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Gifts of the heart

Maranatha Christian College Year 9 students Angela Estimoff and Jonathan Trimble helped raise \$2493 for the victims of Victoria's devastating bushfires on Friday. The school organised a "money line" on its basketball court to support Christian schools in the eastern States. Traralgon's Flinders College principal Jill Healy said two of her school's families had lost their homes. A national day of mourning has been declared for February 22 to remember the 181 people who died. Picture: Laura Tomlinson

Cutbacks devastate

Food distribution centre forced to slash food hampers for needy

By LAURA TOMLINSON

AN organisation that provides food hampers to needy families in Rockingham and Kwinana has been forced to reduce their aid from 275 to 60 food hampers a week.

Freeway Community Care was forced to make the heartbreaking choice because it does not have enough space to cater for demand.

At Christmas, Freeway Church's food distribution centre in Wellard was chock-a-block with baskets of food worth \$75 each.

Last Wednesday, the facility's freezers and fridges were almost empty and the atmosphere at the centre, which is in a shed on the same site as Freeway Church and The Kings College, was one of loss.

No one has forgotten the 200 families the agency has had to turn away.

Pastor Gerry McCoy said the hampers were a lifeline for many, but the lack of space meant the agency was forced to cut down.

"We had people crying, even the volunteers broke down," Pastor McCoy said.

"There are young mothers who are really desperate, broken families, young men who can't even afford to rent a home.

"We had to prioritise who was most in need."

His son, Pastor Mihael McCoy, said a lack of external financial support to cater for demand, as well as the amount of people using the school grounds and carparks on site, were other factors that

led to the cutbacks.

"We don't want to have to cut down — we were turned down for funding for a new building by LotteryWest because they saw it as a one-day (a week) project," Mihael McCoy said.

"We need a place twice as big."

Jane Morris, a volunteer with the agency for 15 years, said the cutbacks were devastating.

"The hardest thing is when you have people come to you and say, 'If it wasn't for you we wouldn't be able to eat,'" Mrs Morris said. "Then to turn them away... it's heartbreaking.

"Last week a woman from Singleton came up to me, cried and said thank you — she said she hadn't been able to feed her kids properly in three weeks."

Parmelia pensioners Peter and Nell Padovan, who receive a weekly hamper, said they were better off than most because they owned their house and car.

"I realise there are a lot of other people who are worse off — if it came down to it we would pull out," Mr Padovan said.

"We've been through hard times in the past.

"Things get a bit hard but you fight it."

Despite the turnaround of events, the agency still has hope — the pastors believe there was a supernatural element involved in the agency's past success — no matter how many families there were, somehow the food stretched to feed them all.

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