

# **Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre**

**Supporting Innovative Research and Evaluation**



**FOOD SECURITY &  
WELLBEING PROGRAM  
PROJECT  
EVALUATION 2022 - 2023**

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FEDERATION UNIVERSITY  
COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION &  
RESEARCH CENTRE

SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

**FOOD SECURITY AND WELLBEING  
PROJECT  
EVALUATION 2022 - 2023**

DECEMBER 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre (CERC) Federation University Gippsland acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land, sea and nations and pays our respect to elders, past, present and emerging. The CERC further acknowledges our commitment to working respectfully to honour their ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to this country.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre (CERC) Federation University Gippsland is an innovative initiative that aims to build evaluation capacity and expertise within Gippsland. As a local provider, the CERC understands the value of listening to the community and has the ability to deliver timely and sustainable evaluations that are tailored to the needs of a wide variety of organisations.

Professor Joanne Porter is the Director of the CERC. Joanne has led a number of successful research projects and evaluations in conjunction with local industry partners. She has guided the development of the CERC since its formation in 2018.

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the country is transitioning out of COVID-19 lockdowns and easing restrictions, Australians are now facing increased costs of living. Global political unrest, interest rate rises, and inflation have seen the prices of fuel, food and household bills surge, increasing the strain on individuals and families. Fruit and vegetables have seen cost increases by almost 7% from last year, with this figure only estimated to rise. During the same period, however, takeaway food prices increased marginally by 0.7%, potentially due to government subsidy and voucher systems introduced post COVID-19 lockdowns. The strain of food prices is felt even more greatly by those living in regional, rural and remote Australia, with prices increasing due to freight costs.

The Morwell Neighbourhood House (MNH) Food Bank provides emergency relief without requiring an appointment and is unrestricted by postcode or healthcare card status. The Food Bank is supported by St Vinnies Morwell, which provides \$12,000 annually towards the cost of food, and by numerous community organisations, individuals and businesses. Demand for the Food Bank has increased steadily and particularly so during the COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate precursor to the People's Kitchen was a 2019 project named Cooking for a Purpose. That involved GippsTAFE VCAL students preparing nutritious frozen meals using ingredients provided by MNH. The availability of frozen home-cooked meals has ensured that Food Bank clients have at least one nutritious hot meal per day.

The CERC was commissioned to explore the activities of the MNH, gaining an insight into how the whole of person approach to food security was being implemented. This understanding was gained through the perspective of those who were paid employees, Volunteers or accessed the MNH services, outlining the benefits, barriers and future suggestions for the MNH operations when addressing food security in the Latrobe Valley.

Data were collected between 2022 - 2023 using a mixed methods approach to understand the impact of the MNH services on participants. Participants included MNH stakeholders, staff, Volunteers, secondary school students and people who accessed the MNH services. In addition to this, a comprehensive literature review was performed to understand the global landscape of food insecurity, exploring how people access Food Banks, the opportunities that arise from engaging with food security service activities and the perspectives of employees who ran these services.

### 1.2 KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Utilisation of, and a need for the MNH organisation is evident in their food and service distribution statistics gathered by Staff and Volunteers. In 2022, from January to December the Food Bank completed a total of 1882 transactions. These transactions were from a range of clients, including 2840 adults and 2402 children. A total of 12,859 kilograms of food products were distributed to clients in 2022; of this, 2418 kilograms were fruit and vegetable produce. In 2023 from January to December, the Food Bank completed a total of 2261 transactions. Of these clients who received support, 3455 were adults and 2450 were children. A total of 17,246 kilograms of food were distributed, of which 3884 kilograms were fruit and vegetables. Statistical data to date in 2023 demonstrates that figures have greatly exceeded 2022 statistics. There was a 20% increase in total transactions and a 34% increase in the food weight distributed in 2023. There had also been a 60% increase in the amount of

fruit and vegetable weight being distributed in 2023. These findings demonstrate an increased demand for the MNH Food Bank services in a 12 month period, and the ongoing impacts of increased cost of living and livelihood insecurity may still be increasing in the Latrobe Valley post the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, findings from an interview the MNH Manager outlined the need for the People's Kitchen service within the Latrobe Valley, recognising that *"Latrobe punches above its weight and all the wrong directions"*, particularly in regard to health and wellbeing. This was considered when exploring the need for fresh nutritious meals for food insecure members of the community, and how this could be delivered in a *"socially just manner"*:

