

“Being At The Table: A Local Partnership Response To Food Insecurity”



Welcome and thanks for joining this session on NGOs and Local Food Projects. I'm presenting here today on behalf of the SSWAHS Food Security Team and our partners, the staff and volunteers at Tallowood Community Centre, the Junction Works Ltd.

And I'll be giving an overview of the ways in which a The Tallowood Community Centre staff and volunteers have taken up the issue of food insecurity in their local community through partnerships.

Getting Started

- **Food Security Project household survey across the two suburbs**
- **Partnership Photovoice project with local young people on food security**
- **Tallowood Community Centre volunteers and staff concerned about levels of food insecurity**



PhotoVoice Exhibition

- When we started working on food security, I would say it was the hidden problem. Once it began to be understood what we meant by using the words 'food' and 'security' together, the surprise for people was just how many people live with episodes of food shortage and hunger or fear of running out of food and not being able to buy more.
- The household phone survey of food security was conducted in 2004 and showed that in the three low income areas of south west Sydney, around 22% of households experienced food insecurity and this rose to 30% for households with children and 45% for single parent households. I'd just mentioned here that this is probably an underestimate if anything as those with limited income had already started to move to prepaid mobile phones in 2004 and the survey was only able to contact land lines.
- Another way we learnt about food security in our area was through the Photovoice Project – were we worked with a number of local partners including the primary and high school, community organisations and volunteers to give young people the opportunity to express their understanding and experience of food security and food insecurity. The images and the words of 30 young people were mounted in an exhibition of 60 photos and proved to be a powerful way for others to understand these experiences. The exhibition was mounted at the local arts centre and also at the Tallowood Community Centre.
- The Tallowood Community Centre, which had recently reopened with a new auspice organisation - The Junction Works Ltd. Was one of the partners on the Photovoice project. The household survey and the Photographic exhibition raised the centre managers and the volunteers awareness of food insecurity and its effects and wanted to work with us to see what they could do as a community centre.

Centre Activities

- **Community Kitchen program**
- **After School cooking program**
- **Community Nursery / produce gardens**
- **Emergency Food Relief**



A community centre like Tallowood can have a role through the programs it offers and through partnerships with other services.

It was also important that at Tallowood they saw that they could address some aspects of food security and be advocates on others. I'd like to mention here that these programs and activities were only some of the ways the centre and the Food Security Team were working with the community. There was a large and well supported community interagency group of community leaders and human service agencies working together around supporting families and children, young people, older people, culturally diverse communities, and community safety, to name a few.

I'll talk now about each of the food security related activities the Tallowood Community Centre became involved in.

Community Kitchen

- Cook low cost, healthy meals
- Sharing recipes and ideas
- Nutrition information
- Social support
- Links to other services



In the Kitchen



A Community Kitchen is a place where people come together to prepare food and share a nutritious meal and a chat. The members are encouraged to share their knowledge and skills and to have ownership of how the Kitchen runs. This includes choosing recipes, planning the menu for the sessions and actively participating in all activities.

The focus for the food is low cost, healthy food for families and individuals with the opportunity to try new foods. When income is limited it can be seen as risky to buy something you don't know if you or your family will like, so the community kitchen provides a place for this experimenting and learning about new foods and new ways to prepare meals. The learning is informal but is also a way to demonstrate practical ways to make the recommended changes for a healthy diet. The participants are encouraged to say what they thought about the meal they have cooked, if it's something they would cook at home or share with others, that kind of discussion.

The focus for the group is being a supportive place where new friendships can be made and there's the opportunity to have a chat.

Discussions at the Community Kitchens range across many topics including food choices, favourite recipes, families, health issues, shopping tips like where to get the best value meat, who has the best value fruit and vegies, problems and hints about children being fussy about food and much more.

After School Cooking Program

- **Develop cooking skills & nutrition knowledge**
- **Growing fruit & vegetables**
- **Have a healthy snack**
- **Opportunity to try new foods**
- **Supportive environment**



Garden bed planted by children from after school group

This program is run by staff and volunteers who are passionate about opportunities for young people in the area. Like the Community Kitchen it's a friendly environment to develop new skills and knowledge and to get an opportunity to find out about food and cooking. The children have attended worm farm and composting workshops run by the Macarthur Sustainable Living Centre and have also planted out a couple of garden beds and have discovered the joy of growing their own food. Some of the children were very hesitant in the beginning about eating fresh foods like tomato but loved tomato sauce. One of the things that the children are learning is where their food comes from and what goes into foods they eat.

