



SUSTAINING COMMUNITY

“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members”.

Coretta Scott King



## Supporting our community

Food Link was developed to support the Shepparton and Mooroopna community during the COVID-19 crisis. The concept was simple: to raise funds to employ local hospitality businesses, who were being negatively impacted by the pandemic, to make meals for people who suffered from food insecurity, also as a result of the pandemic.

Initially the goal was to provide crisis relief for eight to 12 weeks however due to overwhelming support Food Link raised \$44,000 and provided 3660 meals over the course of 16 weeks. When Victoria went into a second lockdown additional funding was sort and Food Link commenced a second round. By the end of Round 2 Food Link had raised \$100,000 and delivered 9,230 meals over a total of 36 weeks.

The Food Link meals were distributed to local welfare agencies and schools who then delivered them to vulnerable members in our community. We believed these welfare supports were best placed to identify those most in need. Overwhelmingly welfare staff acknowledged that Food Link offered much more than delivering food, it also created an excellent opportunity to make positive connections with those they supported.

Food Link's success was significantly enhanced due to the early support of the Greater

Shepparton Foundation (GSF) and The Fairley Foundation. In particular, Cheryl Hammer, GSF CEO, was instrumental in providing advice and her understanding of our community helped establish connections with both agencies and donors. This support significantly improved the effectiveness and reach of the program. A COVID relief grant provided from the Australian Communities Foundation during Round 2 was also enormously appreciated. I would like to acknowledge these important contributions to the success of our initiative.

Food Link also received \$38,300 from StreetSmart, a national organisation that believes no Australian should be homeless. The substantial donation created some welcomed certainty and longevity to delivering the Food Link program.

Food Link was more than a meals program. The feedback documented in this report from donors, businesses, agencies and meal recipients highlights a strong feeling of community connectedness at a time of isolation and uncertainty. Food Link brought together people who had the means to help with those who were struggling.

This is the Food Link story.

Amy De Paola  
Food Link Founder



# Timeline

Food Link was established in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Delivery of meals commenced within two weeks of the initial idea. Round 1 of the program ran until funds were exhausted at 16 weeks. When Victoria went into a second lockdown additional funding was sought and Food Link commenced Round 2. The following timeline illustrates the key events and dates that form the Food Link story...



## 23-27 MARCH

Australia started to go into lockdown. Subsequently, many stories began to appear in the media reporting the loss of business in the catering industry and the increase in demand for food relief. The idea of Food Link was conceived.



## APRIL 1-3

After discussions with the Greater Shepparton Foundation (GSF) a donation of \$5000 was made to kick-start the Food Link initiative. GSF sourced an additional \$5000 from the Fairley Foundation.

Fairley Foundation Executive Officer, Amanda McCulloch and Greater Shepparton Foundation CEO Cheryl Hammer.



## Round 1

### APRIL 6 WEEK 1

Food Link ran a pilot week, ordering 100 meals from The Woolshed @ Emerald Bank and delivering them to two local agencies; The Life Op Shop and FamilyCare.



### APRIL 13-17 WEEK 2

Food Link placed a second order of 140 meals and set the goal of delivering 150-300 per week for 12-16 weeks. This was largely subject to fundraising.



### APRIL 16 WEEK 2

The Food Link media launch



## 20-25 APRIL WEEK 3

St Mel's Primary School Wellbeing staff requested assistance to support their families. As a result, Food Link contacted other schools to gauge their need. An additional 3 schools welcomed the assistance. Pictured below are Elisabeth and Chris from St Mel's Primary School.



St Mel's Primary School, St Georges Road Primary School, Mooroopna Primary School and Gowrie Street Primary School received meals for 9 of the 11 weeks in Term 2.

## SEPTEMBER 23 WEEK 23

Food Link received \$11,000 from the Australian Communities Foundation. With lockdown fatigue impacting community donations, philanthropic organisations were instrumental in the delivery of Round 2. Ongoing support from StreetSmart program provided \$38,300.



## DECEMBER 24 WEEK 36

Food Link delivered the final meals for 2020, including 300 Christmas dinners.

