

# Food for All?

Food Insecurity Community Demonstration Projects  
Maribyrnong City Council and North Yarra Community Health  
Case Studies







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Maribyrnong City Council and North Yarra Community Health

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Cover: Bill Hirst works at the fruit and vegetable shop established by the Westnet Project.

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Stakeholder quotes throughout the document have been taken from the evaluation reports of Deakin University.

### *What is food security?*

The term ‘food security’ can be defined as:

*‘access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. At a minimum this would include having acceptable, nutritionally adequate and safe foods available and the ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways without resorting to emergency food supplies or coping strategies.’*

***VicHealth Terms of Reference for the Food Insecurity Demonstration Projects***



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## Introduction

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In a country full of food it has been difficult to gain support for food security strategies that can make a real difference to people's health and lives.

VicHealth's *1999–2002 Strategic Directions* document recognised healthy eating as a priority health action area. The Department of Human Services lists improving food security for vulnerable groups as a priority issue to improve nutrition in Victoria (DHS 1997).

Having adequate and nutritious food is the basis of good physical and mental health. Recognising that the greatest population health gains can be achieved by ensuring government policies and strategies support food security for everyone, and by assisting people living in the most disadvantaged areas, VicHealth and the Department of Human Services provided funding for two demonstration projects. In 2001, expressions of interest were sought from local government, or organisations in partnership with local government, to undertake a community demonstration project addressing food insecurity.

**The City of Maribyrnong**, in partnership with the Western Region Community Health Centre (WRHC), local agencies, communities and residents, undertook a food insecurity demonstration project to develop, implement and evaluate innovative and sustainable strategies to reduce the impact of food insecurity in the City of Maribyrnong. **North Yarra Community Health**, in partnership with Yarra Community Housing and the City of Yarra, developed the Yarra Food Insecurity Demonstration Project to address food insecurity for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness in the City of Yarra.

### *Raising Awareness*

This document shows the first of two case studies on these projects. The second document will follow up the Café Meals and Westnet projects one year after the cessation of funding. These case studies aim to raise awareness of food insecurity and share strategies implemented to address this issue and encourage other organisations to consider how they can address this important issue in their region, town or community.



# Understanding Food Security

## What is food security?

The term 'food security' can be defined as:

*'access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. At a minimum this would include having acceptable, nutritionally adequate and safe foods available and the ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways without resorting to emergency food supplies or coping strategies.'*

### ***VicHealth Terms of Reference for the Food Insecurity Demonstration Projects***

In Australia, food security problems are invisible to most people; resources to address food security issues are limited; and a lack of awareness and understanding of food security means there are few frameworks or models to address the problem.

The Food Insecurity Demonstration Projects helped to build experience and knowledge to develop potential frameworks and models.

## What causes food insecurity?

Many factors that can lead to food insecurity are beyond the control of individuals. For example, food is no longer just a commodity needed to keep people alive and healthy; it is produced for profit. Today, access to food requires having good health and access to income, electricity, petrol and transport. Therefore, lack of entitlements, such as income, health and education, have an impact on food security.

*'As an asylum seeker I am not entitled to financial benefits for the first two years of arrival in Australia. With no income, I cannot buy food for my family, and when we first arrived I did not speak any English or know how or where to shop for food. In my country we grew our own food. People don't do that here much.'*

***Resident in discussion with Council staff***

## Who is affected?

Food insecurity can be experienced by anyone.

Research and consultation shows that the people most at risk of food insecurity include:

- **People with no, low or inadequate income** – pensioners, asylum seekers, people overcommitted financially or with no access to pensions.
- **People with inadequate accommodation** – homeless people, people in substandard accommodation, rooming houses and supported residential services with no, or inadequate, cooking facilities.
- **People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds** – have difficulty understanding the ‘system’ and accessing appropriate food.
- **People with health needs** – such as chronic addictions, disability, acquired brain injury, chronic health conditions, poor dental health.
- **People who are isolated** – with limited transport, poor mobility and frailty.
- **Single people and single-parent households** – particularly older people and recently arrived families.
- **Young people** – don’t have the skills and resources to buy and prepare food; parents don’t have the resources.

*‘People on social security benefits below the poverty line have to decide what to spend their limited money on – food versus accommodation.’*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

*‘I don’t get around as well as I used to after my hip replacement and after Bill, my husband, passed away I find it even more difficult to get out because I can’t drive. Getting to the supermarket is a chore – with all of those bags to carry. I can’t afford a taxi to get to the supermarket and I can’t carry all those bags on the bus. Some days even getting around the aisles I struggle. I don’t shop very often now. I make do with what I’ve got. I’m at home a lot, looking at these four walls with no one to talk to.’*

**Resident in discussion with Council staff**





## What's happening across Australia and locally?

In Australia most people are not aware that food insecurity is an issue.

Research indicates otherwise:

- The ABS 1995 National Nutrition Survey found that food insecurity was reported by 5 per cent of people aged 16 years and over.
- The Victorian Burden of Disease Estimates for Victoria (DHS, 2000) indicates that low fruit and vegetable intake has a greater impact on health than the use of illicit drugs and alcohol.
- The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (1999) estimates that the number of years of life lost due to diet-related disease is 70 percent of that for smoking.

To effectively address food insecurity, action is needed at the personal, community, local, state and federal government levels as well as globally.

At a national level, food insecurity is a priority issue in the *Eat Well Australia National Nutrition Strategy* (SIGNAL, 2000) and the *Australian National Food and Nutrition Policy* (Commonwealth Department of Health, Housing and Community Services, 1992).

In the 1995 National Nutrition Survey 4.6 percent of people over 16 years said that in the last year there were times when they ran out of food and couldn't afford to buy more. Based on these figures, it is estimated that several hundred thousand Victorians are at risk of food insecurity. The Working Group of the Nutrition Advisory Committee, Food Security and Vulnerable People (DHS, 2000) stated the goal was to 'increase access by vulnerable and at-risk people to adequate amounts of food that is safe, nutritious, affordable, culturally acceptable and sustainable in the long term'. The report recommended a coordinated approach involving many players over the long term.

