

INQUIRY INTO FRESH FOOD PRICING

Organisation: FoodBank NSW & ACT Limited

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STORIES FROM THE FOODBANK NSW & ACT COMMUNITY

INFORMATION FOR THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO 1
PREMIER AND FINANCE
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INTRODUCTION

It can be difficult to comprehend how food insecurity occurs, its impact, its prevalence and the difference that food relief can make.

Here are just a few stories from the Foodbank NSW & ACT community ...

A Family's Story

Bruce* quickly found work again after unexpectedly being made redundant, but the drop in income meant they couldn't make ends meet for a family of seven. He took a second job but it still wasn't enough. His wife had to home-school two children with special needs as local schools couldn't meet their needs. Desperate to keep a roof over their heads, food became the lowest priority.

Please turn to Case Study 1 starting on page 4 for more information.

A Mother's Story

Her family consists of herself, her husband and four children. She works part time and studies. Her husband had a work accident. Workers compensation paid less than half his normal salary. Then the workers compensation payments stopped due to a pre-existing condition. The family is suffering severe financial stress, and she can't afford the medical treatment she needs, or to renew the certificate that is a requirement for her work.

Please turn to Case Study 2 on page 6 for more information.

Paula's Story

Paula was a middle-class mother of three in an abusive marriage.

She quietly set aside some money as she planned to leave, but when she did leave, she had no money left for food after setting up a home.

Paula received a box of fruit, vegetables and groceries – a turning point.

Paula has since set up her own community pantry and feeds 600 families.

Please turn to Case Study 3 starting on page 7 for more information about Paula and her pantry.

Liverpool Community Kitchen

Liverpool Community Kitchen provides meals, emergency food relief hampers and personal hygiene packs. It also acts as a hub where representatives of other welfare organisations can meet with clients.

Liverpool Community Kitchen has served 25,000 meals in the past 12 months and had seen a steep increase in demand in the past two years.

Please turn to Case Study 4 on page 11 for more information about Liverpool Community Kitchen.

South Western Sydney Public School

A South Western Sydney Public School uses food to help students and families and build a strong and cohesive community. There is a School Breakfast Program in which students serve students. The school also provides food hampers for families in need.

Please turn to Case Study 5 on page 12 to learn more about this inspirational school.

School Breakfast Program Feedback

We've been collecting comments about the impact of School Breakfast Programs from staff in schools.

Please turn to the Feedback on page 13 to read some of the comments we've received.

** indicates that the name(s) in the story has been changed.*

CASE STUDY 1 - A Family's Story

*Bruce** worked for a large retailer and had a knack for taking underperforming stores and turning them into success stories.

A big meeting at the company's head office was planned and *Bruce** thought a long overdue promotion was coming his way. Instead he was made redundant with a family of seven to feed.

*Bruce** found work quickly but the household income dropped by \$40,000 and the bills kept coming. At times they needed to use a credit card to put food on the table or pay a utility bill.

*Bruce** then took on a second job which meant he would often work 16-17 hours a day but it still wasn't enough to get by.

As the costs of living increase you won't find many large families trying to survive on one income but in *Bruce** and *Carol's** world it's a forced decision. *Carol** has no option but to home school two of their children as one has a pyrrole disorder and one is on the autism spectrum.

There just wasn't a school nearby that can fulfil their needs but that won't stop *Carol**, she's made of tough stuff and would do anything for her kids. Food had become the lowest priority as they were desperate to keep a roof over their heads.

For *Carol** it's clear what support from Foodbank meant to her family.

"We could have lost the house if it weren't for Foodbank. There just wasn't enough money for everything and food doesn't reduce debt and doesn't keep creditors at bay."

Try and imagine what it would be like when things are so dire that food is almost considered a luxury. After being so successful, his redundancy was a shock that *Bruce** just didn't see coming. It was also the trigger for what became a seven-year struggle to get life back on track.

There were days when *Carol** was frightened to go to the letterbox, knowing that just one more bill could lead them to something they couldn't bear to consider - losing their home.

It frightens me to think that this could happen to anyone through no fault of their own. A little bad luck is all it takes to have a family in crisis. There are people living in your street and in your town that don't have enough food.

The stigma of asking for help often means that food insecurity can be somewhat hidden in our communities.

As a family they did everything they could to get by and made every sacrifice imaginable. For Christmas, *Carol** would lay-by presents months in advance in the hope of giving the kids some joy on Christmas morning.

School excursions were missed, birthdays were low key affairs and they haven't had a holiday together for 16 years. No matter how hard they scrimped and saved, the ever-increasing cost of living kept taking its toll. In the end the family organised a debt agreement as a last resort to fend off bankruptcy.

