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Addison Road Community Organisation - Report to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Covid-19 response – Presented by Rosanna Barbero, CEO of ARCO

Context

Access to food is a basic human right, vital for health and for life itself. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated urgent and well-thought-out food action because this pandemic has left no one unscathed, from the highest levels of government and industry to the most vulnerable individuals, people physically and socially isolated, unwell or financially insecure. But an urgent and effective food security response across the state has proven challenging.

Of course, many people were already struggling with poverty and food insecurity, which is why, six years ago, having researched and reported on food insecurity and sustainability, ARCO opened our original Food Pantry, with funding from the NSW EPA to reduce organic waste. With the support also of volunteers, we have grown our Food Pantry into a low-cost food rescue supermarket open five days a week. Last month we rescued 17 tonnes of food from going to landfill and provided food for up to 5,000 people.

At the same time, ARCO continues to explore other means for transitioning away from dependence on charity models of food aid provision and towards more resilient food systems and food access, for example food rescue, community gardens, a publicly engaged welfare reform campaign, together with other social justice programs and actions.

Who is ARCO?

ARCO is an organisation with an established ability to be accurate in its identification and targeting of need, and to be responsive, with a capacity to reach those most vulnerable in times of crisis.

ARCO is a community-embedded NGO with the capacity to swing into action because it knows the communities, has deeply rooted contacts, is experienced in disaster preparedness and response, and works with 300,000 people and over 200 organisations annually.

ARCO has a track record of service provision to groups and individuals that often fall between the cracks: people living with mental health issues, LGBTIQ and Aboriginal communities, arts and culture workers, international and local students, CALD communities, house-bound, and homeless people and boarding house residents, refugees and asylum seekers.

We have established local and regional food supply networks via our (highly successful) Food Pantry and our infrastructure in the community: staff, volunteers, buildings, extensive grounds with disability and public access, our Food Pantry vehicles, refrigerated vans, warehousing, refrigeration and parking. We have been building community resilience through our food assistance programmes for six years.

Our COVID-19 Response

From February 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic spread to Australia, customer numbers at the Food Pantry grew 20% week on week. New customers were turning up at Addison Road at all hours, looking for help. As other services across Sydney shut their doors because of the virus, we decided we had to act.

In virtually 24 hours, from the 20th of March, we ramped-up our Food Pantry operations and converted our community hall into an Emergency Food Preparedness and Distribution Centre. For five months, we have been providing culturally appropriate, healthy food including fresh fruit and vegetables—so important for supporting immunity—to people who have fallen through our society's safety nets:

international students, refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers; CALD seniors, isolated from their families and communities; LGBTIQ communities; single-parent households; arts, culture and gig-economy workers; Indigenous families and survivors of domestic and family violence.

We work with 60-plus other organisations, that order, collect and deliver our hampers to their communities and clients, from the Aboriginal Legal Service and Brazilian Aid, to the Exodus Foundation and Jesuit Refugee Service. People relying on us for their food security live across Greater Sydney, from South Marrickville to Penrith, Redfern to Belmore. We have even provided hampers to communities in the Central West and South Coast of NSW.

Between our Food Pantry and Food Relief Hub, we are feeding up to 4,000 people a week. And because food is a gateway to mutual understanding, we have added social and cultural support services such as multilingual information packs, service referrals, online and socially distanced English classes, emergency food hamper home-delivery, employment and legal assistance, and introductions to online training from TAFE. We have recently added a drive-

through hamper service for people who are self-isolating or shopping for dependent relatives and community members.

We have been able to respond quickly and flexibly to community need in the time of Covid for three key reasons:

1. We have secure tenure of a unique site:

- we are a known, safe and familiar place that people turn to in times of need
- we have space that gives us the ability to deliver services safely
- we can store, pack and redistribute food easily, with social distancing

2. We run an existing food redistribution system, with:

- organisational infrastructure (admin, staff, communications, financials, governance)
- food safety-trained staff and volunteers
- vehicles and equipment
- storage and delivery facilities
- regular food donors and suppliers,
- supply chain and logistics including receiving and sending corridors.

3. We are trusted:

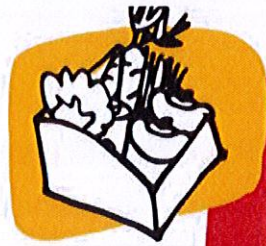
- ARCO has been embedded in the community for 43 years
- our network stretches across 300,000 people and over 200 organisations per year
- we are co-conveners of the Inner West Multicultural Network (120 Civil society Organisations) working with partners to address needs and refer to appropriate agencies.
- we are active in other inter-agencies and local government committees, grassroots neighbourhood projects, collaborations and events
- we have a large and loyal team of volunteers plus individual and corporate donors
- Addi Road is known as safe and welcoming to all people; CALD, LGBTIQ+, all ages and abilities
- we support and coordinate social groups to identify needs in their communities and work through these leaders to ensure the delivery of food, culturally appropriate information, connectivity tools and other needs as they arise.
- We have established a Zoom Aunties program and regular social media correspondence to keep connected with international students and migrant workers who have little language capacity and/or understanding of what help and services are available.

Recommendations for Action

The NSW Government should create, fund, and lead a body to coordinate approaches to food security, food research and emergency food distribution-- preparing, preventing and mitigating the impact of pandemics and building resilience.