Only a few projects, for example in Darebin, Fitzroy, Penrith and South Sydney, have addressed food security in local government areas. These projects found that food security needs to be linked to other community activities, such as housing strategies, community and urban planning, healthy cities and environments for health to have an impact.

While local government can encourage local improvements, unless the fundamental issues that affect food security are addressed, food insecurity will continue to be a problem.

*'There needs to be a greater focus in the heads of decision makers – Council staff, town planners, community agencies and possibly traders.'*

**Stakeholder, Yarra**

# The Maribyrnong Project

## An Overview

### Food insecurity in Maribyrnong

The City of Maribyrnong has a high proportion of its population at risk of food insecurity. The municipality has an industrial heritage and while higher income earners are moving into the area, many residents are low income earners. In fact, around 45 per cent of households earn less than \$26,000 per year (compared to 31 per cent of households in the Melbourne Statistical Division). The municipality has one of the highest unemployment rates in Melbourne and is considered to be one of the most disadvantaged urban municipalities in Australia (ABS 2001 Census data).

The City of Maribyrnong is just to the west of Melbourne. It is home to more than 60,000 people, almost half of whom were born overseas and speak a language other than English at home (ABS 2001 Census data).

The main problems in relation to food insecurity are poverty and disadvantage, poor housing and accommodation, lack of private and public transport to food shops and limited local food shops.

The Maribyrnong City Council (MCC) identified food security as an issue some years ago and has been concerned at the increasing need for emergency food relief in the municipality. In March 2000, dietetics students at Western Region Health Centre (WRHC) conducted research into food insecurity in Footscray. This research confirmed the increasing demand for emergency food relief and identified gaps in where and how relief was available.

In June 2000, Maribyrnong City Council facilitated a community forum attended by 22 local agencies.

This consultation formed the basis of the expression of interest submitted to VicHealth and DHS by the MCC and WRHC. The nature of the submission, the need for resources and the fact that Council already had strong networks throughout the community and the welfare sector, meant that the project was best placed in Council. WRHC maintained a role through the project committee and Muller provided ongoing assistance and advice.

### What we wanted to achieve

The overall aim of the Maribyrnong Food Insecurity Demonstration Project is to work with local organisations, communities and services to develop, put into action and evaluate short and long term strategies to reduce food insecurity in the City of Maribyrnong.



### *An idea becomes a project*

The project was initiated by the WRHC Health Promotion Coordinator and Dietitian, Sharon Muller, who involved some Masters-level dietetics students in research to explore food access issues in Footscray.

*'I was keen to extend our response from just providing advice (nutrition education) to clients to actually working to change issues such as poor access to food.'*

**Sharon Muller, Health Promotion Coordinator and Dietitian, WRHC**

The students found that demand for emergency food relief was increasing and there were gaps in service availability. When Muller discussed the issue with colleagues and others in the welfare field, she found that people were keen to get involved.

*'It appeared to be an issue that was close to their hearts and their work.'*

**Sharon Muller, Health Promotion Coordinator and Dietitian, WRHC**

### Consulting widely

The project officer consulted widely and often through community networks, residents' meetings, discussions between Council and agency staff and meetings of representatives from Council teams.

The MCC project officer set up three working groups—the *Food Relief Working Group*, *Food Supply Working Group* and *Food Security Policy Working Group* and a *Garden Audit Across Branch Team*. In addition, three specific forums were held: Food Insecurity Forum, Food Relief Forum and the Meals Access Forum. These were attended by 656 people from 33 agencies and eight Council departments. In total, there were 197 individual meetings – 64 with Council staff or Councillors, 64 with individual agencies, 20 interagency meetings, participation in 22 forums (10 with residents, 12 with agencies), 13 working group meetings and 14 steering committee meetings. (Maribyrnong City Council, *Food Insecurity Maribyrnong Community Demonstration Project, Final Project Report August 2001–December 2002*, vol 1, p.6).

*'It is starting to happen in Maribyrnong. There has been a concerted effort to engage a lot of stakeholders and peak organisations and agencies...a lot more people are knowledgeable about the issue...'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

This consultation provided information about food insecurity, what was being done to address it and plans for the future. It also helped to raise awareness and understanding of food insecurity and gain support for strategies.

*'From a fruit industry point of view...the Food Insecurity project has been interesting and rewarding. It shows large scope for additional activity and arrangements in the future.'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

## The role of partnerships

Partnerships were crucial to the success of the project. Each of the strategies relied on agencies and people getting together to contribute their skills, ideas and services. Both the forums and the project officer provided an important way for people to link up.

*'Perhaps the most important and successful aspect of this project was the development of partnerships linking people and organisations. People learnt what others were doing and connected with them.'*

**Paul Greco, MCC Project Officer**

The Project Steering Committee members emphasised:

*'The importance of coordination, the need for political advocacy, the importance of networking to inspire a variety of alternative ways of addressing a shared issue of concern. There is much that can be done in sharing the existing resources we already have through better coordination.'*

**Wood, Swinburn & Burns, Methods and Cluster Analysis, p.125**

MCC was the lead agency, with project partner WRHC providing support through a community dietitian, membership on the steering committee and attending forums.

*'As Council was the auspice agency, the relationship with them developed as more of a collaboration than a partnership. Because Council has the financial and management accountability this leads to greater responsibility within the organisation.'*

**Sharon Muller, Health Promotion Coordinator and Dietitian, WRHC**



Following this project, the WRHC is addressing food insecurity in its first Health Promotion Plan and is planning to form a Food Insecurity Coordination Committee to drive activities.

A common experience for most was that relationships began and continued through a shared commitment to project aims.

*'These partnerships have developed through people's knowledge and networks and they are maintained because we are committed to achieving what we believe is a worthwhile goal.'*

**Donald Gibb, Consultant, Fruit and Vegetable Industry**

Also common was the extension of the partnerships beyond the Food Insecurity Project and into new projects and initiatives.