It meant paying \$450 a fortnight to reduce their debt before a single bill was paid or a single bag of groceries was bought.

They did so for 5 years just to get back to zero. The family didn't ask for help - they just tightened their belts and worked bloody hard to get their lives back on track.

*Carol** became a master at meal planning out of necessity. Some cheap mince for example would form the basis of 3-4 meals to feed her family for an entire week. The mince that was last night's shepherd's pie was tomorrow's spaghetti bolognese and so on.

The family didn't drink, smoke or go out as a family, everything was about keeping their heads above water and keeping their house.

Now - seven years after the redundancy - the family is debt free. They still need a little help now and then but the future is much brighter.

** Note - real names not used in this story*

CASE STUDY 1 - A Family's Story continued





Our volunteers are amazing and keep our costs low.

We'll use a team of dedicated volunteers to pack the hampers and our network of community partners to distribute the hampers just in time for Christmas.



Here's how you can make your gift:

-  Donate online at foodbanknsw.org.au
-  Call 02 9756 3099

Christmas Hampers Putting food on the table and smiles back on faces



While some families want to buy the kids bikes, an Xbox or go on a holiday some families just want enough to eat

1 in 7 families are experiencing food insecurity which means you probably have a friend, a neighbour or a work colleague that's struggling.

Some of the statistics might surprise you.

48% of people that don't have enough are employed

He was working around the clock at two jobs and still couldn't get ahead. **If your household income dropped \$40,000 without any notice could you cope?**

No one should go without a family meal on Christmas day which is why we're determined to distribute 20,000 Christmas hampers to families that need them most.

Just having enough food can make all the difference

"We could have lost the house and we just didn't have enough money for food. Getting assistance from Foodbank NSW & ACT meant we could save some money on food and use the money for bills and other living expenses"

With the kitchen being the heart of most homes, food truly brings families together.



**We need your help
so please send your donation today**

CASE STUDY 2 - A Mother's Story

Her family consists of herself, her husband and their 4 kids.

She works 2 nights a week in disability services and is studying a law degree. Her husband is a tow truck driver and is the main bread winner.

Her husband recently had an accident at work. Unfortunately the workers compensation payments were less than half his usual salary. Then to make matters worse his workers compensation was ceased due to a pre-existing condition.



Because of this the family is in severe financial stress. They have 2 pays left to last them for 7 weeks. She is trying to be as thrifty as she can to make ends meet. The money needs to be stretched between mortgage, bills, rego and medicine for her husband's injury etc.

She too hurt her own elbow but cannot afford treatment for herself. Her First Aid Certificate is due to expire and is essential for her job. She does not know how she can pay for it. She has started sewing from home and doing alterations for extra money. She only leaves the house if it's essential to save petrol for getting to work.

Some days she breaks down because her children have to go hungry because the family cannot afford food. At times the mother has to skip meals because there is no food in the cupboard.

"It makes me feel like the worst mother on the planet. It's a struggle and sometimes it is a case of do I pay the bills or do I buy food" the mother said. "More needs to be done to support families like mine. We live in a country that is financially stable but the reality is people could be struggling to feed their family and they might be living right next door to you".

CASE STUDY 3 - Paula's Story

Most people don't think of domestic violence when they think about Foodbank, but the sad fact is an unsafe, volatile home makes it impossible for a parent to consistently provide meals for their children. Tragically, 1 in 3 women in Australia have experienced domestic violence - many of them carers to young children.

Paula is a hard-working, middle class mother of three daughters. Few people around Paula knew, but during her 20-year marriage, she suffered intimidation, psychological abuse and even physical violence from her partner. At times, she feared she would be killed. Every part of Paula's life was impacted: even her ability to buy food was restricted.

Since she worked up the courage to leave the family home she shared with her partner, all Paula cares about is making sure her daughters have a normal life like other children; free from violence and poverty.

In the months before she left, Paula quietly set aside money for a bond to rent a house and buy a fridge and washing machine - the absolute basics. There were no savings left for food.

She is happy to be free now, but life is still very tough. Paula just scrapes by. Initially, she and the girls didn't even have cutlery and plates and Paula slept for months on a mat on the floor because she couldn't afford a bed.

Once her daughters are in bed, Paula often cries alone in despair. As a middle-class woman with a university degree and a job, this is not the life she imagined.

"When things were at their worst, I would cry after people visited because I just wished they would bring a meal to feed my kids," she says.