*"One of my initial focuses was how do we connect all of community into what is a response to a wicked issue like food security and how do we connect them at a local level? Because we know that food insecurity is experienced by people across the globe, but what can we do in our little patch?"*

Surveys of clients accessing MNH services highlighted the diversity and needs of community members in the Latrobe Valley. Participants were asked about their employment status, with multiple options that could be chosen. Approximately one-third of the participants (33.6%, n=16) stated that they were stay-at-home parents and the same number of participants (33.6%, n=16) recorded that they were looking for jobs. Among "Other" replies, the following responses were reported: BSP (Behaviour Support Plans), DSP (Disability Support Pension), injured, disabled and unemployed. When participants were asked the question *"How often do you access these services?"*, answers included "Once a week" (34.3%, n=23) and "Once a month" (25.4%, n=17). "Every couple of months" were mentioned by 10.4% of participants (n=7). Among "Other" replies, there were few responses of "Fortnightly" and few responses of "First time". These findings are indicative of the vulnerable populations that require the most assistance from the MNH, aligning with global literature that describes where services may be most needed in vulnerable populations. However, findings from this evaluation and from the literature review suggest that at times, food insecurity does not discriminate on demographics or neighbourhood of residence.

There was a strong theme identified from the interviewed clients utilising MNH services around the feeling of acceptance and lack of judgment regarding their need to access the Food Bank. Inclusiveness also extended to children, and this was appreciated by a participant when they stated, *"My children are very loud, but they're very accepting of my children"*. Being treated *"just like anybody else"* reflected a lack of judgment and was expressed in a similar way by another participant:

*"It's friendly. They don't judge anybody. Everybody's the same. I just feel really comfortable when I go in there. I don't know how to say it, you don't feel like you're a scammer"*.

Across the client interviews, there was a consensus that the MNH was an excellent program, and one participant stated the staff and Volunteers at MNH *"were just fantastic, and I think they provide a necessary service here in Morwell"*. To continue their valuable work, the participant added, *"If anything, they don't need less funding; they need more funding to run more programs because they do a fantastic job"*. Another participant added:

*"They do a great job; they work under a tremendous amount of pressure from a lot of other areas... What they're working under, and the limited funds there, they do a really good job"*.

The positive social environment was also important to the participants which was created not only by the staff and Volunteers but also by others who attended MNH. Cooking together and sharing meals helped alleviate negative emotions for this participant:



*“It’s full of food and we just pulled out some food and we’re able to cook ourselves a meal. We called it cooking class, but really all the old fellas were kind of ‘meat and potatoes’ type fellas. But it was fantastic just to get together with them. It was so good for me, particularly living alone and being by myself. I suffer from depression and anxiety and just having that group each week just bolstered me”.*

Evaluation findings suggested that the service provided by the MNH was immensely important to vulnerable community members in the Latrobe Valley. The diversity of services ensured that clients were not only supplementing their nutrition with the Food Bank, but they had the opportunity to build social connections through social groups, gain life skills through education sessions and cooking classes in the People’s Kitchen and receive holistic lifestyle support that assisted with whole of person wellbeing.

