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MEDIA RELEASE – ALCOHOL AWARENESS WEEK 2010

The Salvation Army’s annual Alcohol Awareness campaign looks this year at why people drink alcohol, have they tried to reduce the amount they are drinking and if they’ve been unsuccessful in that effort, why?

New Roy Morgan Research being released by The Salvation Army on Monday, 13 September, concludes the consumption and misuse of alcohol remain major elements of the Australian way of life. It reveals, for example, that 12% of people sometimes drink simply because they want to get drunk (2.1 million people), and that within this overall number one in three 18-24 year olds reported that they sometimes or often consume alcohol because they want to get drunk.

The research estimates more than 7% of people often or sometimes drink alcohol “in order to feel normal” (approximately 1.3 million people).

The research also shows that in the past year 26.5% (approximately 4.8 million people) have deliberately cut down on the amount of alcohol they were drinking at the one time. Nearly 28% (approximately 5 million people) deliberately went without alcohol for a week.

In an encouraging move, The Salvation Army says the new research shows that in the past 12 months, 16% (approximately 2.9 million people) deliberately changed their drinking habits so that at least one day a week was alcohol free.

The Salvation Army’s new alcohol awareness research examined reasons why people drink alcohol, whether people have tried to cut down on alcohol and why they have failed if they’ve been unsuccessful.

Roy Morgan Research has carried out a major survey for The Salvation Army. The results may surprise many. The research will be launched on Monday, 13 September across Australia.

The Salvos’ annual national campaign is not an anti-alcohol initiative but seeks to create more debate in the community about the real impact alcohol is having on society.

The new Roy Morgan Research estimates that:

- 2.1 million people *sometimes* use alcohol because they want to get drunk (12.1%), with a further 334,000 people *often* using alcohol because they want to get drunk (1.8%).
- 975,000 people *sometimes* drink alcohol “in order to feel normal” (5.4%) with a further 397,000 people *often* drinking “in order to feel normal” (2.2%).

When it comes to cutting down on alcohol consumption, The Salvation Army’s new research estimates that:

- In the past 12 months 4.8 million people have deliberately cut down on the amount of alcohol they were drinking at the one time (26.5%).
- 475,000 people have tried unsuccessfully in the past 12 months to cut down on the amount of alcohol they were drinking at the one time (2.6%).
- 5 million people had deliberately gone for at least a week without alcohol in the past 12 months (27.9%) with 527,000 people trying unsuccessfully to go for a week without alcohol (2.9%).
- In the past 12 months 2.9 million people had deliberately changed their drinking so one day a week was alcohol free (16.3%), while 536,000 had tried unsuccessfully to do this (3.0%).

The Salvation Army’s Major Peter Sutcliffe said, “The new campaign is urging everyone to look at their lifestyles and ask more questions. Alcohol is so ingrained in society. It’s just everywhere. A key part of this initiative is to get people to stop and ask do we need to have alcohol all the time when we celebrate or when we have a meal or wind down. Just because people might drink out of habit, does that mean such consumption needs to continue? We’re asking people to stop for a moment and ask themselves more questions about their lifestyle choices.

“What we do know is that the social and economic costs of alcohol are simply enormous. This new research is designed to promote more debate about what is really happening. It is very helpful, we believe, to regularly have a really good look at why people are drinking and what are the drivers behind people’s drinking habits. The Salvation Army is extremely concerned about the negative impact of alcohol misuse on the community – on individuals and on families.

“We see the impact of alcohol abuse every day. People who are experiencing relationship breakdowns or family problems. Victims of violence and people who have lost their jobs. The research shows alcohol consumption remains very high. It’s remarkable to see how many people are actively using alcohol to relax or wind down ... many millions of people are doing exactly that. It’s alarming to think that millions of people use alcohol because they want to get drunk.

“Obviously this research shows trends based on a standard sample size. It shows that 32% of 18-24 year olds reported they often or sometimes consume alcohol because they want to get drunk.

People have revealed all kinds of reasons for why they consume alcohol, and the research estimates that:

- 6.1 million people *sometimes* drink alcohol because the people they were with were drinking (34%), and another 2.0 million (11.2%) *often* drink for this reason.
- 6.7 million people *sometimes* drink alcohol to go with a meal (36.9%), and another 3.6 million *often* drink to go with a meal (20%).
- 1.3 million people *sometimes* drink alcohol to stop feeling down or depressed (7.2%), and another 178,000 (1%) *often* drink for this reason.

- 975,000 people *sometimes* drink alcohol in order to feel normal (5.4%), and another 397,000 (2.2%) *often* drink for this reason.
- 7.8 million people *sometimes* drink alcohol to be sociable (43%), and another 4.4 million people *often* drink alcohol to be sociable (24.3%).

The research also estimated that:

- In the past 7 days 1.2 million people had alcohol every single day (7.1%).

Major Peter Sutcliffe added “It’s surprising to see more than 1.3 million people are sometimes or often drinking alcohol in order “to feel normal”. This obviously has to raise wider questions about what is really happening in our community.

“This new research clearly confirms alcohol is a key part of the way people celebrate with millions of people revealing that they link alcohol and celebrations together. We believe it is time to step back and ask more questions about this. Why is it that we feel alcohol must be part of celebrating and being sociable? Why is it so alcohol so entrenched in our society?”

“The fact that many people have now said they are taking action to cut down at some level is clearly encouraging. It is good to see close to three million people appear to have deliberately changed their drinking patterns so that one day a week is alcohol free.”

Celebrations and habits also featured in the new research:

- 26.4% reported that when they drink alcohol it was often because they were celebrating (approximately 4.8 million people) and 47.3% said it was sometimes because they were celebrating (approximately 8.6 million people).
- 43% said when they drink alcohol it was sometimes to be sociable (approximately 7.8 million people) and another 24.3% said it was often to be sociable (approximately 4.4 million people).
- 14% said that when they drink alcohol, it is sometimes just out of habit (approximately 2.6 million people) and another 7.6% said that is often just out of habit (approximately 1.4 million people).