Soon after Paula left her dangerous marriage, her youngest daughter asked if she could have a party for her 11th birthday just like other little girls. Paula would have to say "no" to her daughter. She was devastated. She couldn't even afford cereal, bread and milk, let alone party food.

No parent wants their child to experience poverty and miss out on birthdays. Thankfully, just when Paula began to doubt her ability to rebuild her life, she received a gift that changed everything. It was her first box of fruit, vegetables and groceries from Foodbank. After she collected the box from a community food pantry in her suburb, she placed it in the boot. Then she sat in her car and sobbed with relief.

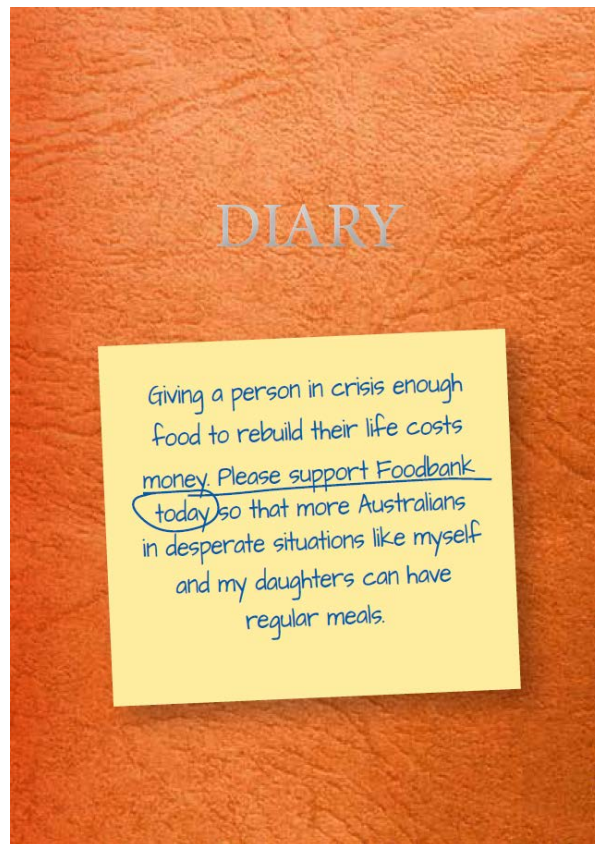
"There were Rice Bubbles in the box, and I thought 'I can make chocolate crackles for my daughter'," she remembers, smiling. As I was bawling in the car I was thinking "Now she can have a birthday party and feel normal and have her friends over."

Right now, across the country, the lives of thousands of people like Paula could be transformed if they could only receive the regular gift of a box of basic groceries. Like Paula, they could go home with full arms and full hearts. Tonight, their children could have full bellies.

This incredible woman is already using the help she has received so far to help others just like her. She has established a food pantry in her local community that last year delivered Foodbank meals to over 600 in-need families.

"This is saving people's lives," says Paula "It has saved my family."

CASE STUDY 3 - Paula's Story continued



WHAT DO I DO???

I feel petrified and so alone. I'm sleeping on average two hours a night. I know I have to leave, but I want to plan it. How do I get out of this?

I don't want my kids to grow up like this – thinking this is normal!

I've managed to secretly scrape some cash together but it just isn't enough to even feed us!



-1-

I FINALLY LEFT!!



I'm numb. All I want to show the girls is that I am happy and try to create a normal, safe home for them. But when they go to bed I just sit in my room and cry, wondering how I will move forward.

Then I have to remind myself over and over "This is better than where you were". And that's how I get through.

-2-

CASE STUDY 3 - Paula's Story continued

I opened the pantry and it was empty
THIS IS VERY TOUGH! Food is something
I have always taken for granted – until I
didn't have it. I am struggling to make ends
meet and a big bill could tip us over into
crisis any day. The two eldest girls take
turns buying things for dinner with their
earnings from their jobs to keep
us going. My oldest daughter says she gets
very upset and tired. I don't want them
to be ashamed of feeling poor. Because
we are we have lost everything.



-3-

A box of groceries was my turning point.
You can't fix your problems when you are
hungry. Today I received something from
a food pantry that came from Foodbank.
It had things like cereal, pasta and snacks for
the girls.



Sitting in the car crying, that feeling will
never leave me. Getting help in the form of
food fills the most basic of human needs,
which we all need. And it also means my
daughter can have an 11th birthday party
and feel normal. It felt like a turning point.

-4-

My pantry is my way to give back.
The reason I am so passionate about setting
up my own pantry is that I've lived on pantry
food. Donors will never appreciate the
impact of giving someone food. I received a
hamper and one year later I am feeding
600 families. My endless passion for my
pantry is my way of giving back and saying
THANK YOU!