## Round 2

### AUGUST 10 WEEK 17

With businesses and service providers again having to adapt to a second round of COVID restrictions it was decided to commence Round 2 of the Food Link program.



### AUGUST 4

Regional Victoria went into a second lockdown.



### JULY 20 WEEK 16

Food Link delivered the last meals for Round 1 and began collating information for a Food Link Report.

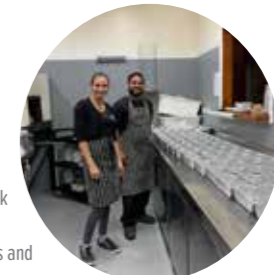
### JUNE 22 WEEK 12

Smartmeals program came on board with funding enabling Food Link to reach the 16-week milestone.



### WEEK 8

By week 8, Food Link was ordering meals from 9 local eateries and catering businesses.



36 WEEKS  
\$100,000 RAISED  
9,230 MEALS DELIVERED

By the end of the Round 2, Food Link had supported 14 businesses and delivered to 15 agencies and schools in the Shepparton and Mooroopna area.



The Greater Shepparton Foundation once again provided the initial funding. Its \$5,000 donation enabled Food Link to be operating within a week of going into the second lockdown. The Fairley Foundation also donated a further \$5,000.

16 WEEKS  
\$44,000 RAISED  
3,660 MEALS DELIVERED

A total of 10 agencies were receiving meals from Food Link.