The research indicates that 5.5% of people (approximately 989,000 people) had unsuccessfully tried cutting down their alcohol consumption in the last 12 months by either cutting down the amount they drink at one time, going for at least a week without drinking, or by having at least one alcohol-free day a week. Of these people who were unsuccessful in cutting down on their drinking in these ways, the most common reasons given were:

- It was a hard habit to break.
- They had been having a difficult time, or going through a stressful period.

Gerard Byrne, The Salvation Army’s Recovery Services Clinical Director said, “We continue to be concerned about the simple fact that there are huge issues that need to be addressed in the community. People are becoming more and more concerned about personal safety. We know issues with mental health are on the rise and it’s been clearly established that long-term heavy drinking is a known risk factor for depression and anxiety. And, of course, alcohol abuse has all kinds of links to gambling because it lowers inhibitions and impairs judgement.

“To some degree drinking alcohol is still treated as if it is quintessentially Australian. It’s vital we have more debate about alcohol – why we are drinking and how we can reduce the real impact of what’s happening. This major new research underlines there’s still much to be concerned about.

“Our message is that if you are struggling with alcohol, don’t give up trying to overcome your habits, because you can beat issues. Alcohol is insidious in the way it can creep up on a person. We need more education out there. It is not easy to break habits but it can be done. The community is starting to wake up to what is really happening and we believe the tide is starting to turn.

“There are definitely lots of people out there who want to get out of our current alcohol culture. A lot of people want to change their habits. We have to take much more responsibility and stop having the view that it’s someone else’s problem. It’s a problem for all of us and we can all do more.”

The Roy Morgan Research was a CATI telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of 629 people aged 14+ conducted in September 2010 for The Salvation Army. Anyone wanting to get more information should go to www.salvos.org.au.

Media enquiries to The Salvation Army media office, (02) 9266 9820 – diverts after hours.

The Roy Morgan Research At A Glance

- 12.1% of people sometimes drink because they want to get drunk. **(2.1 million people)**.
- 1.8% of people often drink because they want to get drunk. **(334,000 people)**.
- 5.4% of people sometimes drink alcohol “in order to feel normal”. **(975,000 people)**.
- 2.2% of people often drink alcohol “in order to feel normal”. **(397,000 people)**.
- In the last 12 months, 26.5% said they have deliberately cut down on the amount of alcohol they were drinking at the one time. **(4.8 million people)**.
- In the last 12 months, 2.6% said they had tried unsuccessfully to cut down on the amount of alcohol they were drinking at the one time. **(475,000 people)**.
- 27.9% said they had deliberately gone for at least a week without alcohol in the last 12 months. **(5 million people)**.
- 2.9% said that in the last 12 months they had tried unsuccessfully to go for a week without alcohol. **(527,000 people)**.
- 16.3% said they had deliberately changed their drinking in the past 12 months so one day a week was alcohol free. **(2.9 million people)**.
- 3.0% said that in the last 12 months they had tried unsuccessfully to change their drinking so that at least one day a week was alcohol-free. **(536,000 people)**.
- 34% of people in the survey said when they drink alcohol it was sometimes because the people they were with were drinking. **(6.1 million people)**.
- 11.2% said that when they drink alcohol, often it was because the people they were with were drinking. **(2 million people)**.
- 20% said when they drink alcohol, it’s often to go with a meal. **(3.6 million people)**.
- 36.9% said when they drink alcohol, it is sometimes to go with a meal. **(6.7 million people)**.
- 7.2% of people said when they drink alcohol, it is sometimes to stop them feeling down or depressed. **(1.3 million people)**.
- 24.3% of people said when they drink alcohol, often it’s to be sociable. **(4.4 million people)**.
- A further 43% of people said when they drink alcohol, sometimes it’s to be sociable. **(7.8 million people)**.
- 7.1% of people revealed in the past 7 days they had had alcohol every day – 7 days a week. **(1.2 million people)**.
- 38.3% of people sometimes use alcohol to relax or wind down. **(6.9 million people)**.
- 17.4% of people often use alcohol to relax or wind down. **(3.1 million people)**.
- 26.4% of people revealed when they drink alcohol, it was often because they were celebrating. **(4.8 million people)**.
- 47.3% of people revealed when they drink alcohol, it was sometimes because they were celebrating. **(8.6 million people)**.

- 24.3% of people in the survey revealed when they drink alcohol it is often to be sociable **(4.4 million people)**.
- 43% of people said when they drink alcohol, it is sometimes to be sociable. **(7.8 million people)**.
- 14% of people said when they drink alcohol, it is sometimes just out of habit. **(2.6 million people)**.
- 7.6% of people said when they drink alcohol, it is often out of habit. **(1.4 million people)**.
- People who said they had been unsuccessful in cutting down on their drinking – 1.2% said it was a hard habit to break. **(219,000 people)**. 1.2% said they were having a difficult time or going through a stressful period. **(210,000 people)**. 0.5% said they had been unsuccessful because they needed to conform socially and fit in **(83,000 people)**.
- 4.7% of people have had a drinking session in the past month where they consumed 15 drinks or more. **(876,000 people)**.
- 2% of people revealed they drink between 16 to 20 standard drinks a week. **(389,000 people)**.
- 0.8% of people revealed they drank more than 30 standard drinks a week. **(152,000 people)**.
- 5.6% of people revealed they drink alcohol 7 days a week. **(1 million people)**.
- 1.7% of people revealed they drink alcohol 6 days a week. **(312,000 people)**.