*'The partnerships developed through the project have been valuable in sparking efforts in other projects. Partnerships have enabled people to expand their role; they have provided a bigger setting for our work and given us a role in greater community change.'*

**Sharon Muller, Health Promotion Coordinator and Dietitian, WRHC**

## The evaluation

The Deakin University School of Health Sciences evaluated the Food Insecurity Demonstration Projects to identify effective strategies that could be sustained and to recommend actions to address food insecurity in Victoria.

The evaluation found that the strategies chosen were largely sustainable. The Maribyrnong Project focused on initiatives that built on existing program and policy frameworks such as the Municipal Public Health Plan developing local cooperation, sharing resources and building the ability of the community and agencies to respond to the problem. It also emphasised the need to develop Council policies and dedicate resources to improve local food security.

*'If funding is available for someone to be employed, then we can look at sustainable solutions.'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

## Emergency Food Relief

### THE STRATEGIES

Emergency Food Relief

Food Security Policy

Braystone Fruit and Vegetable Supply Project

Community Gardens

Meals Access

*For further information about any of these strategies please contact the Public Health Policy and Planning Officer, Maribyrnong City Council on 9688 0237 or [email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au](mailto:email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au)*

### Our aim

To develop innovative models to improve the provision of Emergency Food Relief (EFR).

### What we did

The MCC held a food relief forum that brought together people and agencies in the region to discuss food insecurity and to examine what other organisations were doing to address the issue

From this, a smaller food relief working group was established to look at specific issues for the sector and the region. The working group included representatives from St Vincent De Paul, Salvation Army, Foodbank, Victorian Relief, Footscray Outreach Mission, Melbourne City Mission, One Umbrella, Wombat Lanigiro and the Inner Western Region Migrant Resource Centre.

*'The small group approach was effective as it allowed us to work through issues strategically and share information'*

**Hilary Bolton, CEO, Victorian Relief**

*'It is almost surprising that the forum brought together emergency food relief agencies for the first time. This enabled them to share experiences and look at ways to work together in the future.'*

**Shauna Jones, Health Promotion Officer, Department of Human Services Western Region**

### What we achieved

The food relief forum and working group:

- provided an opportunity to talk and learn;
- produced a local *Food Relief Services Guide* and distributed it to more than 200 workers from 100 agencies;
- developed an Emergency Relief Model and presented it to VCOSS for consideration by the Emergency Relief Committee;
- contributed to the development of the Food Security Policy;
- provided a link between service providers;
- increased awareness of food insecurity and of culturally appropriate responses;
- encouraged the establishment of a Sunshine emergency relief network; and
- increased access to food supplies for four local agencies by signing up with Victorian Relief and Foodbank Victoria.



*'Emergency food relief has so many splinter groups and is so diverse...it is not able to hit the nail on the head.'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

*'People are very excited by the connections made and discovering how people can work together. There have been small discoveries such as the agency of Wombat Lanigiro now getting assistance from Victorian Emergency Relief.'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

### **The people involved**

Perhaps the main achievement of this strategy was that it developed strong partnerships between agencies working in the region.

*'A major outcome was the development of relationships that have extended past the project date and provided the basis for people and organisations to continue to work together on other issues and projects.'*

**Hilary Bolton, CEO, Victorian Relief**

This strategy brought together people from local and statewide organisations. It connected agencies and raised awareness of who is doing what. EFR agencies were linked to suppliers and improved their access to food for their clients.

*'excellent participation by community workers...enthusiastic meetings...and informal partnership developed between members of the Working Group and also with other agencies.'*

**Wood, Swinburn & Burns, Multi-Site Evaluation, p.67**

### **The challenges**

The main challenge was continuing a level of funding and resourcing to support the work and finding the time and energy to participate in new programs. While there was a good level of cooperation, it was recognised that workers are stretched.

*'As with other pilot projects, it is difficult to maintain the project when there is no longer a dedicated project officer.'*

**Hilary Bolton, CEO, Victorian Relief**

### **What happens next?**

The working group is keen to keep food insecurity on the agenda. It has asked MCC and WRHC to coordinate future meetings and to support VCOSS to further promote the EFR model and VicRelief to pick up relevant issues.

## Food Security Policy

### THE STRATEGIES

Emergency Food Relief

Food Security Policy

Braystone Fruit and Vegetable Supply Project

Community Gardens

Meals Access

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### Our aim

To develop a food security policy for the Maribyrnong City Council.

### What we did

Before writing the policy, MCC Project Officer talked with community members, local organisations and Council staff.

A draft policy was developed by the Council team with representatives from the Environmental Health; Policy, Research and Social Planning; Family and Children's Services; Aged and Disability Services; Property Management; Open Space; and Community Development sections of the council.

This draft was circulated for comment to more than 100 people who participated in the project and feedback was received.

The policy was finalised in consultation with Council's Executive Management Team, and was adopted by the MCC in November 2002.

### What we achieved

- The City of Maribyrnong is one of the first councils in Victoria to develop and adopt a Food Security Policy.
- The Food Security Policy is a public document. It was adopted at a public meeting and is open to public scrutiny.
- The policy is being incorporated into the Municipal Public Health Plan 2002–2006 and will be reviewed as part of the Public Health Plan evaluation process.
- The policy guides Council's response to food insecurity.
- The policy promotes the benefits of all levels of government working together to ensure that everyone has access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

*'Having a Food Security Policy adopted at local government level and incorporated into established statutory planning processes such as the Municipal Public Health Plan will help to keep the issue on the agenda. It will also provide opportunities to link this important issue to many other areas, such as Home and Community Care, mental health, neighbourhood renewal, children's services and homelessness.'*

**Shauna Jones, Health Promotion Officer, Department of Human Services, Western Region**





### **The people involved**

Many areas across Council helped to develop this policy and input was also obtained from the Food Security Working Group and through community consultation.

### **The challenges**

The major challenge in developing and adopting new policy is to gather the interest, support and resources needed to address a new issue. Incorporating the policy into the Municipal Public Health Plan has ensured that it will remain a priority.

### **What happens next?**

The Food Security Policy will guide the way Council responds to food insecurity. The Public Health Policy and Planning Officer is responsible for implementing the policy and it will be reviewed regularly as part of the Municipal Public Health Plan.