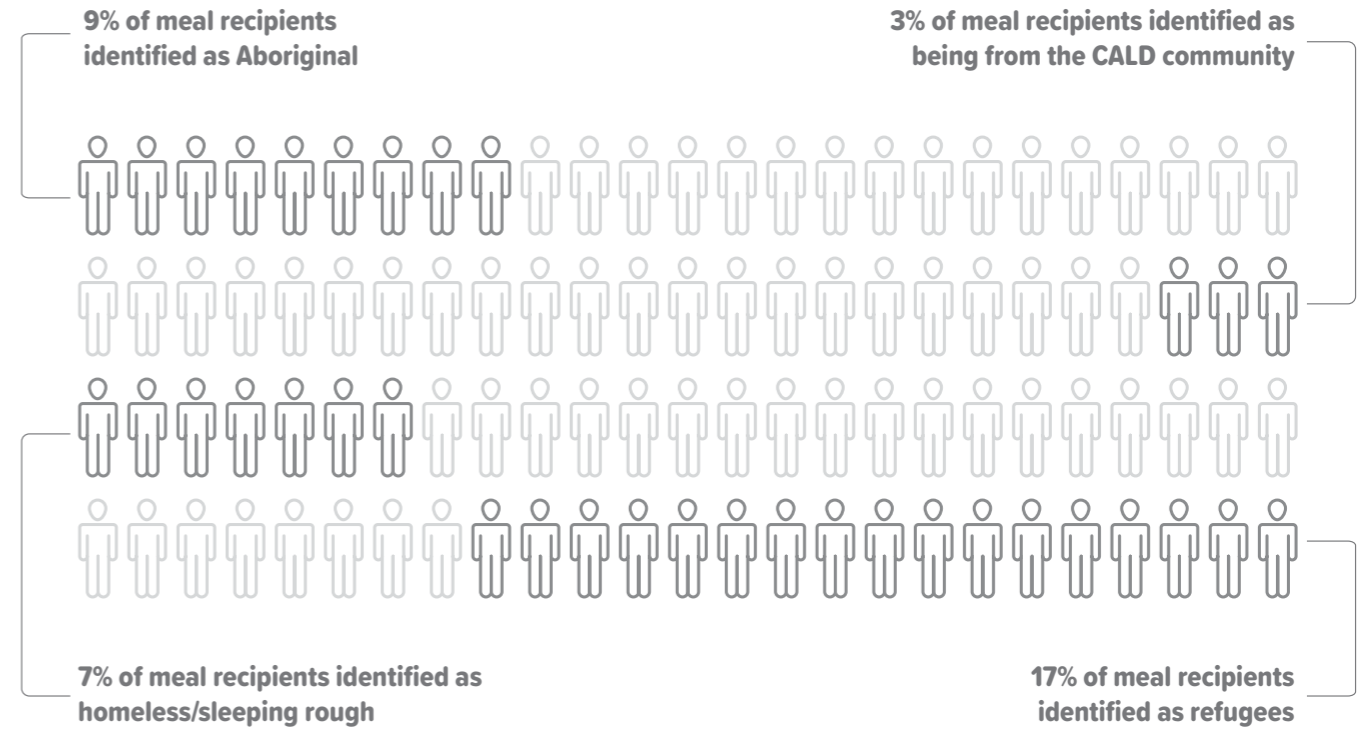


# Supporting local agencies



Agencies supported	Meals
Shepparton Family & Financial Services	2067
Life Op Shop, Mooroopna	2194
Uniting Goulburn North East	800
FamilyCare	180
Wellways	437
Food Share	400
Shepparton South Community Centre	230
Mooroopna Family Haven	290
OzChild	92
Primary Care Connect	23

- Two agencies received 63.5% (4261) of meals over the 36 weeks
- Uniting GNE received 800 meals with 100% distributed to those identifying as Refugee and Asylum Seeker, or as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse families and individuals (units).
- Please note some of these units received multiple meals.



Meals delivered to agencies supported a diverse range of people in the community. The following is a breakdown of each cohort...



Please note some of these cohorts received meals multiple times.

At Food Link we knew our local welfare agencies were best placed to know who in our community were most in need of a nutritious, healthy meal.

"The people who utilise the service come from diverse backgrounds and situations. The demographic of the clients who come for food assistance change overtime depending on availability of work and other circumstances in their lives. Over the past month there have been fewer new arrivals as work has commenced at orchards and many have been able to find employment. There has been a notable increase of Aboriginal families and single men."

Staff member - Shepparton South Community Centre



"Some people in the community don't have any income support from Centrelink and have lost their jobs. The support has been very helpful for those vulnerable people. Overall, everyone is experiencing mental health issues and are expected to navigate all the restrictions to ensure they are doing the right thing, so when we have delivered food to them it has definitely made their day".

Sara Noori - Programs Manager, Uniting - Goulburn North East (pictured: Uniting volunteers)



"I feel that some of those small things that make it easy and can be offered without barriers and red tape can make an immediate difference for individuals and Family's. As you are aware I don't make people reliant on charity but during a crisis removing problems allows them to move forward".

Staff member - Family Care



Examples of Wellways meal recipients circumstances:

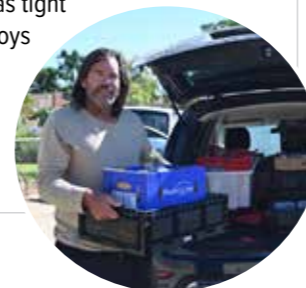
"Single male that has no domestication skills and loneliness after wife's passing. Has ABI that prevents retaining memory of new skills taught. Would otherwise live on takeaway."

"Single male that has minimal cooking skills, social anxiety to eat out and loneliness. Enjoys healthy meal packs and would otherwise live on takeaway."

"Single parent dad with son. Has a poor budget and seldom food in house."

"Yoralla male employee with some special needs and loneliness. Reasonably self sufficient but has tight budget and enjoys relief in costs and gesture."

Rick Coates - Wellways



"The most important impact for us when providing meals is to be able to go to someone's home to deliver them a meal but also check how their mental health is and see if they might need other support. Also, to show them that there are people in the community that care and they aren't alone".

"As the extra payments and jobkeeper start dropping we have started to see the effect that it is having on the community with an increase of those seeking assistants for not just food but for other items as well."

Sandy Anderson - Manager, Life Op Shop, Mooroopna



"Due to the nutritional value of the meals, it assisted with not just food relief but overall health of the clients over a period of time when health and improved immunity was critical".

"High cost of accommodation in the Shepparton area, often costing the total of their weekly unemployment benefits. This is then impacting on people's mental health and their abilities to improve their own circumstances."