When exploring the impact of Volunteering within the MNH, results were overwhelmingly positive and demand for service expanded greatly in 12 months. Findings from this evaluation suggest that this expansion may have been due to the positive responses from Volunteers who worked in the kitchen and the increased demand for the meals cooked by members of the local community. In 2022, there was a total of 182 Volunteers that attended the Kitchen, completing a total of 1004.5 hours. Volunteers made a total of 2819 meals, weighing over 1409 kilograms, and included groups from business and industry, community volunteers, clients accessing MNH services and high-school students assisting the People’s Kitchen. In 2023, Volunteer numbers attending the People’s Kitchen had grown, with a total of 304 Volunteers doing 1600 hours within the Kitchen. A total of 4483 meals were made in 2023 at the time of reporting, weighing a total of 2241.50 kilograms. This demonstrated a 59% increase in the number of meals cooked and total weight of food produced from 2022 to 2023.

The Manager of the People’s Kitchen highlighted that the business and industry sectors were interested in how you could *“actually Volunteer in your community and you can directly see where it goes in your community”*. This benefit of Volunteering locally increased business *“buy-in”* and saw numbers attending the Kitchen to cook meals grow to *“extraordinary numbers”* and over *“3000”* meals being made to date:

*“They’re [the businesses are] on that shared mission with us. We want them to share the goal, we want them to buy in. We want them to be warriors around this issue of food insecurity with us”.*

Being part of the People’s Kitchen program created such a strong impression that many Volunteer respondents expressed a desire to *“help out again”*. Other comments included, *“I would love the opportunity to do this again!”* and *“Loved it, would love to do it regularly (once a month),”* and *“I will definitely be back to help some more.”* Cooking the meals alongside their work colleagues also provided a *“great team bonding experience”* and resulted in *“incredible teamwork”*:

*“It was a great experience and fabulous for me personally to get to know other members of our organisation in a social environment. The work that MNH & People’s Kitchen does for our community is extremely valuable. The understanding and insight that they have of the social and economic issues that families and individuals are facing in our region is extremely relevant. It is great to see business & industry supporting the fabulous work that they do. I hope that the People’s Kitchen and the work of MNH can continue to evolve to meet and assist those in our community when they are in need. Fantastic work MNH & People’s Kitchen!”*

For some Volunteers participating, the realisation of the gap between those who were struggling to provide for their families and those who had plenty left some stakeholder participants feeling a sense of guilt, recognising the privilege that they experienced in their own lives:

*“It served two purposes because not only were we doing a great thing for the community which makes you feel good about yourself. And in some ways... when you go in there, and you hear how other people struggle from day to day to provide for their family and things, you almost feel a little bit guilty”. (P2)*

A suggestion from the stakeholder participants interviewed was around connecting the voices of the meal recipients with those who were cooking. Participants were keen to know more about how their work was impacting their communities in real time, closing the loop in the helping process:

*“I would love to get a community member who’s actually relied on their meals, and I do understand that they may not want to come in face to face and actually speak to us about it. But even if they were to write a letter about how important and how much they really relied on the meals or they really appreciated the meals and were very grateful to hear that it was actually a local group of young kids that actually prepared the meals for them. Just so the kids can see what their work is doing and where it’s going”. (P17/C)*

Volunteer feedback about engaging with the MNH was extremely positive. The increase in interest from Volunteers had now seen the wait time for a cooking session in the People’s Kitchen to be over a year. Organisations were keen to create a regular Volunteering Day within their organisations, as it provided their staff with a sense of accomplishment, team building and aligned with company corporate social responsibilities. With the high level of support and buy-in from local community members, stakeholders and businesses, leveraging the Volunteer network could see the expansion of the MNH and People’s Kitchen to assist in supporting vulnerable populations in the Latrobe Valley.

