

Children's Youth and Families Advisory Group

Agenda Item: Food Security for Homeless and Vulnerable Young People and their Families

The Problem

A lack of food security is defined as 'the inability of an individual to obtain adequate safe, nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food from non emergency sources'

Community health and wellbeing measures (Community Indicators Victoria (CIV)) highlight that 6% of Victorian households were recorded as having experienced food insecurity. The Barwon South West Region percentage is 3.8%.

Particular groups and localities are more at risk or vulnerable to food insecurity. The Colac Otway area registered 8.2% of the total population as experiencing food insecurity (CIV data). The FEAST study conducted by Time for Youth with RMIT in 2010 indicated that 40% of lower socio-economic status families have experienced food insecurity by using the same measure as the CIV

People who are homeless are a particularly vulnerable group in relation to food insecurity and poor nutrition. The current evaluation of the Cafemeals program being conducted by Time for Youth in conjunction with RMIT University preliminary findings shows 85% of homeless youth subject to severe food insecurity.

Research undertaken by RMIT University & Time for Youth (formerly BYAS) during 2005 showed that homeless young people in Geelong and Colac suffer from poor nutrition which is likely to adversely affect their long term health, as well as have short term negative effects such as malnutrition, iron deficiency, anaemia, poor concentration and fatigue.

The survey of 25 homeless young people in Geelong and Colac showed that only

- 24% met their energy requirement needs,
- 20% ate any fruit,
- 40% ate some form of fresh vegetable, when hot chips were excluded from the vegetable category,
- 20% met the required daily intake (RDI) for calcium,
- 4% (one participant) met the current RDI requirements for all major nutrients.

Also of concern, was the amount of fat consumed by the participants:

- 72% consumed diets above the recommended 10% of kilojoule intake from saturated fat."

When this data was compared with studies that already existed of the nutrition of adolescents from family homes, **homeless youth showed lower intake of many nutrients, and higher intakes of sugar and fat.**

These young people have an unreliable access to food. Without intervention they typically eat one up-sized KFC or Mc Donald's meal per day, when they can afford it. On days they cannot afford it, they go without, borrow from friends, or acquire food in other socially unacceptable ways.

Most of them do not have access to appropriate cooking and food storage facilities, and those who do usually lack the skills necessary to adequately prepare and store food.

The review of research undertaken as part of the report suggested that poor nutrition of the kind in evidence is likely to have adverse effects on the physical and mental health of young people, including fatigue, compromised bone density and sub-optimal growth.

Further research has been conducted overseas since 2005 and consistently shows homeless youth suffer from poor nutrition and emergency food relief provided by charitable agencies is inadequate to meet the nutritional needs of a growing teenager.

Community Sector Responses

Various agencies in Barwon South West and elsewhere are responding to the problem in relation to the needs of vulnerable groups. For example

- Bethany Community Support has demonstrated the benefits of the Community Kitchen model for disadvantaged families
- Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda maintains the health of hundreds of homeless men and women through their daily meals program
- Social Café Programs operate in the City of Yarra, City of Brimbank, and Inner East Community Health Service for the general adult homeless population.
- Second Bite and similar food rescue operations collect leftover fresh produce and distribute to agencies to feed homeless and vulnerable individuals and families.

Cafe Meals

Café Meals Club was established in Geelong and Colac in 2006 after an extensive undergraduate research program was conducted into the Nutrition of Homeless Young People in Geelong (2005), through Time for Youth and RMIT University.

The results of the dietary analysis conducted as part of this research were presented to the young people, youth and social workers in separate focus groups. Several proposed food related interventions were also presented. The young people decided unanimously the intervention they preferred was what is now called Café Meals Club.

Café Meals Club comprises four key elements:

1. The 'core' component - **subsidised meals for homeless and 'at risk' youth** in selected 'youth friendly' cafes. A young person in the program pays \$3.00 to the café for a meal up to the value of \$12.00. This enables them to obtain healthy food in an affordable, socially acceptable and socially inclusive way. The cafes are reimbursed through philanthropic funding that is raised by Time for Youth.

2. **Refuge youth breakfast program:** Youth being accommodated in the youth refuge, City Limits, are invited to a café with a youth worker one day per week to introduce the young people to the café meals club program. This informal setting provides an ideal forum to answer questions and provide information related to food security and broader youth support services available

3. **Breakfast program:** A free cooked breakfast is available most Wednesday mornings in Geelong City for any youth who attend. The program is jointly run by paid staff and volunteers and utilizes donated and purchased food.

4. **Cooking classes in lead tenant and transition houses.** Young people who are unable to return to their family home, are placed in mid-term housing where they are required to develop independent living skills. Many of these young people do not have budgeting, food purchasing, cooking, food storage skills. Where resources allow, Time for Youth works with young people in these housing to improve their food skills and enhance their chances of eating healthy meals on a low income.

