

Beyond emergency food relief

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Fiona Hughes is a born and bred Western Australian who grew up on a farm three hours south-east of Perth. After studying a double degree in health promotion and nutrition at Curtin University, she worked in the Wheatbelt regional east of Perth as a health promotion coordinator and then went travelling overseas for 12 months.

On arrival back in Perth in 2009, Fiona still had the travelling bug so she relocated to Albury-Wodonga, a regional centre on the border of New South Wales and Victoria. Here she took up the position of Food Security Health Promotion Coordinator at Gateway Community Health.

Fiona is an advocate for the sustainability of Australia's food systems. Having been brought up on a farm and experiencing the 'paddock to plate' catchphrase first hand, she is passionate about buying local, growing your own and reducing food miles. Fiona has found her niche working in the area of food security. She has been able to combine her knowledge of health promotion and nutrition, skills in cooking from fresh produce and family values around supporting local farmers, and implement projects that improve the food security of Albury-Wodonga and the Upper Hume region.

Introduction

Irregular access to safe, nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable food from non-emergency sources is known as food insecurity.¹ Food insecurity can occur when there is an imbalance in the food system. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has identified four components of food security:²

- Physical *availability* of food
- Economic and physical *access* to food
- Food *utilisation*
- *Stability* of the other three dimensions.

There is a growing body of evidence that food insecurity is having a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities in the Upper Hume Region.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare Social Enterprise project. This project is a comprehensive community food security enterprise which aims to improve food security in the region by moving beyond emergency food relief and focusing on improving the social determinants of health to better address the multitude of issues associated with food insecurity.

Food security in the Upper Hume Region

According to the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey, 8.3% of persons living in Wodonga had experienced food insecurity (run out of food and could not afford to buy more) in the previous 12 months, compared to 7.3% in the Hume Region and 6.0% average for Victoria.³

The City of Wodonga were one of five local councils funded through VicHealth's *Food for All* program from 2005-2010. This funding was made available to improve access to nutritious food and to influence the cultural, social, economic and environmental barriers that poor and disadvantaged communities face in healthy eating. As a result of the *Food for All* program in Wodonga, a collective of 45 community organisations who work in areas that have an interest in the issues of food security established the Albury Wodonga Regional Food Security Network (AWRFSN). This network facilitates and encourages an increase in household and community food security throughout the Upper Hume region through a number of different community food security programs.

Food Security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.⁴

Community food security programs include the collaboration of a variety of projects which aim to improve the quantity, quality and affordability of food for all residents through a sustainable food system which maximises self reliance and social justice.^{5,6}

One of the community food security projects which the AWRFSN coordinate is FoodShare.

The Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare Project 2009-2010

The initial Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare Project was a response to the growing incidence of food insecurity in Wodonga and surrounding districts, and the significant impact it has on individuals, families and communities. The project began in 2009 and was based in a house next door to UnitingCare Wodonga which became the hub for emergency food relief in the Upper Hume Region. A refrigerated van was purchased to collect and redistribute donated food and a FoodShare worker was employed to coordinate volunteers and source and manage donations from VicRelief Foodbank, Woolworths, ALDI's, local producers, community gardens, community kitchens and backyards. Nutrition surveys of the food parcels show that the FoodShare centre has improved the variety and amount of healthy foods available through emergency food relief in the Upper Hume region.

One initiative which helps to increase the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables being donated to FoodShare is Street Harvest. The Street Harvest project aims to seek and share excess fruit and vegetables from residential gardens to neighbours and emergency relief agencies. In the first six months of Street Harvest operating, 1400kg of excess produce from residential gardens was donated and used in local school breakfast projects, healthy eating programs, and community meal programs, made into preserves to use in food parcels and provided directly to clients accessing emergency food relief. By actively connecting with residents and volunteers, the project builds community engagement and social cohesion, provides inter-generational and inter-ethnic opportunities and strengthens the communities' ability to become more locally sustainable. Street Harvest also reduces waste and helps minimise fruit fly outbreaks. A Street Harvest Project Kit has been developed for other communities to use and was recently requested from as far away as New Zealand. The project can be implemented in any community and operate in many varied scales depending on resources and volunteers.

In 2010, over 4500 requests for food were made to emergency relief providers in Albury-Wodonga and from July 2009-June 2010, \$226,425 worth of food was processed at the Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare Centre. The most common reasons for accessing food relief were unexpected large bills, illness and pharmacy accounts.

The Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare Social Enterprise 2010 and beyond

In 2009, the AWRFSN commissioned a feasibility study to formally investigate the potential for a comprehensive FoodShare model that extends beyond emergency food relief to better address the multitude of issues associated with food insecurity in the region.