Students at a local high school in the Latrobe Valley shared their experiences of being involved in catering classes within their school curriculum, and how this connected them with the People’s Kitchen. They outlined how this cooking course allowed them to learn skills in food preparation, food handling and improved their understanding of nutrition:

*“We’re learning each skill, a new skill with each meal. For say, fried rice, we have to make sure that we’re not burning the rice and we’re cooking with big woks and then we might make curried sausages. So, we have to make sure we’re not making the Curry too spicy. So it gives us life skills. But then we also get to give back to the people that need it. And just to help out and then gain a skill with it, sort of like a win-win”.*

Students discussed how they had made stronger connections as a “team”, recognising that the class helped them make new friends, “I wouldn’t know any of these people if it wasn’t for catering”. They highlighted that they had “a lot of laughs” in the process too:

*“You gotta be willing to be able to work with different people and accept that you’re not gonna know everything. Like me, I just think I know everything, and I don’t care what other people say. But as I’ve gone throughout the year, I listen to a lot more, I listen to [Student 4] a lot more unfortunately, I’ve listened to [Student 1] a bit. I’ve listened to [Student 8] a bit, even [Student 6]. And this dude (pointing at other student). \*laughter\*. You’re always gonna have someone to guide you. You just gotta be able to take that next step and keep working towards that next step”.*

Staff and facilitators running the cooking classes with the students echoed these sentiments, highlighting that the experience *“gave them [the students] opportunity to understand pressures”*. The students believed they were able to step outside their comfort zone as the facilitators encouraged them to have *“a growth mindset”* and helped them *“achieve”* great things in the class. Beyond the classroom, learning life skills in catering class empowered the students to understand what may be required of them when they move out of home or gain employment.

When asked how they felt about cooking for the People’s Kitchen, and the impact of this Volunteer work on them as individuals, the students stated that they were *“appreciative”*, that it helped them realise *“how lucky you are”* (student 3), and that *“it makes you feel better”*, especially knowing that *“we’re helping a family out and making sure they’re getting through a rough time”*:

*“For me, it’s knowing that I had done something to help my community, that most of it is going through rough patches and are struggling more than what I am and knowing that I’ve done something that can help them in so many different ways. And knowing that could have changed their life just by simply making a meal. Like, just knowing that impact that could have on some families is amazing”*.

Students wanted to share their experience cooking for the People’s Kitchen with the MNH, furthermore, they wanted MNH to share with other schools that the program *“builds work ethic, it builds teamwork, it builds leadership skills, it builds everything that you want in young teenagers these days”*. Some students shared the comment that initially, they *“didn’t hear anything about them [MNH]”* and *“didn’t understand what they [MNH] were”*. The students suggested that promoting the work more within the community and demonstrating the impact of the meals on the students may benefit everyone involved:

*“Just lay down that it’s like a really good thing to do. Maybe inform the people that wanna do it, the results maybe when we go and deliver these meals. These people are so thankful because they finally have a meal. And so you sort of know what the reward is going to be and then they could also say that you get the add-on of gaining the life skills. So not only are you helping the community you’re gaining skills”*.

The students felt that they wanted to know more about *“what we achieve afterwards”* and where the meals go once they are delivered to the People’s Kitchen. They were keen to build stronger connections with the MNH in future, with many students now more interested in how they were helping their communities.

Students spoke regularly about the physical life skills they were gaining through formal cooking and food handling education, whilst also highlighting the inter- and intra-personal skills they gained with their peers. Students felt more able to work as a team, share their ideas, collaborate with peers and seek opportunities outside of the classroom to further their education. It was evident from focus group interviews with students that this program had a profound positive impact on them and should therefore be continued in future. Fostering the connection between local high schools and the MNH allows students to gain life skills, whilst also feeling more connected to their local community.