#### *Where do I find the policy?*

You can locate the Maribyrnong Food Security Policy at [www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au](http://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au)  
It is a PDF file under P for Policy and Strategies on the A-Z index.

# Braystone Fruit and Vegetable Supply Project

## THE STRATEGIES

Emergency Food Relief

Food Security Policy

**Braystone Fruit and Vegetable Supply Project**

Community Gardens

Meals Access

For further information about any of these strategies please contact the Public Health Policy and Planning Officer, Maribyrnong City Council on 9688 0237 or [email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au](mailto:email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au)

## Our aim

To give people living in Braybrook and Maidstone better access to fresh and nutritious food.

### The Target

The Braystone Fruit and Vegetable Supply Project targets people living in an area of significant social disadvantage and where there is not an adequate local food supply. It is aimed at people who find it difficult to access fruit and vegetables, particularly people on low incomes, the aged, frail and isolated.

*'There is an absence of local community shops selling fresh food – particularly fruits and vegetables – and no outlets at all of this kind in the suburbs of Braybrook and Maidstone.'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

## What we did

The main strategy was to provide options for accessing low-cost fresh fruit and vegetables through a shop, van and home delivery.

*'Not everyone in the municipality has a car. There is very low ownership in Braybrook/Maidstone and a large concentration of elderly live there.'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

This project was raised by WestNet, a local disability organisation established to provide support and education to people with a disability and respite for parents and carers, during discussions with the Council project officer about kitchen availability.

Establishing the project involved collaboration between MCC, WestNet and the Food Supply Working Group, which included representatives of MCC, Braybrook Community Centre and WRHC. A small group of residents in Braybrook were involved in focus groups to provide understanding of local needs and the best sites for delivery and sales.

WestNet management, staff and clients were enthusiastic from the start. The facilities were well suited to a shop, with access to a loading bay, forklift, sink, toilets and entrance hall.

*'This project provides much needed community services and a way of involving people with a disability in a worthwhile, meaningful community project'.*

**Barbara Gillies, Program Manager, WestNet**

VicHealth put the MCC project officer in contact with a consultant who liaised with growers to provide wholesale fruit and vegetables.



## What we achieved

- WestNet operates a shop, a phone order and delivery service, and a van that visits public housing estates, rooming houses and elderly persons' estates.
- The project provides a valuable service to the local community and has greatly improved access to affordable, nutritious food.
- The project gives WestNet clients the opportunity to work in a shop and develop their literacy, numeracy, communication skills and improve their self-esteem. The project has been so popular that there is a waiting list for clients to become involved.
- The Braybrook/Maidstone Working Group initiated some local projects to improve community food security. They used low-cost farm fruit at community celebration days, helped the local tenants union develop a community garden and assisted the Braybrook Garden Group to find a site for a community garden.

## The people involved

This project demonstrates what can be achieved through partnership.

The MCC Project Officer worked closely with WestNet to prepare documentation for Council. WestNet management, staff and clients were enthusiastic and VicHealth provided valuable links to a fruit and vegetable supplier.

*'The partnership with the Council project officer was productive and rewarding and VicHealth provided excellent support and guidance.'*

**Barbara Gillies, Program Manager, WestNet**

The partnership with the fruit growers was also vital. It enabled WestNet to provide quality produce at affordable prices and the growers to be part of a worthwhile community project.

### *Making the connection*

Donald Gibb, a consultant with many years experience in the fruit and vegetable industry, became involved in the project through his connection with VicHealth and interest in other nutrition projects. VicHealth put Gibb in contact with MCC's project officer, Paul Greco, and, following discussions, they determined that Gibb could find growers and wholesalers who would be prepared to provide fresh fruit and vegetables and WestNet could provide the storage and distribution.

*'I was amazed when I saw the facilities at WestNet. The coolroom was exactly what was needed to ensure proper storage of bulk deliveries of fruit and veg.'*

Donald talked to wholesalers at Melbourne Markets, took some of them to WestNet to see the facilities and got them involved.

*'These partnerships came out of people knowing the right people and they have lasted because the partners share enthusiasm for the projects.'*

### The challenges

The major challenges faced by this project were:

- **Council requirements** – MCC required permits and placed restrictions on signage, opening hours and parking. Preparing plans for Council approval took months and decisions were made to comply with planning requirements so that the project could begin. Changes to opening hours and signage will be discussed with Council at the end of the demonstration project period.
- **Resources and support** – Being able to dedicate staff and funds to programs is an ongoing challenge for organisations like WestNet, where workers and budgets are already stretched.
- **Location** – As the shop is not located with other shops, it does not attract passing trade. Because only limited signage is allowed, the shop relies on promotion through word of mouth, letterbox drops, local newspaper advertisements, use of existing networks and display of information at various community venues.
- **Market monopoly** – A major challenge was entering a market that is dominated by large and experienced buyers, such as supermarket chains, that can influence wholesale activity. For this reason, the growers who supply WestNet remain anonymous.

### What happens next?

WestNet intends to continue to provide the service. This will require dedicated staff and funding and cooperation with local agencies to identify people who need the service.

*'WestNet is extremely committed to this being a sustained program five to ten years beyond the Food Insecurity Demonstration Project. We have a positive role putting something back into the community.'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**



# Community Gardens

## Our aim

To help people develop skills to produce their own food.

## What we did

Council provided information and support to the Braybrook Garden Club, the Inner West Community Garden Collective and the Braybrook/Maidstone Tenants Association community garden.

*'The Project Officer is great at communicating, bringing people together and maintaining interest...'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

Residents, agencies and people with experience in community gardens were referred to garden groups. For example, the MCC project officer referred people to assist with the Maribyrnong Detention Centre Garden Project and with preparing a funding application to the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

Council promoted the development of gardens by identifying suitable Council-owned sites.

## What we achieved

- Information and support was provided to existing and new community garden groups.
- MCC has completed an audit identifying Council-owned sites that have in-principle support for use as community gardens.

## The people involved

The main achievement was linking people and organisations to enable them to develop initiatives and connect people with mutual interests to strengthen the community they live in.

