

## **INQUIRY INTO FRESH FOOD PRICING**

**Organisation:** Belmont Neighbourhood Centre

**Date Received:** 21 May 2018

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Dear Fresh Food Pricing Inquiry Committee,

I write to you from Belmont Neighbourhood Centre in Belmont North, NSW. We are a busy and bustling community centre, serving the community on the eastern side of Lake Macquarie, and some of our most highly attended programs are our OzHarvest and Community Pantry food programs. OzHarvest collects food donations from local businesses, deliver the food to our centre and we distribute it out to the community, free of charge. Community Pantry occurs at the same time and provides clients with a box of food for \$10 per person. This food is purchased in bulk from FoodBank in Sydney at a reduced cost, and allows our clients to take home a large amount of food, pantry items, fruit and vegetables.

There are a few things that we notice, regarding food security amongst the most vulnerable people in our community.

Firstly, fresh fruit and vegetables make up only 15-20% of total food donations. The majority of donated foods are processed foods – sweets, white bread, biscuits and pantry items. While we certainly understand the importance of carbohydrates, we do receive disproportionately huge donations of white bread.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are sometimes overlooked by people accessing the service, often preferring ready-made, processed or long life products. This is due to a few factors – firstly, some of our clients are experiencing homelessness and lack basic cooking facilities; some clients are after quick and convenient lunch box items, which can easily be whipped into a lunch box with little to no preparation; and lastly, some clients simply do not know how to cook fresh fruit and vegetables or turn their noses up at them, preferring sugary sweets and baked items.

While we are absolutely thrilled to be able to provide emergency food assistance to the community, we are mindful of the shortage of fresh fruit and vegetables which are available for us to distribute out to the community for a reduced cost, or free of charge. There certainly is a need in our local community, to look at redirecting fresh fruit and vegetables to people experiencing financial hardship, rather than food ending up in landfill.

The real strength of this program is in developing community connectedness, trust and respect, as well as providing supported referrals to local service agencies. The food is just a bonus.

If you would like any more information about our food programs, give us a call on (02) 4947 0031

Kind regards,

Chris Brown  
Centre Coordinator  
Communications, services and resources.

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