### 1.3 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue operations of the Morwell Neighbourhood House with all current services available, including the Food Bank and People's Kitchen.
  - a) Sustaining current operations is vital to support those who rely on the services.
  - b) Continuing operations allows Morwell Neighbourhood House to be a pilot and learning opportunity for other localities considering implementing similar programs.
2. Provide information for stakeholders and Volunteers on where meals prepared in the People's Kitchen go.
  - a) Providing follow-up to stakeholders and Volunteers involved in the People's Kitchen ensures they understand the impact of their service.
  - b) Building relationships with stakeholders and recipients may create a stronger desire to Volunteer more regularly.
  - c) Demonstrating these outcomes may increase buy-in from other business and industry stakeholders.
3. Expand the opportunities for community gardens within Morwell Neighbourhood House.
  - a) The development of a working community garden can provide educational opportunities and foster a sense of achievement for workers/Volunteers.
  - b) Growth of the community garden may assist with reducing operating costs of the People's Kitchen by using produce grown in-house.
4. Expand Volunteer support for the People's Kitchen to local secondary schools to increase the skills and confidence of local young people.
  - a) Invite additional secondary schools to participate in the People's Kitchen program to increase their food handling and nutritional understanding.
  - b) Expansion to additional secondary schools may increase output capacity for the People's Kitchen to provide meals for the Latrobe Valley.
5. Consider formal education opportunities within the People's Kitchen.
  - a) Leveraging the People's Kitchen cooking sessions as formal educational courses may provide Volunteers with greater confidence and vocational qualifications.

# FOOD SECURITY & WELLBEING PROJECT EVALUATION

## FOOD BANK



**2022**

1882 transactions  
12,859kg of food



5245 clients served

**2023**

2261 transactions  
17,246kg of food



5905 clients served

“I can get the frozen meals and stuff... it really helps out on the weeks that I’m very short on money sometimes... If it wasn’t for them, I’d be bugged at times”.

**Food Bank Client**



## PEOPLE’S KITCHEN

2604 Volunteer hours



7302 meals cooked



486 Volunteers



“I just think it is the community spirit that you feel when you are there working and the sense of achievement that you get as you walk away and feel like you’ve done something”.

**People’s Kitchen Volunteer**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue the MNH program including Food Bank and People’s Kitchen
2. Provide stakeholders and Volunteers information on the outcomes of volunteering and cooking in the People’s Kitchen
3. Develop community gardens to aid in supply of food
4. Expand the network of People’s Kitchen cooks to include school groups and incorporate vocational training

## 2. PROGRAM: THE MORWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the country is transitioning out of COVID-19 lockdowns and easing restrictions, Australians are now facing increased costs of living. Global political unrest, interest rate rises, and inflation have seen prices of fuel, food and household bills surge, increasing the strain on individuals and families.<sup>1</sup> Fruit and vegetables have seen cost increases by almost 7% from last year, with this figure only estimated to rise.<sup>2</sup> During the same period however, takeaway food prices increased marginally by 0.7%, potentially due to government subsidy and voucher systems introduced post COVID-19 lockdowns.<sup>2</sup> The strain of food prices is felt even more greatly by those living in regional, rural and remote Australia, with prices increasing due to freight costs.<sup>3</sup>

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations defines food insecurity as lacking enough safe and nutritious food on a regular basis that is required for normal growth and development and maintenance of a healthy and active lifestyle.<sup>4</sup> Food insecurity impacts approximately 15% of the Australian population and is not exclusive to those who are unemployed or homeless.<sup>5</sup> Families often have to choose between accessing food or heating their homes, with 2 in 5 Australians not being able to pay their bills as they are required to allocate their incomes to purchasing food.<sup>5</sup>

Children and adolescents are some of the most vulnerable populations in regard to food insecurity, with one in seven school children not consuming breakfast.<sup>5,6</sup> Evidence suggests that school-based food provision and preparation programs increased student school attendance, increased student focus, alertness and energy, increased students' confidence in food preparation and nutritional choices and fostered a sense of community among students, teachers and parents.<sup>6</sup>

By establishing a whole of person food security, health and wellbeing program within marginalised communities, there may be an opportunity to increase access to nutritious food, provide education and skill acquisition in food preparation and choices. Additionally, it may provide secondary school students with the appropriate skills and education regarding food choices and preparation, fostering confidence and resilience as they transition to independence.