There was widespread support for community gardens, with interest from new arrival communities, schools, older community members, young people, public tenants associations, Maribyrnong Detention Centre detainees and local families and residents.

Council acted as a facilitator, providing leadership, negotiating with residents and landowners and linking experts with interested community members.

### THE STRATEGIES

Emergency Food Relief

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### **The challenges**

It is a challenge when setting up a community garden to find a suitable site that includes easy access, is big enough and has neighbours that are happy with the idea. Traditionally, the gardens that have met with least resistance are those located on 'ugly' sites. The challenge is to find a suitable site that has Council and community support.

Community garden programs need to be linked to other Council open-space programs and community initiatives that promote social connection. They also need ongoing support and resources from Council.

*'The challenge is to try to think creatively around the problems of food insecurity and to build the capacity of the organisation to address it...'*

***Stakeholder, Maribyrnong***

### **What happens next?**

Council will continue to identify suitable sites through the Open Space Strategy.

Proposed sites need a development plan that addresses issues such as:

- gaining local support;
- accredited soil testing;
- resources for construction;
- clear management and maintenance arrangements; and
- options for funding.



# Meals Access

## Our aim

To develop ideas and models that build a community's ability to tackle food insecurity over the long term.

## What we did

The MCC held a Meals Access Forum with community workers from a range of agencies. While this forum identified a lack of agencies able to prepare and distribute low-cost meals, it indicated a great interest in improving food security by increasing the provision of meals throughout the municipality.

## What we achieved

While not a major strategic focus, the project achieved some outcomes:

- Initiated a partnership between Mission Australia and the Braybrook Community Centre to provide a training program in hospitality and community cooking.
- Provided information to groups enquiring about available kitchens.
- Circulated information about resources and services available.
- Supported the establishment of a school breakfast program at Footscray City College, linked to Victorian Relief.

By raising awareness of food insecurity, this project helped Council, community members and agencies better understand food insecurity, its causes, and how to respond. The forums, working groups and consultation brought agencies together.

*'The Project is concentrating on identification of issues, getting people to work together and finding a way forward...attendance at meetings is capturing a whole range of people, agencies and workers.'*

**Stakeholder, Maribyrnong**

## The people involved

This project brought together people from welfare and food relief agencies, community groups and Council.

## The challenges

Following the Meals Access Forum, the project officer investigated ways to give community groups access to community-owned kitchens so that they could prepare and sell food at a low cost. Unfortunately most of the kitchens failed to meet Council environmental health and food safety standards and legislation relating to the production of food for sale. This information was reported back to the Council for future development of community kitchens.

It was agreed that there was not the time or resources to set up a specific working group.

## What happens next?

The Community Kitchen Access and Meals Access Forum strategies have the potential to improve food security. For example, the Meals Access Forum could be repeated with organisations that are able to improve low-cost food access (such as commercial traders, hospitals, institutions and community food services). Future community kitchens and food safety standards will comply with various environmental health and safety standards to enable more access by the community.

### THE STRATEGIES

Emergency Food Relief

Food Security Policy

Braystone Fruit and Vegetable Supply Project

Community Gardens

**Meals Access**

*For further information about any of these strategies please contact the Public Health Policy and Planning Officer, Maribyrnong City Council on 9688 0237 or email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au*

# The Yarra Project

## An Overview

### Food insecurity in Yarra

The City of Yarra is immediately north-east of Melbourne and one of Victoria's most population-dense municipalities, with just over 70,000 people (ABS 2002).

Yarra has a significant population at risk of homelessness and, therefore, food insecurity. Homelessness means more than living on the streets. It includes people who live in housing that is insecure or lacks facilities such as a kitchen and bathroom, and people who rely on friends and family or crisis accommodation. Yarra has the largest proportion of public housing renters in Victoria, with around 9,000 people or 15 per cent of the population living in public housing. Thirty-four per cent of the population lives alone (a major indicator of potential food insecurity) and many people live in temporary housing, such as apartments, public housing, rooming and boarding houses.

Homeless people are at risk of food insecurity because they have limited capacity to buy food (limited money, transport, skills, storage and cooking facilities, time, mobility and social supports) and a poor local food supply (limited food outlets, high prices, poor quality and poor variety).

While the City of Yarra has plenty of public transport and many food outlets, there are major problems with access. For example, emergency food relief services tend to be concentrated in Fitzroy. If you live in Richmond and need emergency food relief, the public transport trip to Fitzroy is quite complex and costly. So while the infrastructure is there, in terms of services and transport, it can be difficult to access.

In relation to access to food, a 2002 market basket survey of the cost, availability and accessibility of food in the City of Yarra (NYCH, Yarra Food Insecurity Demonstration project 2002, Literature Review p. iv) found that there are many take-away food shops, cafés and restaurants and a limited number of supermarkets with a range of affordable products. The survey estimates the average fortnightly cost of a healthy food basket in Yarra was \$397 for a family of six and \$104 for a single person. In the City of Yarra, more than half of the population is on an income of less than \$300 per week.

*'Choice has to be made between paying bills and transport and buying food.'*

**Stakeholder, Yarra**





## What we wanted to achieve

The Yarra Project was developed by North Yarra Community Health (NYCH), in consultation and collaboration with agencies and community stakeholders, to address food insecurity amongst homeless people and people at risk of homelessness. Within this group of people, many also have further vulnerabilities, which increase their food insecurity, for example, women and children, people with psychiatric disability, people in rooming houses or public housing, people with drug and/or alcohol dependence, welfare recipients and isolated elderly people.

## Consulting widely

The consultation was extensive. NYCH interviewed six local government departments, 18 agencies, 49 clients and one café proprietor. A range of methods was used:

- **Agency interviews** were conducted face-to-face with the project officer.
- **Local government departments** were sent information. A telephone follow-up encouraged a greater response rate.
- **Client focus groups** were selected to represent the target groups, including single men, single-parent families, people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people from Indigenous communities. Participants were given \$10 grocery vouchers.

*'The focus groups were really good in getting clients to open up. The people enjoyed talking about food; they were very opinionated. Food day-to-day affects us all.'*

**Stakeholder, Yarra**

The consultation helped to develop strategies that target people in need. It helped to identify ways to involve people in the strategies and it kept people informed and enthusiastic about the project.

