

Generosity to the fore

By SIMONE KERWIN

■ Welfare and relief groups praise community for support

COMMUNITY generosity continues to abound local welfare and emergency relief groups, as need for their services rises in the lead-up to Christmas.

Tanya Grant, Anglicare Victoria community development worker, said while the level of need appeared similar to previous pre-Christmas periods, the increase in donations to organisations like Loaves and Fishes Christmas Caring was "amazing".

"We had a lady who saw our first Grab a Grocery and turned up with six bags of groceries chosen specifically to fit our list of suggested items," she said.

"We have had a few times like that where people have got their family together to buy groceries to donate.

"They're the things that really do warm your heart and make you realise what a great community this is.

"We have had some tough years as a community, but people are always happy to support the grassroots staff if they can see it's making a difference locally.

"And it does make a huge difference for people in need, knowing that other people care a little bit.

"There are some days when

we get to the end of the day and you get quite emotional about how beautiful people can be; that is great to see, because unfortunately you do see the other side.

"It's the fact that people do it so anonymously.

"Most of the schools donate at Christmas now, and it's important for kids to know, particularly in a society where we are quite fearful for a lot of reasons, that it's good to watch out for each other."

Wanganata Salvation Army Captain Rosie Massey concurred with Ms Grant's expectation of an influx of people in need over the next week.

"The closer we get to Christmas, the more desperate people will get," she said.

She said most people contacting the Salvation Army at this time of year sought food and toys, with increasing bills (particularly energy bills) compounding already tight finances.

"There are also a few who haven't normally sought help – half of our current clients didn't apply for help last year," she said.

Capt Massey said she had noticed throughout her first year in Wanganata that the rural city was an "extremely



DONATIONS ARE IN THE BAG: Caravan Wanganata's Lorraine Wisener and Trudy Cornish with Christmas hampers, stored in reusable Boomerang Bags, which will be given out at the group's meal sessions prior to Christmas.

PHOTO: Emma Hiller

generous community", and people were always willing to support appeals.

The Salvation Army will next week distribute gifts donated to its Knat Wishing Tree.

Capt Massey said other fundraising taking place in the lead-up to Christmas would help provide food to those in need, and local businesses were lending

a hand to support the church's work over the festive season.

St Vincent de Paul has also benefited from great support from the community this year, according to St Patrick's Wanganata conference member Pam Gardiner.

"It's been our busiest year ever; some weeks we have had 70-80 people come through our

doors for assistance," she said.

"But each year we're surprised by the level of generosity."

"It has been fantastic this year through the parish giving tree and school donations."

Caravan Wanganata food coordinator Lorraine Wisener said donations to the group's regular meals, which feed an

average of 60 people each week, had been as consistent as ever in the lead-up to Christmas.

"Donations come from individuals, community groups, schools and at collection points," she said.

"Everyone is happy to help, and there are a lot of quiet achievers out there, it's really satisfying to see."

These donations have also cradled a number of hampers to be packed, ready to give out to clients in the week before Christmas.

"It always amazes me that we start thinking we've lost on something, and then it will be donated – it's like the universe provides," Lorraine said.

Ms Grant said the fact all welfare and emergency relief groups in the rural city worked well together made the going much easier.

"We might have excess, and make the call that we've got a heap of fresh produce, to find out where we can take that and who can use it," she said.

She encouraged anyone who would still like to donate pre-Christmas to continue the season of generosity.

"There are so many organisations, it doesn't matter who you give to, whether it's your local church or sporting organisation, or any other group," she said.