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<sup>1</sup> Truu, M. (2022, June). Giving up insurance, choosing meat-free meals and skipping breakfast: What Australians are doing to survive the cost-of-living crisis. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-06-20/australians-cutting-costs-to-survive-cost-of-living-crisis/101160172>

<sup>2</sup> Zorbas, C. & Backholer, K. (2022, May). *Yes, \$5 for lettuce is too much. Government should act to stem the rising cost of healthy eating.* <https://theconversation.com/yes-5-for-lettuce-is-too-much-government-should-act-to-stem-the-rising-cost-of-healthy-eating-182295>

<sup>3</sup> Gregory, X. (2022, June). Cost-of-living crisis forcing people in remote regions to give up fresh produce. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-06-13/fresh-produce-too-expensive-remote-living-cost-of-living-crisis/101057668>

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO]. (2022). Hunger and food insecurity. <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

<sup>5</sup> Food Bank Australia. (2017). Food Bank Hunger Report 2017. <https://www.Food Bank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2017-Food Bank-Hunger-Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Deavin, N, McMahan, A., Walton, K., & Charlton, K. (2018). 'Breaking Barriers, Breaking Bread': Pilot study to evaluate acceptability of a school breakfast program utilising donated food. *Nutrition & Dietetics*, 75(5), 500–508. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12478>

## 2.2 PROGRAM OVERVIEW


The Morwell Neighbourhood House (MNH) Food Bank provides emergency relief without requiring an appointment, and is unrestricted by postcode or healthcare card status. The Food Bank is supported by St Vinnies Morwell, which provides \$12,000 annually towards the cost of food, and by numerous community organisations, individuals and businesses. Demand for the Food Bank has increased steadily and particularly so during the COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate precursor to the People's Kitchen was a 2019 project named Cooking for a Purpose. That involved GippsTAFE VCAL students preparing nutritious frozen meals using ingredients provided by MNH. The availability of frozen home-cooked meals has ensured that Food Bank clients have at least one nutritious hot meal per day.


The MNH provides a number of supports to community members in the Latrobe Valley. The majority of the activities are implemented within the MNH building (8-50 Beattie Crescent, Morwell). Part of the MNH operations includes the People's Kitchen, where fresh meals are prepared by Volunteers to support people experiencing food insecurity. The People's Kitchen is held at A Kinder Cup Café (65 Church Street, Morwell). Outlined below are a range of programs and services that are offered by the MNH:

- People's Kitchen: Volunteers offer their time to cook frozen meals for the Food Bank.
- Food Bank: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9.30am to 3.00pm, no appointment needed, frozen meals, personal care items and pet food available.
- Free Morwell Store: Free clothing, toys, homewares and other items available.
- Shower Facilities: Available during business hours, free of charge.
- Repair Café: Free repairs, mending and fixing offered by Volunteers.
- Portable Tag and Test: Test your electrical appliances for compliance with the AS3760 Standard.
- Lawn Mower Bank: Book a lawn mower for the day, free of charge.
- Social Activities: Community breakfast to exercise classes, all ages and abilities welcome.
- Free Hair Cuts: Available monthly, free of charge.
- Conference Room for Hire: Rooms available for social gatherings or meetings.
- Recharge Point: Drop in to re-charge your electric scooter on the go.
- Community Garden: Herbs, vegetables and learning opportunities available.
- Shared Kitchen: Utilise the fully equipped kitchen facilities to cook a meal or heat up a frozen meal.
- Internet Access: Computer available, \$1 per hour for internet access, plus any printing costs.