## The role of partnerships

The project was run by NYCH, which already had strong links to local referring workers. Community health centres are well placed to coordinate these strategies because of their links with the community and with local service providers.

The partnerships developed between NYCH and local agencies, workers and residents were critical to the success of the projects. In some cases these have extended after the project has finished.

## The evaluation

The evaluation by Deakin University School of Health Sciences found that the projects were well supported and provided a base for projects to continue and even expand.

Overall, the projects encouraged community participation by involving a variety of agencies and individuals. By communicating with all the people involved, the NYCH project officer encouraged and supported the development of partnerships and kept participants involved and interested.

Establishing new relationships between residents and workers and building on existing relationships opened the door for people to tackle a range of issues.

Workshops and training improved people's knowledge of food insecurity issues and provided the impetus to work together in the future and attend more training.

Introducing food security to the Municipal Public Health Plan is a major task and requires the support of Council.

*'By building food security into public health plans and community health plans, it becomes a specific issue. The challenge is how to bring it into core activity in a broader context (not just homeless people).'*

**Stakeholder, Yarra**

## Café Meals Program

### Our aim

To improve access to nutritious, affordable and prepared meals by vulnerable clients.

#### *Designing the program*

This program built on a City of Yarra pilot program established in 2000 for Home and Community Care clients and was redesigned following consultation with local government, agencies, client representatives, proprietors, feedback from the steering committee, discussions with VicHealth and external evaluation meetings. This determined where the program would operate and identified venues, agencies and referring workers. The redesigned program drew on existing support and made access easier through changes such as:

- establishing venues within walking distance of rooming houses and public housing;
- referral via a worker known to the clients, not through Council;
- wider promotion of the program;
- making meals easy to access using a membership card; and
- increasing the value of available meals to \$8.80 with client paying \$2, allowing greater choice.

### What we did

Workers selected people to be part of the program and gave them a membership card that allowed them to get a meal up to the value of \$8.80 at any one of four nominated cafes, once per day, and pay only \$2.00. The remaining \$6.60 was invoiced to NYCH.

The café proprietors recorded information – the date, the client's membership number, the value of the meal and client contribution – which was used to monitor the program and for invoicing.

*'Clients...want choice about where to eat, but they can't eat in their local area because there are a high number of restaurants and few outlets cater to them.'*

#### **Stakeholder, Yarra**

The four venues that participated were a café and a hotel in Fitzroy and a vegetarian café and Chinese/Vietnamese restaurant in Richmond. These businesses were recruited by Council, who called for interest through their food business newsletter and by approaching proprietors directly. The NYCH project worker and Council environmental health officers visited the businesses and looked at price, quantity and variety of food available.

*'We need to provide something that doesn't humiliate people or make them feel like failures...'*

#### **Stakeholder, Yarra**

#### THE STRATEGIES

Café Meals Program

The Smart Food Market Bus Program

Rooming House Garden Project

Worker Education

Input into Local Policies and Plans

*For further information about any of these strategies please contact the Dietitian, North Yarra Community Health on 9411 3555.*

The NYCH project officer developed a referral process and a promotion strategy and briefed referring workers and café proprietors. They were given a referral package, which included the referral form, membership cards, promotional pamphlets, invoicing procedures, evaluation plan and client feedback form, and a client rights and responsibilities sheet. They were also invited to attend Café Meals subcommittee meetings and a food insecurity workshop. Ongoing support was provided through personal visits and telephone contact.

### What we achieved

- Between July and October 2002, 41 people were registered to use the program (capped at 41 to comply with budget) and by December 2002 the waiting list had grown to 70.
- Some clients were nominated for the program by workers they knew, others by workers who were advertised as referral points.
- Most participants were males living in rooming houses in Richmond or Fitzroy.
- Of the 41 registered members, 33 used the program. Weekly use ranged from 52 to 90 percent of participants and most used the program 2–3 days a week and used only one venue.

Evaluation of the program found that it has great support:

- **Café proprietors** felt supported and want the program to continue and even grow. Improving access for women was one example provided to show how it could grow.

*'Small businesses and traders can be champions that spread the word throughout the inner city.'*

**Wood & Burns, External Evaluation, p.60**

- **Workers** felt that the program was easy for clients to use and it motivated them to get out of their room, which helped workers and clients set other goals.

*'Helping the clients establish new habits around food and eating gives them breathing space to think about addressing other issues.'*

**Katrina Doljanin, NYCH Project Worker**

- The **client** evaluation form, completed by only 19 participants, indicated that a few had positive weight change, improved appetite and bowel health and most increased the number of meals they ate each day, from less than one to 2–3. While the barriers to shopping and cooking—lack of money, disability and inadequate facilities—remained, some participants did increase their cooking behaviour due to support from workers, talking more about food and making it a priority.



## The people involved

The project involved extensive consultation and a partnership approach, with NYCH coordinating the project and working with the City of Yarra Aged and Disability Department, local agencies, businesses and clients.

The workers who referred clients to the program did this as part of their ongoing work. Because food and eating are an important part of their clients' needs, ways to access food become another goal, like accessing housing.

*'The referring workers showed great commitment to this project and its aims by considering it as part of developing a response for their clients. They offered the program to eligible clients, helped them fill out the application form, took them to the café initially and kept in touch with them over time.'*

**Katrina Doljanin, Project Officer, NYCH**

## The challenges

- Finding suitable cafés – there was a lot of work involved in selecting venues, checking the menu, location, price, variety, and willingness to accept clients.
- Motivating people to participate – it is often difficult to get people out of their rooms.
- Budgeting – is often a problem and requires referring workers to help clients.
- Reporting – regular reporting and feedback is time consuming but is important in keeping workers engaged and enthusiastic.

### *Being part of the community*

The Café Meals Program was valuable in giving people an opportunity to be part of the community, to interact with other people and to do what other people do.