- Don't reinvent the wheel. Ensure a whole -of -government approach. For example, the EPA has prepared organisations for food rescue and that infrastructure, with extra support, could be more widely used for food relief.
- Conduct specific pandemic research relating to emergency food distribution.
- Look to the community for expertise and experience.
- Institute an ethical, progressive, diverse and inclusive research agenda towards better food systems and a resilient food network for NSW.
- Work towards creating food systems that function for all including for environmental health and sustainability

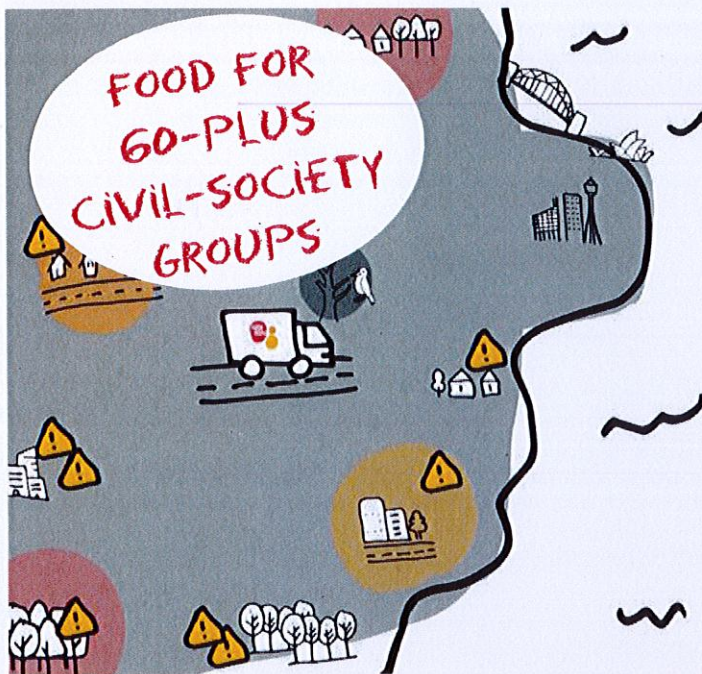
Thank you and I would like to end by saying that in my experience it is by our actions we can either compound disasters or diminish them.



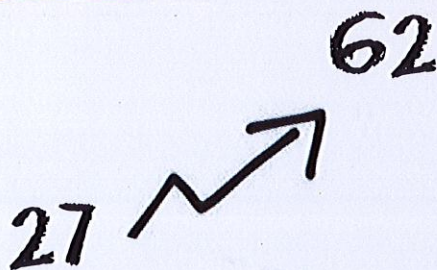
51,000 PEOPLE HELPED IN 5 MONTHS



SNAPSHOT OF ADDISON ROAD COMMUNITY ORGANISATION'S COVID-19 RESPONSE AT AUGUST 2020



ABORIGINAL CARE COORDINATION TEAM PRINCE OF WALES HOSPITAL-ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICE-ASYLUM SEEKER CENTRE-AUBURN GALLIPOLI MOSQUE-BELMORE YOUTH CENTRE-BRAZILIAN AID-CAMA COMMUNITIES-CATHOLIC CARE CABRAMATTA-CO.AS.IT-COMMUNITY CULTURAL CONNECTIONS INC.-CONNECT INNERWEST-COMNECT MARRICKVILLE-COUNTERPOINT COMMUNITY SERVICES-CREWCARE-ETHNIC COMMUNITY SERVICES CO-OP-EXODUS FOUNDATION-FAMILY SPIRIT SYDNEY-FLOURISH AUSTRALIA-GENDER CENTRE-HOUSE OF WELCOME-HOXTON PARK PUBLIC SCHOOL-JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE-KICHELA BOYS HOME ABORIGINAL CORPORATION-LAKEMBA MOSQUE-LILLIAN HOWELL PROJECT-MARRICKVILLE SOUTH COLLECTIVE-MARRICKVILLE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTRE-MERRYLANDS PUBLIC SCHOOL-METRO ASSIST-MILAN DHIYAMH-MISSION AUSTRALIA KINGS CROSS-MUDGIMAL WOMEN'S CENTRE-MUMS4REFUGEES-NEW HORIZONS-NEWTOWN MISSION-NEWTOWN NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE-PACIFIC LABOUR FACILITY-PENNY APPEAL-PRINCE ALFRED HOSPITAL STAFF-QUEER CONNECTIONS-RANDWICK COUNCIL-RED FROGS-ROHINGYA COMMUNITY NETWORK-ROZELLE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE-SHELTERS-SOUTH EASTERN SYDNEY LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT-STEPPING OUT-SURRY HILLS PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS-SWOP-SYDNEY CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL-TAMU SAMAJ NEPALESE ASSOCIATION-TOUCHED BY OLIVIA-TRIBAL WARRIOR ABORIGINAL CORPORATION-TWENTY10-UNITED FOR COLOMBIA-WATERLOO AND CHIFLEY SOCIAL HOUSING-WEAVE YOUTH SERVICES-WOMENS AND GIRLS EMERGENCY CENTRE-YOUTH OFF THE STREETS-YWCA



CIVIL-SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS USING OUR EMERGENCY FOOD RELIEF CENTRE



4,000



PEOPLE FED FROM OUR FOOD PANTRY PER WEEK