# Morwell Neighbourhood House



 65 Church Street Morwell

8-50 Beattie Crescent Morwell 

   
 The People's Kitchen      A Kinder Cup



Volunteers



Cooking



Frozen Meals



Food Bank



Free Morwell Store



Shower Facilities



Repair Cafe



Portable Tag and Test



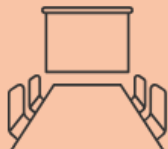
Lawn Mower Bank



Social Activities



Free Hair Cuts



Conference Room for Hire



Recharge Point



Community Garden



Shared Kitchen



Internet Access

Figure 1: Morwell Neighbourhood House Service Map



## 2.3 PROJECT DELIVERY / ACTIVITIES

Across three workshops, the MNH and Latrobe Health Assembly (LHA) explored opportunities to leverage the Food Bank and People's Kitchen to develop a program of activities for a whole person approach to food security, health and wellbeing. The Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre (CERC), in partnership with the LHA and the MNH will evaluate the proposed five potential solutions:

1. Enabling relevant community agencies to participate in People's Kitchen, Food Bank, and community garden activities.
2. Reaching out to communities in the Latrobe Valley who are marginalised in relation to access to resources and services.
3. Framing the Food Bank and People's Kitchen as a key point of access for clients and Volunteers to government, health, and community services.
4. Offering access for People's Kitchen participants to formal training, skills recognition, and vocational qualifications.
5. Investigating ways to engage secondary schools in addressing the question of food security and the feasibility for senior secondary students to participate in aspects of the People's Kitchen concept.

The CERC was commissioned to explore the activities of the MNH, gaining an insight into how the whole of person approach to food security was being implemented. This understanding was gained through the perspective of those who were paid employees, Volunteers or who accessed the MNH services, outlining the benefits, barriers and future suggestions for the MNH operations when addressing food security in the Latrobe Valley.

Data were collected between 2022 - 2023 using a mixed methods approach to understand the impact of the MNH services on participants. Participants included MNH stakeholders, staff, Volunteers, secondary school students and people who accessed the MNH services. In addition to this, a comprehensive literature review was performed to understand the global landscape of food insecurity, exploring how people access Food Banks, the opportunities that arise from engaging with food security service activities and the perspectives of employees who ran these services.

## 3. THE EVALUATION

### 3.1 AIM OF THE EVALUATION

The aim of the Food Security and Wellbeing program evaluation was to understand the establishment a whole of person food security, health and wellbeing program at MNH.

### 3.2 EVALUATION RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Key research questions included:

1. How does access to People's Kitchen, Food Bank, and other MNH activities impact individual and community health and wellbeing outcomes and food security status?
2. What impact does Volunteering have on those who support the work of the MNH Food Security and Wellbeing program?

3. What impact does food preparation for the People’s Kitchen have on secondary school students who are engaged in formal training on food preparation and nutritional education in schools?

### 3.3 DATA COLLECTION/TOOLS USED

A mixed methods approach was used to evaluate the MNH activities and included qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data for this evaluation were collected via surveys, attendance statistics collection and collection of participant feedback cards that were provided to the MNH. Qualitative data were collected during one-on-one interview sessions and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis, and qualitative data were analysed using the Braun and Clarke (2022) thematic analysis method or content analysis method. Data were collected by CERC researchers, with the support of the MNH manager. Feedback cards and attendance statistics were regularly provided by the MNH manager throughout the evaluation.