Jacqui, the community volunteer who runs the program told me how parents picking up their kids are turning up early so they can join in for part of the afternoon.

Community Nursery & Gardens

- Community Greening Partnership
Housing NSW Community Renewal
& Royal Botanic Gardens Trust
- Free plants & seedlings to
Housing NSW tenants
- 9 produce garden beds
- Produce to centre programs



Herb garden



New vegie garden beds

The household food security survey asked for preferred strategies people would like to see happen in their local community to alleviate food insecurity and improve people's access to food and growing fruit and vegetables was a very common response.

A number of residents and agencies, including our FS team began to work together to set up a local produce garden in the community. An initial site was chosen but this fell through.

Two of the partner organisations on the garden committee - Community Greening and Housing NSW- had been working in partnership in other areas and had come up with a idea of a community nursery. The benefit of a community nursery is that free plants can be made available for people to grow in the own yards and experience elsewhere was showing that if people had their own space and were supported with resources they would be more likely to create gardens at home. As the majority of housing in the area were cottages or town houses with yards this model was decided on. It was felt that the Tallowood Community Centre would be a good location and had the benefit of bringing a new service to the community while promoting the other work of the Junction Works Ltd at the centre. It also had established amenities like water, shelter, toilets and a secure site.

The nursery is housed at Tallowood and is run by dedicated community volunteers and a number of free plants are available through Community Greening to Housing NSW residents every couple of months. The Food Security project ensured that fruit and vegetable seedlings could be included along with the other seedlings.

Vegetable garden plots were initially included in the Nursery as demonstration gardens and to grow a few vegetables at the centre but the skills and confidence of the volunteers grew and then a neighbour offered the Community Nursery half of the their back yard so that the gardens could expand and there are now 9 very productive vegetable plots. Margaret who oversees the day to day workings of the garden plots will tell you she was a novice when she began and now has the greenest thumbs around.

The produce from the gardens are used in the centres programs, including the Kitchen, kids program and emergency food relief.

Emergency Food Relief

- Locally available support in emergency
- Nutritious and meal combinations
- Bread run
- Vegetables from the garden when available



Emergency food, bread and vegetables from gardens

Food relief is an important emergency support mechanism for people experiencing food insecurity but the nearest centre providing emergency food was 6 kms away and not easy to get to by public transport so it was decided to offer emergency food relief at Tallowood. Our community nutritionist worked with the community volunteers who would be responsible for administering the program to develop their policy and procedures and to look at what kind of foods would benefit families to make a number of nutritious meals, including food that could be taken to school. The centre also provides information about other services in the region offering emergency relief.

Volunteers pick up donated surplus bread from a local bakery to be distributed through the Centre. One morning a week residents are able to come to the centre to pick up bread and Margaret the volunteer who manages the produce gardens, picks fresh vegetables the evening before to be distributed to families who come on the day.

Transport for food shopping has been another service offered from the centre at set times, including a fortnightly vegie run to Flemington produce markets and a weekly run to the Aldi store several suburbs away. Now Aldi have recently opened in the same suburb as Tallowood.

In Conclusion

- **Measures that clearly show the level food insecurity put food access on the agenda**
- **Partnership and local input guided direction on food security**
- **Tallowood Community Centre (The Junction Works Ltd) saw food as a core business**



To conclude I'd like to say that the information from the household food security survey and the impact of the photos from the young people helped to raise awareness of an issue that wasn't well understood or well recognised in our community. But it was an issue that people readily understood once the conversations about food insecurity had started.

Our partnership with Tallowood was guided by the local situation, local input and local opportunities. The volunteers at the centre are inspirational in the way they work for their community, giving hours and days of their time, week in and week out and it's thanks to them that so much of what has happened at Tallowood has been able to be sustained and continues.

It was important too that the (now former) co-ordinator at the Centre, Marilyn, saw food and access to food as a core business of the Tallowood Community centre.

Contact Details

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Finally - These are the contact details for Tallowood Community Centre, The Junction Works Ltd, and the new co-ordinator

Community Greening (The Sydney coordinator at the moment is Steven Paul who will be retiring shortly but this number will be the same.)

And the SSWAHS food security team involved in the Tallowood Project.

I have a printout copy of the Photovoice images and narratives and some information on the household survey with me here also.

Thankyou for the opportunity to present here today.