Michelle Attenborough - Manager, Shepparton Family and Financial Services



# Supporting local schools



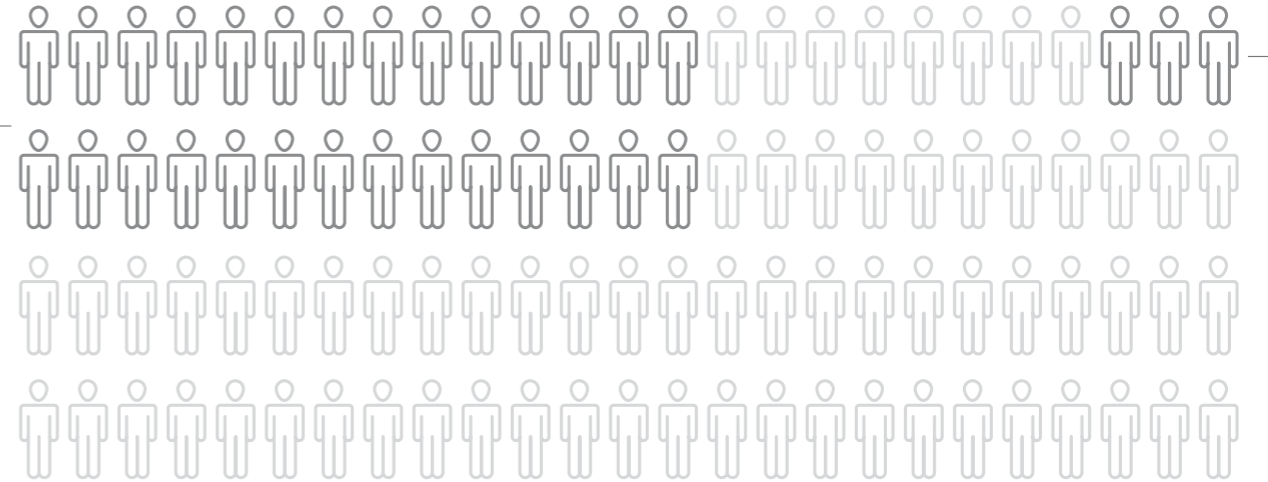
Schools/Kinders supported	Meals
St Mels Primary School.....	574
Mooroopna Primary School.....	588
St Georges Road Primary School .....	475
Gowrie Street Primary School .....	705
Lulla's Child and Family Centre .....	175

\*It is estimated 250 families benefited from the meals. The decision as to who received the meals was made at a school level. A majority of the meals were delivered during remote learning.

Pictured left: Lulla's Child and Family Centre.

28% of meal recipients identified as Aboriginal

3% of meal recipients identified as being from the CALD community



Meals delivered to schools supported a diverse range of families in the community. The following is a breakdown of each cohort...

Families of 2 adults and up to 2 children  
**21%**

Families of 2 adults and more than 2 children  
**27%**

Single parent families  
**52%**

Please note some of these cohorts received meals multiple times.

With students learning remotely, school wellbeing staff were unable to check in on their more vulnerable students and their families. Delivering a Food Link meal created the opportunity to connect and establish how the school could support families during lockdown.

“Often times the people who are in the greatest need don’t put up their hand and say they are in need. Families are extremely grateful for the contributions made by the community, it was wonderful to be a part of raising the emotional wellbeing, and reducing stress on families as they go through their own personal battles on top of a nationwide pandemic”

**Ben Balmer, Assistant Principal – Student Wellbeing, Gowrie Street Primary School**



“I would like to thank you for such a generous act. Seeing the relief that providing these meals has given our most at risk families has been fantastic in this really uncertain time. The quality of the food was also remarkable”.

**Bianna De Angelis - Primary Welfare Officer, Mooroopna Primary School (pictured Steve Rogers, Principal)**



“By providing the meals to our struggling families it was a way to break down barriers for some of our families who do not usually have open lines of communication with the school. After the first time of receiving meals, the parents realised that the school is here to provide assistance and think of the family situations”.

**Luke Simpson - Assistant Principal, St. Georges Road Primary School (pictured Dougie Souter, Principal)**



“Food insecurity remains an ongoing and urgent issue for St Mel’s, particularly for families who have lost their jobs. Financial distress impacting on mental health, family relationships, learning outcomes and connection with community, are further exacerbated by isolation and growing disengagement. Families have felt valued and cared for within their community”.