As a result of the feasibility study, the Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare Social Enterprise concept was developed. The FoodShare enterprise will have a population health approach, which aims to improve the health and wellbeing of whole populations, reduce inequalities among and between specific population groups, and address the needs of the most disadvantaged.⁷ It will utilise the social determinants of health model to provide a broader, more systemic approach to regional food security, that draws on evidence, regardless of disciplines, to understand the ways in which health is created or diminished,⁸ to guide the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project. Recognising the importance of the wider social determinants of health creates environments supportive of healthy behaviours. It also highlights that health promotion is not just health education; it is also the development of healthy public policies and involves those that have a role in the upstream determinants of health to ensure social justice.⁹

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the social determinants of health.¹⁰ Almost all of these determinants can be addressed in some way by the FoodShare Social Enterprise model, as demonstrated in Table 1.



Figure 1 Social determinants of health¹¹

Table 1 Social determinants of health Addressed by FoodShare

Social determinant of health	Relationship to the FoodShare model
General socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions	Potential for health promoting changes to policies within FoodShare partner agencies
Agriculture and food production	FoodShare community garden and horticulture area at Wodonga Institute of TAFE. Links with external community gardens and cooking programs in Albury Wodonga as well as other food security and community supported agriculture projects (i.e. <i>Street Harvest and Subscription farming</i>)
Education	TAFE training opportunities including transport/logistics, warehousing/storage and hospitality oriented training enterprise
Unemployment	Transition into employment through FoodShare volunteering and training opportunities
Housing	Improved opportunity to alleviate poverty through improved education and subsequent employment prospects
Social and community networks	Reducing social isolation via opportunities for inter-generational and inter-ethnic volunteering and training.
Individual lifestyle factors	Opportunities for exposure to health promotion activities and interventions

Proposed FoodShare enterprise model and structure

The enterprise model has two driving assumptions:

- Firstly, the enterprise will not have sufficient scale if it is limited to the original/core activity of receiving, storing, handling, breaking down and distributing of donated food for emergency food relief. In order to establish sufficient scale, it will need to expand into other programs/activities.
- Secondly, in order to be successful, and given the underlying presumption that commercial gain is not the key business driver, the enterprise will ultimately be reliant on significant community and corporate support and goodwill.

Recognising these drivers, the model has been developed to have social, community, health, environmental and financial/economic outcomes.

The proposed FoodShare social enterprise model is illustrated in Figure 2.

