyclone Yasi hit, at the Townsville Riverway Corps.
- At the Townsville Riverway Recovery Mission large mature trees were uprooted and flung about the property, and the roof damaged.
- Many local people dropped in at the Mission and the team provided hot drinks and snacks. The Mission has a large generator specifically for such emergencies which allows them to use lights and power points in the building so they can keep functioning and offer whatever help they can.
- Captain Lincoln Stephens, Corps Officer, Townsville Faithworks, mobilised an SAES team to visit the evacuation centres and deliver ration packs to people in the centres.
- Another SAES team in Townsville have been on standby, ready to relieve the first team or go wherever is required.

6th February

With the major roads now open, Salvation Army Emergency Services crews were able to get into some of the areas worst affected by cyclone Yasi. The teams have been anxious to access these isolated areas and will remain there as long as required. "*We have no time limit whatsoever,*" said Captain Meaghan Gallagher. "*We will be there as long as the community needs us to be there.*"

In Tully:

- SAES crews are feeding up to 500 people per day. These are mostly residents, as well as emergency services crews. The Salvation Army expects these numbers to increase over the next few days as more residents return to the town, or those already there run low on supplies. Fresh SAES teams from Atherton and Cairns are going in every day, bringing in enough fresh food for the day, as it is difficult to find cool rooms.

In Cardwell:

- SAES teams began setting up to feed residents and emergency services crews

In Ingham:

- SAES teams are feeding 150 people per day - mostly residents and emergency services crews.

In Townsville:

- SAES teams will finish their catering operations on Monday, 7 February, as power has now been restored to most areas in the city.

In Mt Isa:

- As the storm hit it brought a night of wind and torrential rain, but so far there has been no report of damage. All those communities between the coast and Mt Isa that have been affected by the rains are having their needs assessed by the Outback Flying Service. Most properties have generators so are prepared for emergencies but needs will still be assessed.

In Innisfail:

- As the evacuation centre has closed, the catering teams are no longer needed. A soldier from the Cairns corps, who works with welfare assistance there, will continue to provide this service.

In Townsville:

- The Salvation Army is catering for families who have come to the Townsville Riverway Corps and are staying there. Most of these people are from the hard-hit areas of Cardwell and Tully who came south to Townsville to avoid the brunt of Cyclone Yasi and now can't get back as the roads are still blocked. **The SA will continue to feed and look after these people until they can get home.**
- Meals are also being provided at Calvary Church

In Cairns:

- Centennial Lodge is still taking people in, even though they were without power until it was restored at lunch time today. They are now trying to get fully operational again

More than a meal

As well as making sure people are fed, SAES crews provide a listening ear to people starting to feel a sense of grief and loss more deeply as the cleanup progresses and decisions about the future have to be made.

Just like the crews who helped during and after the recent Queensland floods, they listen and provide referrals if necessary. They often give out the number of the Salvo Care Line, the 24-hour telephone counselling service, where trained counsellors are available for people who are needing someone to talk to.

The Salvation Army is also assessing the debriefing process for its own SAES crews. Many of the crew members have just experienced, and are still experiencing, the same thing as the people they are helping. Their lives and properties have also been affected.

The Salvation Army Response to Cyclone Yasi has been coordinated by:

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and

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