**Elisabeth Rodriguez, Pastoral Wellbeing Officer, St Mel’s Primary School**



**2,517 meals were distributed to four schools and one child care centre in Shepparton and Mooroopna**

# Supporting local business

## Businesses supported in Round 1 and 2

- Bill & Beats - 900 meals ordered
- The Woolshed at Emerald Bank - 1,140 meals ordered
- Fryers Street Food Store - 940 meals ordered
- Bay Leaf - Jacobs Foods - 1,100 meals ordered
- Shepparton Brewery - 1,040 meals ordered
- Lutfiyes Shish Kebab - 1,025 meals ordered
- Bicaro's Ristorante - 560 meals ordered
- The Little Gourmet Food Company - 1,125 meals ordered
- Yiche Restaurant - 90 meals ordered
- Printworks - supplied labels for meals
- Shepparton Golf Club - Over 580 meals ordered
- Little Lipari - 55 meals ordered
- Stanleys - 240 meals ordered
- The Butter Factory - 145 meals ordered
- Country Fresh Bakery - 290 meals ordered

- 100%** Food Link improved cash-flow
- 22%** Food Link allowed us to retain staff
- 44%** Food Link allowed us to provide additional hours for staff
- 44%** Food Link has had a positive influence on the mental health of staff
- 44%** Food Link improved staff moral
- 100%** Food Link made us feel supported by the community
- 88%** Food Link helped to create community connection
- 100%** Food Link enabled us to support others in the community in a meaningful way.

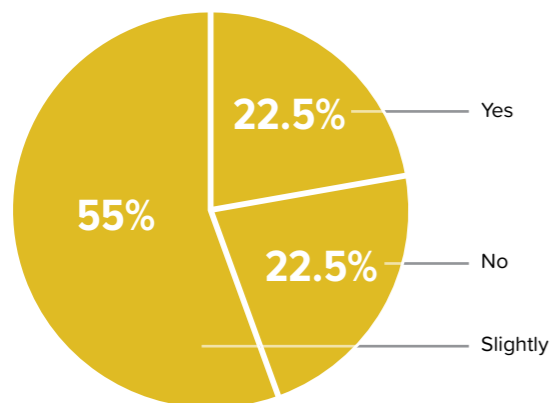
**Ingrid, Fryers Street Food Store**



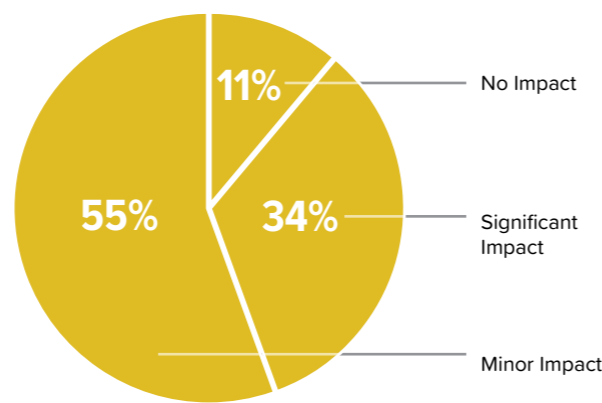
Food link has provided extra hours for staff, and engaged them in meaningful work, this was especially important during lock-down when dine-in trade was closed when we had many staff on Jobkeeper, but few hours of work available to them. Jobkeeper works as a reimbursement on a monthly basis so we needed to find funds for these wages upfront. Additional revenue raised through Food Link helped to offset this quite significant cost.

In terms of the ongoing financial contribution - given that current restrictions require an incredibly high staff to customer, (and simply would not be feasible without being offset by Jobkeeper), it's great to have an order that can be prepared and delivered in an efficient manner (in terms of comparing it to the wage hours needed to generate the same revenue from tables in the cafe), and also provides us the flexibility to choose the meals provided, making the most of ingredients we have on hand.

Would your business experience (keeping staff, closures, adaptation) have been different during COVID-19 lock-down without Food Link?



Businesses were asked to indicate the financial impact of Food Link.



**Note:** One of the challenges of supporting local businesses was aiming to include as many businesses as possible, but also ensuring that the quantity ordered was significant and meaningful. Food Link actively sort feedback from each business and took into account individual and evolving circumstances when allocating meal orders.