Foodbank is not about giving a hand-out –
it's a hand-up. They are rebuilding people.

-5-



My youngest daughter loves helping out at
the pantry.

Even though I know she is dealing with so
much at such a young age she is so caring
and wants to help other people like us.

I am SO PROUD of her!

-6-

CASE STUDY 3 - Paula's Story continued

Making a difference

Foodbank NSW & ACT is essential to our work bringing hope and rebuilding spirits in our community. The impact of Foodbank is felt on so many levels; my greatest admiration for Foodbank is how it allows us to create an intergenerational shift.

Every time a family leaves with those tears of relief we see every week, especially when we see families leaving with our family meals, I am aware that this is one more family that will get to sit down as a 'normal' family to a 'normal' meal regardless of the external situations. This will be a family where even if only just for a meal, parents can put aside the worries or anxiety of how they are going to get ahead.

Children learn by association, and despite the best efforts of parents to conceal their anxieties about money, children hear, see and feel behaviours that imprint on them. Whenever a child senses or hears of their parent/s stressing about money, it leaves an imprint on that child that 'life is hard and that it is hard to provide for your family'. This impression is proven to have life-long effects and lead to the next generation experiencing life as a struggle and perpetuating poverty.

Just recently a new member arrived as a referral from another local agency. The family was living in transitional housing that was due to expire shortly with no prospects of securing new accommodation. The family arrived with 5 quiet and withdrawn children who struggled to hold any eye contact. Supplying the family with sufficient food for several weeks, they arrived back weeks later with the news of being approved for a private rental, moving in and working on rebuilding their family.

This was an excellent outcome for the family and our project, what was even more heart-felt was seeing the children standing taller, communicating with eye contact, singing and joking amongst themselves. Mum being able to breathe and think clearly again had the ripple effect of bringing joy back to this family. This is how Foodbank assists and impacts our community - food is a soft access to assist our members, what these resources allow is true human-ness!



CASE STUDY 4 - Liverpool Community Kitchen

Liverpool Community Kitchen, which has been operating for over seven years, has seen a steady increase since opening, but none as drastic as in the past two years.

As part of their operational procedures they record on a daily basis meals served (breakfast, lunch and takeaways).

Since 26th June 2017 until the present date they have served over 25,000 meals.

They have found it necessary to provide Emergency Food Relief Hampers as well as Personal Hygiene Packs.

There is a wide diversity of cultures that attend the community kitchen for many different reasons.

Clients include:

- Indigenous community
- Homeless clients
- The elderly
- Low income families
- Refugees and their families
- Youth, clients that suffer with mental health disorders
- Drug and alcohol abuse clients
- Single parent families

To meet the increasing needs of the people, they have approached and connected with other community and government organisations that share their vision for the future of their community.



CASE STUDY 5 - South Western Sydney Public School

A South Western Sydney Public School P&C Association became aware of a need for students to start the day with a healthy breakfast in their bellies. A desire to make this possible in a welcoming, community environment was quickly born. Breakfast Club began in term 4 2017, and they have consistently served between 80 and 120 breakfasts since beginning the Breakfast Club program.

A desire to be involved with food hamper distribution became a passion in the beginning of 2018.

Each Friday this South Western Sydney Public School P&C Association distributes between 20 and 50 hampers to people in their school community. They quickly noticed that the requests to fill lunch boxes or recess and lunch orders has rapidly decreased.



FEEDBACK - School Breakfast Program

Here is a selection of comments by staff members in various schools about the impact of the School Breakfast Program:

"One of our students wouldn't speak a word to anyone, teachers or students. Then one day while attending the breakfast program, he said thank you to the student handing him breakfast! Since then, he has started regularly communicating with staff and students."

"I used to spend most of my day dealing with behaviour issues at the school. Since the School Breakfast Program, I now deal with only one of two behaviour issues per day."

"The School Breakfast Program has helped the school identify families who may need assistance. We've helped so many families who may have otherwise been missed."

"The program doesn't just help the students who attend. We've seen a transformation in the behaviour of the students who volunteer on the program serving breakfast to other students."

"Some of our students come to school without having eaten since lunchtime the day before. Without Foodbank, our school wouldn't have the money to provide breakfast for as many students as we now do."

"The program not only provides breakfast for over 100 students who would otherwise go without, it also brings our school community together. Teachers, students, volunteers and local community groups pitch in to serve and chat with each other. Breakfast time is chaos but it's wonderful. Thanks Foodbank!"