*'You feel a bit more important, coming in and buying something from a decent place.'*

**Robert, participant, Channel 7 news story**

*'Doing this means I get the chance to talk to different people and find out that I'm not the only person who is going through this.'*

**Paul, participant, Channel 7 news story**

## What happens next?

It secured recurrent HACC funding and staff time and all referring workers and proprietors were happy to continue.

The consultation found that the program needs to play a role in addressing the determinants of food insecurity, such as poverty, disability and housing.

## Rooming House Projects

People living in rooming houses are vulnerable to food insecurity—they have limited storage and cooking facilities and a limited income that is often spent on rent and personal costs.

*‘The high degree of organisation required to prepare a meal in a communal kitchen in a rooming house can’t be supported...also, the availability of the kitchen is sometimes affected by violence.’*

**Stakeholder, Yarra**

Based on community consultation and client demand, the Yarra Food Insecurity Steering Committee selected two projects to help rooming-house residents learn the skills of shopping and preparing meals.

## The Smart Food Market Bus Program

### THE STRATEGIES

Café Meals Program

**The Smart Food Market Bus Program**

Rooming House Garden Project

Worker Education

Input into Local Policies and Plans

*For further information about any of these strategies please contact the Dietitian, North Yarra Community Health on 9411 3555.*

### Our aim

To increase people’s knowledge of food and help them choose suitable foods.

*‘We paid \$11 for sausages, beef strips and lamb chops. This would usually cost \$25.00 in the supermarket. We couldn’t afford that amount of meat every week.’*

**Yarra Food Insecurity Demonstration Project, 2002, Rooming House Projects, Final Report, p.18**

### What we did

From May to November 2002, there were 13 fortnightly (pension day) bus trips to Preston Market. Residents were picked up from five locations (four rooming houses and one community agency). The NYCH dietitian went along to help the residents choose foods and to talk to them about food – what to choose, budgeting, storage and recipes.

*‘I saved heaps and got some treats for myself that would have been unaffordable otherwise.’*

**Yarra Food Insecurity Demonstration Project, 2002, Rooming House Projects, Final Report, p.18**

Lunch was provided, making the trip a social outing and giving the residents the chance to try new foods.

*‘The food was great. Eating together is nice.’*

**Yarra Food Insecurity Demonstration Project, 2002, Rooming House Projects, Final Report, p.18**

The dietitian produced two editions of Smart Food, a newsletter with helpful food tips. A couple of residents contributed a food message and recipe. The newsletters were distributed to St Mary’s House of Welcome, Outreach Victoria, Yarra Community Housing, NYCH and rooming houses to encourage healthier eating and promote the market bus program.



## What we achieved

- Twenty-five clients participated in the program, with 2–6 people on each trip.
- The program addressed some barriers to food preparation, helped the residents improve their diet and promoted a sense of community.
- The supportive and informal environment encouraged the residents to discuss ideas and issues, which helped to improve their confidence and social skills.

*'The girls at the chicken place remembered me – they greeted me with "How many chicken kiev's would you like this week?"'*

***Yarra Food Insecurity Demonstration Project, 2002, Rooming House Projects, Final Report, p.18***

## The people involved

The NYCH dietitian coordinated the program, forming partnerships with agencies and rooming-house residents.

- Outreach Victoria and Yarra Community Housing encouraged residents to participate, incorporated the program into existing rooming-house programs and assisted with sessions.
- The Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Peoples Program also encouraged and supported people to participate.
- St Mary's House of Welcome provided a pick-up point, staff and volunteers supported consumer involvement, advertised the program and provided a bus when needed. The volunteer bus driver, recruited through St Mary's, was a great asset; he developed an excellent rapport with residents and helped them with their shopping.

## The challenges

Working with rooming-house residents requires flexibility and patience. It is important to build trusting relationships with the residents and not judge them. This means being prepared to reschedule meetings and visit the rooming house at different times to catch up with residents and encourage them to participate.

## What happens next?

This program could continue with further funding through local government grants or other options such as VicHealth and DHS. Additional services could be built on, such as cooking classes after the shopping trips.

## Rooming House Garden Project

### THE STRATEGIES

Café Meals Program

The Smart Food Market Bus Program

**Rooming House Garden Project**

Worker Education

Input into Local Policies and Plans

*For further information about any of these strategies please contact the Dietitian, North Yarra Community Health on 9411 3555.*

### Our aim

To encourage rooming-house residents to grow, prepare and eat fresh vegetables and fruit.

### What we did

The project started in May 2002. The NYCH project worker talked with rooming-house residents and agencies to see who was interested and what their roles might be.

The rooming house selected was located close to the Collingwood Children's Farm, had an ideal yard for growing fruit and vegetables and residents showed overwhelming support for the project.

Collingwood Children's Farm became involved in garden design and planning and determined a budget of \$8,000 to cover materials and staff costs, which was provided by Yarra City Council.

Work began in August 2002 and the garden was completed in October 2002. There was ongoing consultation, evaluation and feedback to the steering committee, agencies and workers.

*'The project provided a focus on the celebration of food, the social aspects of eating, the home-like environment that a vegetable garden creates'*

**Toni Phillips, Horticulturalist, Collingwood Children's Farm**

### What we achieved

- The rooming house now has a vegetable patch, fruit trees, a native-grass lawn and a walking path.
- The project provided a great opportunity for residents and workers to interact and for residents to be involved in a new project.
- Feedback from the residents was very positive; they felt they had contributed and were excited about using produce from their garden.

*'As well as the benefits of having access to fresh produce, the project gave the residents a healthy, social activity. It brought them out into the fresh air to do physical work, and they developed better relationships with each other.'*

**Toni Phillips, Horticulturalist, Collingwood Children's Farm**





## The people involved

The program relied on strong partnerships between:

- **NYCH** – dietitian coordinated the project, linked the stakeholders and liaised with everyone involved.
- **Collingwood Children's Farm** – a horticulturalist, gardener and finance manager were involved providing expertise, setting up the garden, providing the budget and recording the expenditure.
- **Rooming-house residents** – the residents had input into the garden design, and have developed, maintained and used the garden.
- **Yarra Community Housing** – the housing liaison officer supported residents' involvement and a maintenance person helped with the upkeep of the garden.