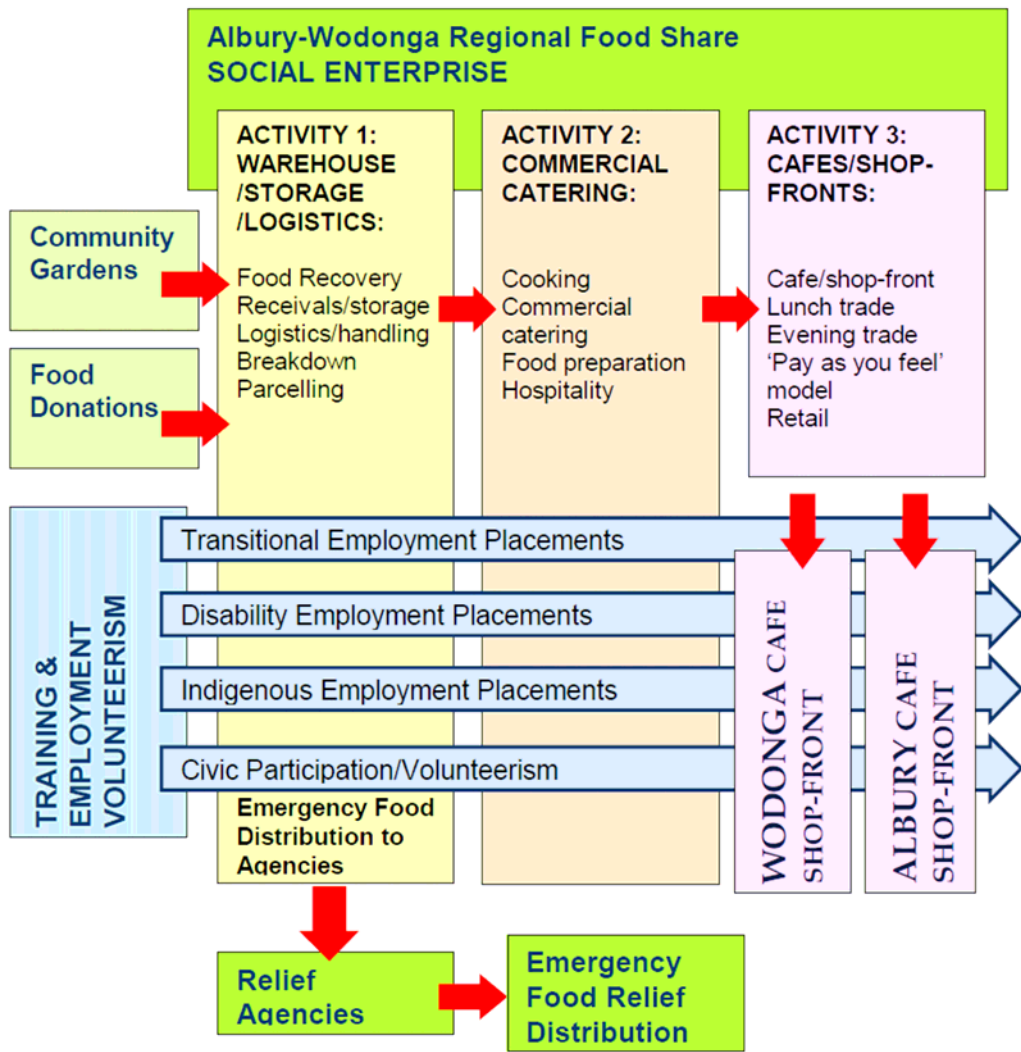


Figure 2 Proposed FoodShare enterprise model

The FoodShare social enterprise concept is multi-dimensional, rather than food rescue/emergency relief alone and is based on a community strengthening model, drawing together a range of activities that are focused on community development, skill building and social inclusion. The enterprise moves beyond traditional community-based donations and support to areas like corporate social responsibility, building direct links into the broader sustainability of the project. The concept proposes food rescue/recovery activities with emergency food relief, warehouse/storage operations, catering and café operations, as well as training/transitional work placement programs.

The FoodShare model is characterised by:

- A local warehousing/storage/logistics area which has capacity to hold sufficient amount of food and other items for emergency relief. This area will need to be able to receive, handle, store, break down, package and distribute a range of foods and goods to local emergency relief agencies. This will include the ability to handle and store a wider range of fresh, frozen and non-perishable foods. The AWRFSN has identified several local warehouses which have space for FoodShare operations.
- A commercial food preparation/catering operation that is able to prepare food for the shop-fronts and provide catering for businesses, sporting clubs and community groups. The AWRFSN has identified several existing commercial kitchens which FoodShare can utilise.
- One or two café/shop-front outlets located in Albury and Wodonga that have the capacity to receive and sell foods prepared by the commercial kitchen

- The incorporation of a training/employment transition through Wodonga Institute of TAFE as a core activity of FoodShare. Programs will be targeted specifically at identified high needs and disadvantaged groups within the community.
- Food sourced primarily through fresh, frozen and packaged food and grocery lines donated by local supermarkets, wholesalers and producers and collected by the enterprise.
- A community garden (or gardens) included as part of the enterprise
- ITC web-based logistics program will be used to coordinate food recovery and distribution to emergency food relief providers as well as volunteer timetables
- A FoodShare board will be established with a specific skill set. The enterprise operating structure will be staffed through a combination of paid professional staff and volunteers, as well as staff sourced through trainee/transitional employment placement programs (including TAFE, Work for the Dole Scheme, Disability Employment Network and STEP Indigenous Employment Program).
- Volunteering program will provide opportunities for civic participation, corporate social responsibility and community strengthening activities
- Opportunities for the corporate sector to give back to the community through corporate sponsorship, in return for recognition of sponsorship and team building activities

The sustainability of the FoodShare model is enhanced through the use of a population health approach and the collaboration of a wide variety of partners from various sectors. Strategies used by FoodShare, and outcomes gained by FoodShare, will be shared amongst and embedded in various sectors and communities.

Evaluation of the FoodShare Enterprise will be performed on a yearly basis and will measure community strengthening, social connectedness, volunteerism and public health/education/awareness outcomes. Statistics will also be collected on; the number of participants involved in the transitional employment pathways and training program, food rescue and redistribution, corporate sponsorship and financial outcomes.

In 2010, the AWRFSN collaborated with other organisations in the community for support and sourced funding from philanthropic partners to move forward with the FoodShare social enterprise. The project will be implemented in two stages; stage one is currently under way with the development of a business plan for the complete social enterprise, this will be available in April 2011. Stage two will be the full implementation of the agreed self-sustaining community enterprise model.

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