

21st century food parcels

Struggling workers rely on handouts

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INJURED workers struggling to make ends meet can now register for free food hampers.

The food is provided by an injured workers' support group amid claims cuts to compensation income – under the Rann Government's controversial changes to WorkCover legislation – are leaving some without enough money to feed themselves or their families.

Some are surviving on packet soup while others send their children to school hungry as they can't afford to buy food for breakfast, according to Rosemary McKenzie-Ferguson, founder of the Work Injured Resource Connection.

"We have been offering food hampers on an ad hoc basis over the past couple of years because people are having to face the choice of paying their bills or buying food, and as a result some people are going hungry," Ms McKenzie-Ferguson said.

She said the introduction of cuts to compensation payments was made under the WorkCover changes in 2008.

"People are in the situation of needing food because the system takes people down to 90 per cent of their wage after 13 weeks on WorkCover, 80 per cent after 26 weeks and after 130 weeks they can be cut off completely," she said.

Josie Lawn, who first went on WorkCover in June 2006, is one of



SAMARITANS: Duane Ferguson and Rosemary McKenzie-Ferguson provide food to Josie Lawn (right). **Picture:** Greg Higgs

those injured workers who has had to put their hand out for food hampers in the past and will continue to do so.

"Getting a food hamper means a decent feed for a few days, and a packet of pasta and a jar of sauce helps get me through," she said.

The former casual sales assistant suffered injuries, including damaged nerve endings, due to the manual repetition involved in writing out hundreds of item description signs a week. "I have never been on the dole and I used to work up to 60 hours some weeks, which with overtime meant I'd take home around \$800.

"Now I only get \$300 a week from WorkCover (irregular overtime is

not considered part of a typical wage) and my weekly rent is \$235, so with bills and medication costs there's not much left for food."

Anne Bressington MLC, who has also helped injured workers with supermarket vouchers, said all South Australians should be frightened by the existing WorkCover system. "It's a ragged and cruel system," she said. "Every citizen of South Australia should be very, very afraid for themselves or their loved ones if they get injured at work."

Registration for food hampers can be made by people on WorkCover, or affected by WorkCover, during business hours from Monday by calling 8410 0121.