Ineka, The Little Gourmet Food Company

"It has been fantastic because it can pay for the power and gas and rent, because you still have to pay for all of that".

Comment source: Weekly Times article, published June 24



Azem and Jeihan, Lutfiyes

"Being part of Food Link has allowed us to continue to operate during these difficult times. Our business has been effected by the pandemic and we are very grateful for the support of Food Link"



Jacob, Bay Leaf

"Food Link did help my business financially during this Covid-19 crisis".



Chris, Bill and Beats

"It provided us with a good cash flow that my business requires to stay open. Thanks for the support during the difficult time that we were facing".



Gina and Sam, Bicaro's

"For us it wasn't really about the money. For Sam and I it was about being able to give back to our community. Having said that the money was certainly put to good use, ensuring our bills were paid!"



Ang, The Woolshed

"Excellent initiative. It's all about the community banding together. It allowed us to keep working and help those in need".



Matt and Daina, Shepparton Brewery

"We did two lots of 100 to start with, so that gave them (our staff) a days work. It wasn't about the business making money, it was about giving them some work and some money for them to get to their families".



Ken Fawkner, Printworks

It helped to improve our bottom line in a small way. The ongoing work on a week by week basis gave us things to do when all else seemed to be stopping".



Chris, The Butter Factory



Karen and Rami Stanleys Cafe



Evelyn, Yiche Restaurant



Tim, Shepparton Golf Club



Vi, Country Fresh Bakery



Claire and Joe, Little Lipari

**100%** of businesses surveyed said they would be happy to continue to take orders from Food Link on a regular basis.

# Our donors

It was a conscious decision not to approach businesses for funding during the first lock-down. Regardless of whether a business was challenged or benefiting from the crisis many were consumed with the task of adapting. For that reason our focus was a public fundraising appeal giving individuals and families an avenue to support our community. Their stories helped generate some much needed positivity. As businesses adapted to restrictions and as Food Link developed a profile several businesses came forward to support. A number of community groups also made donations.



More posts featuring our community donors can be found on the Food Link Facebook page.

## Our philanthropic, community groups and business donors

### Thanks to our philanthropic organisations whose support was instrumental in the Food Link program.

- StreetSmart (Smartmeals)
- Australian Communities Foundation
- Greater Shepparton Foundation
- Fairley Foundation

### Thanks to our local business and community groups:

- Rotary - Shepparton Central
- Rotary - Shepparton
- Quicklift
- Graham Hill Eyecare
- 2020 Fairley Leadership Group
  - Foote Waste
  - Shepparton Club
  - Fortitude Frames
- Mooroopna Dental Care
- Milk to your Door
- Ripe Health
- The Little Gourmet Food Company

### Several of the businesses we supported chose to support Food Link with meals donations:

- Yiche Restaurant
- Shepparton Brewery
- Bay Leaf

### Several businesses supported Food Link by donating the following:

- In Hospitality supplied the paper bags
- Mint Digital printed the corflute signage

**100%**  
of funds raised  
went back into  
local business



# In the Media



Philanthropy Australia Podcast  
[Connecting communities - Delivering to those in need](#)



Shepp Life podcast with Terri Cowley  
[Shepplife with Terri Cowley: Amy De Paola](#)



Win News  
[Food Link Schools Support](#)



Shepparton News  
[Linking those most in need together](#)  
[Food Link delivering ready-made meals to Shepparton schools](#)  
[Birthday donation for Shepparton FoodLink](#)  
[Food Link runs for a full 16 weeks thanks to community support](#)  
[Food Link all set to provide meals during second lockdown](#)  
[Shepparton's Food Link service reaches 5000 meal milestone](#)



Shepparton Adviser  
[Putting business in touch with those in need](#)  
[An extra special Mother's Day gift](#)  
[Shepparton businesses band together to feed the vulnerable](#)



Weekly Times (a subscription is required to view this article)  
[A step up to the plate](#)



Nine News Boarder North East  
[A new initiative is helping keep Greater Shepparton caterers cooking and the community's most vulnerable fed during COVID-19](#)

## Food Link Socials



750 Facebook followers



330 Instagram followers