Café Meals Club accepts referrals from all youth agencies in Geelong and Colac.

Currently Cafemeals referral agencies include, but are not limited to:

- Time for Youth
- Barwon Youth
- Child FIRST (Bethany)
- Diversitat Youth Xpress, SWEET and job skills programs
- Clockwork
- Headspace
- Jigsaw
- Horizon House
- WhiteLion
- MacKillop Family Services
- Corio Bay Senior College
- Norlane High School
- North Geelong High School
- Bellarine Community Health Service

Several cafes and restaurants are engaged with Cafe meals. The cafe staff and owners receive information, guidance and support in relation to the needs of vulnerable young people. The cafes in the program are 'youth friendly and serve nutritious meals.

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| Munch n'Crunch | 115 Ryrie Street, | Geelong |
| Cafe GO | 37 Bellerine Street, | Geelong |
| Spresso Bar | 80 Ryrie Street, | Geelong |
| Spuds on High | 161a High Street, | Belmont |
| Corio Bay Senior College Café | Campus | Corio |
| Norlane High School | Cox Road | Norlane |
| North Geelong High School | Separation Street | North Geelong |
| Colac Country Food Store | 136 Murray Street, | Colac |

Café Meals Club has up to 40 members at any one time. Since commencement in 2006 more than 350 young people have benefited from the program.

At October 30, 2010 there were 12 young people on the waiting list. The duration of membership depends on individual circumstances, but varies from 6 or 8 weeks to 12 months – or longer if their circumstances remain extremely disadvantaged. The average length of membership is 3 to 6 months.

Issues

- Community agencies working closely with vulnerable youth and families are more likely to be able to identify and document the problem of food insecurity with vulnerable populations.
- Community agencies are more likely to be able to engage vulnerable populations in developing solutions. For example vulnerable young people in the homelessness, youth justice, protective and leaving care programs generally require engagement strategies and services that are youth friendly
- However the same community agencies that are exposed to the problem and can engage families and young people in developing solutions, are less likely to have the resources to adequately address the problem
- Food security initiatives for vulnerable young people and families in BSW, such as Cafe meals rely upon philanthropic trusts for funding
- This does not appear to be the case elsewhere. A number of food security programs for vulnerable and homeless groups in Melbourne, for example in The City of Yarra and City of Hobsons Bay, City of Maribyrnong, City of Boorondarah, are sustained by HACC flexible service response funding.
- Community Services responding to the needs of homeless adults in The City of Yarra also receives significant local Government funding support.
- There does not seem to be a common approach by HACC State-wide in relation to food security particularly for young people and families.
- There is no Government Policy framework for food security programs for vulnerable groups of young people and families
- There is a dearth of research and evaluative material on the problem particularly in relation to vulnerable and homeless youth and its solutions

Research and Evidence base

Time for Youth has received a grant of \$232,000 (over two years to 2012) from The William Buckland Foundation administered by ANZ Trustees to demonstrate and evaluate the Cafe Meals program and examine food security in Barwon for vulnerable young people.

Specifically this project aims to undertake a detailed, evidence-based evaluation of the Café Meals Club Project which can be used to inform policy development for addressing food insecurity in homeless and 'at risk' youth. The aims of the Research are

- To describe the social and nutritional health context of vulnerable youth participating in The Café Meals Club.
- To produce an evidence-based evaluation of the different components of the Cafe Meals program including an assessment of the changes to diet related health risks and social inclusion for young people in the Cafe Meals Club program.
- To develop recommendations for policy and service delivery models focused on the social and nutritional health of young people at risk
- To pilot recommendations arising from the staged evaluations.
- To examine the short term social impact on key stakeholders in the cafe meals club project (for example cafes owners and staff)
- To gather evidence of changing awareness of the Geelong community of issues surrounding 'at risk' youth and food insecurity.

This project is being undertaken by Jill Whelan Nutritionist with Time for Youth who is enrolled at RMIT University to do an honors research project in 2010. Jill is supervised by Dr Anne Sibbel RMIT who has extensive experience in the area of community nutrition and sustainable food supply. The second supervisor, is Prof. Chris Chamberlain who has extensive experience in research into homelessness and evaluation strategies.

Recommendations

That the Children's Youth and Families Advisory Group

- Consider the problem of food insecurity among vulnerable children, youth and family groups.
- Examine the locus of responsibility within government for responding to this need particularly in relation to vulnerable children and young people
- Suggest links with Government that may be helpful to establish in developing and evaluating the above research project

Mike Kelly
CEO Time for Youth
October 4th 2010

References

Community Indicators of Victoria 2010 Measuring Wellbeing
www.communityindicators.net.au/well-being reports

FEAST Families Eating and Socialising together
VICHEALTH link and Learn project
Time for Youth and RMIT 2010

Improving the Nutrition of Homeless Young People in Geelong
Jill Whelan RMIT & Barwon Youth Accommodation Service (BYAS) study 2005