*'This project provided a great opportunity for the farm to be involved in an activity in the community.'*

**Collingwood Children's Farm Manager**

## The challenges

A major challenge was getting residents to participate regularly. Issues such as conflict with other residents, illness and lack of confidence sometimes prevented them from joining in. Also, working with rooming-house residents requires patience and willingness to reschedule activities and meetings.

*'We needed to be flexible – to fit in with what the residents were doing and be prepared to rearrange times and activities – but it worked OK.'*

**Collingwood Children's Farm**

## What happens next?

The feedback from this project has been positive and encourages agencies to work together to get funding and support for garden projects at other rooming houses. Other ideas include preparing a manual on how to set up a garden in rooming-houses, cooking classes, recipe ideas and linking rooming-house residents to community gardens to encourage them to be a part of their wider community.

## Worker Education

### THE STRATEGIES

Café Meals Program

The Smart Food Market Bus Program

Rooming House Garden Project

Worker Education

Input into Local Policies and Plans

*For further information about any of these strategies please contact the Dietitian, North Yarra Community Health on 9411 3555.*

### Our aim

To deliver training and education to help workers address food insecurity in their day-to-day work.

### What we did

NYCH developed and delivered a two-hour workshop attended by 18 people from 16 agencies. The workshop covered the following topics:

- What is food insecurity?
- Overview of food insecurity project
- Nutrition information and resources
- Broader issues around food insecurity – where to from here?
- Evaluation

A *Worker Training Manual* was produced, which included an overview of food insecurity, nutrition resources, further reading and references and the literature review. This was given to participants at the workshop.

A *Cheap Eats Guide* and *Food for \$35 a Fortnight* were adapted from other resources, following feedback from the workshop.

### What we achieved

- The workshop gave workers the chance to discuss issues with other workers—all thought this was a valuable approach to addressing food insecurity.
- The workers developed a list of suggestions on how to address food insecurity issues in Yarra. These suggestions were provided to Yarra Council to consider when developing the Municipal Public Health Plan.



### **The people involved**

NYCH talked to government departments, agencies and workers. This helped identify the training needs and the type of training that best suited workers.

Workers suggested a range of training options, from workshops to written information, videos and peer support. They nominated topics, such as awareness of food insecurity, nutrition information, client relation skills and coordination of emergency relief services.

More than half of the agencies expressed a need for up-to-date information on local services that address food insecurity, such as a resource guide listing emergency relief services, eligibility criteria, hours of operation and other relevant information.

### **The challenges**

While the need for training was recognised by agencies and workers, it was important to time it right—as workers are often pushed for time—and cover issues that would meet diverse needs. While most participants were happy with the workshop time and venue, future training could be delivered differently, for example as one-hour sessions, during staff meetings at agency offices, over lunch. (Yarra Food Insecurity Community Demonstration Project, *Raising Awareness and Understanding of Food Insecurity – Methods and Outcomes*, Final Report p.7).

### **What happens next?**

The workshop was successful and received very positive feedback. Future training may include longer workshops, workshops tailored to the specific needs of agencies and workers, training conducted by NYCH staff visiting agencies, or at times and venues preferred by the agencies. Funding will need to be secured for future training.

## Input into Local Policies and Plans

### THE STRATEGIES

Café Meals Program

The Smart Food Market Bus Program

Rooming House Garden Project

Worker Education

Input into Local Policies and Plans

### Our aim

To make sure that local policies and plans consider and respond to food insecurity issues.

### What we did

The first thing was to identify local plans and policies that influence food security. Community consultation and discussion with the steering committee identified:

- Two government departments and only two of the 18 agencies interviewed had policies addressing food insecurity.
- The Yarra Municipal Public Health Plan needed input on food security issues.

### What we achieved

A list of recommendations was developed from community consultation, the literature review and the worker training. These recommendations covered food safety, nutrition education, food packaging and waste disposal, community services, zoning and urban planning, economic planning and commercial agriculture. They were sent to the City of Yarra for presentation to the steering committee of the Yarra Municipal Public Health Plan.

*'What is missing is the real need for State Government to embed health promotion and food insecurity in core programs—aged care, drug and alcohol services, the whole lot—with clear incentives to provide nutritious food.'*

**Stakeholder, Yarra**

### The people involved

This project involved input from steering committee members and discussion with local agencies and government.

### What happens next?

To keep food insecurity in the minds of local policy makers, this project recommends that:

- a representative from the Yarra Food Insecurity Steering Committee sits on the committee that reviews the Yarra Municipal Public Health Plan;
- a food insecurity policy should be developed for the City of Yarra and link to the Municipal Public Health Plan; and
- a health promotion position in Council would ensure that food insecurity initiatives are part of the Municipal Public Health Plan and are put into action.



## What We've Learnt

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1. Having adequate and nutritious food is the basis of good physical and mental health and is a human rights issue.
2. The Food Insecurity Demonstration Projects highlighted the complexity of the problem and the need for a range of actions at all levels—individual, community and federal, state and local government and global.
3. The Maribyrnong and Yarra Projects both demonstrated the resolve and the resources to start to address food insecurity in the local community.

*'A common aim of the strategies was to get people thinking about food and to make it a priority in their lives and in their work. This involved programs that address people's access to food, their role in the wider community and the social barriers to food security.'*

**Katrina Doljanin, NYCH Project Officer**

4. The diverse strategies largely succeeded in addressing food insecurity for specific target groups and in raising the profile of the issue. Building food security policies into policy frameworks such as local government Municipal Public Health Plans has the potential to provide focus and leadership and ensure there is action at the local level.
5. The projects provided key contact points to enable a coordinated approach and advocacy work. They were a valuable experience that can be used to inform future food security strategies and actions. The partnerships that developed have created opportunities for more options to address food insecurity in the future.
6. All of the strategies revealed that solutions were not found in the health sector only and local action is just one part of an effective response to food insecurity. Unless the structural factors that cause food insecurity—such as poverty, inadequate housing, inaccessible transport and unaffordable food options—are addressed, a growing number of people will have difficulty accessing food.

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