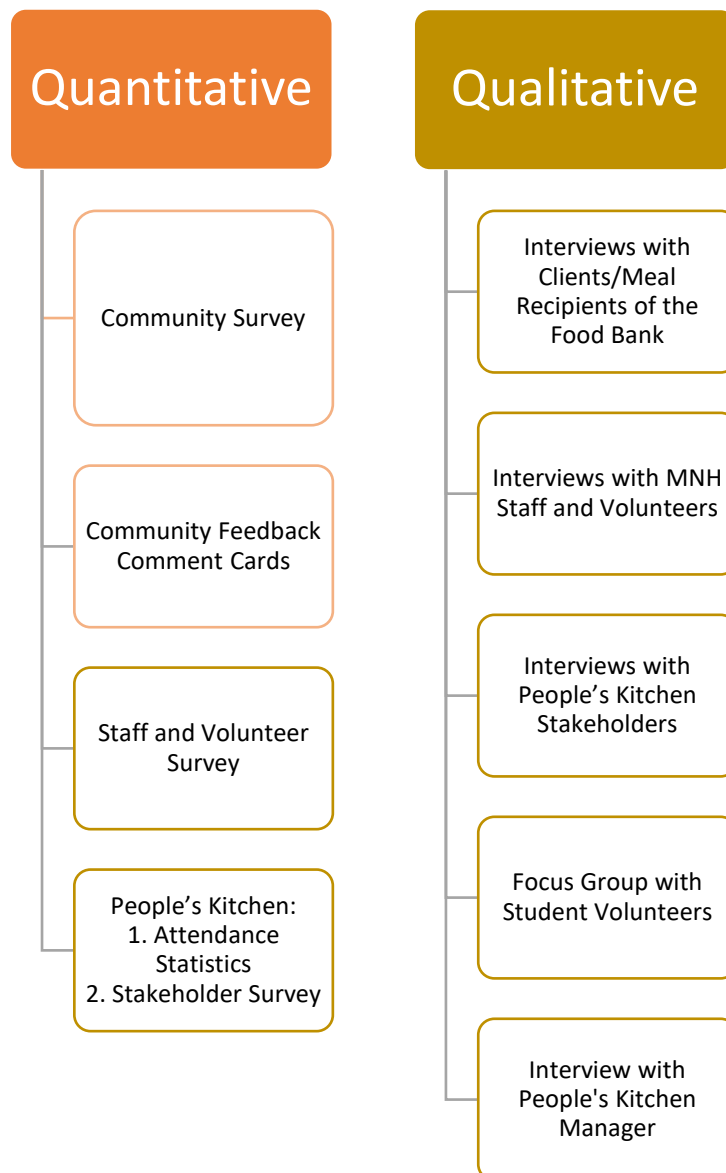


Figure 2: Data collection tools

## 4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

### 4.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA

#### 4.1.1. Community Survey

##### INTRODUCTION

A sample of 67 participants completed a Food Security and Wellbeing Community Survey completed at MNH in March 2023. Community surveys were distributed to community members attending the House for a variety of activities including Community Breakfast, Social Sisters, and Food Bank. Paper-based surveys were distributed to attendees of MNH events by members of the CERC research team or MNH staff. Survey participation was voluntary, and assistance was available for members of the community who had difficulties with literacy or were visually impaired. At the completion of the survey, participants were invited to attend an online interview with the research team. Of the 67 participants who completed the survey, 25 agreed to be contacted regarding a follow-up interview, and 10 participants completed an interview.

##### *Food Bank attendance statistics*

To provide context for community survey results, the collection of statistical data from the MNH Food Bank will be outlined. In 2022, from January to December the Food Bank completed a total of 1882 transactions. These transactions were from a range of clients, including 2840 adults and 2402 children. A total of 12,859 kilograms of food products were distributed to clients in 2022, of these, 2418 kilograms were fruit and vegetable produce.

In 2023 from January to December, the Food Bank completed a total of 2261 transactions. Of these clients who received support, 3455 were adults and 2450 were children. A total of 17,246 kilograms of food were distributed, of these, 3884 kilograms were fruit and vegetables. Statistical data to date in 2023 demonstrates that figures have greatly exceeded 2022 statistics. There was a 20% increase in total transactions and a 34% increase in the food weight distributed in 2023. There had also been a 60% increase in the amount of fruit and vegetable weight being distributed in 2023. These findings demonstrate an increase demand for the MNH Food Bank services.

##### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The majority of participants were female (59.7%, n=40), and 35.8% (n=24) were male. One participant identified themselves as non-binary and another one did not state their gender. Six participants (9.1%) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and one preferred not to say. Three participants (4.8%) spoke another language than English at home.

All participants were over 18, with a high proportion of those aged 26-45 (59.1%, n=39). The number of participants for each age category is shown in Figure 3 below.

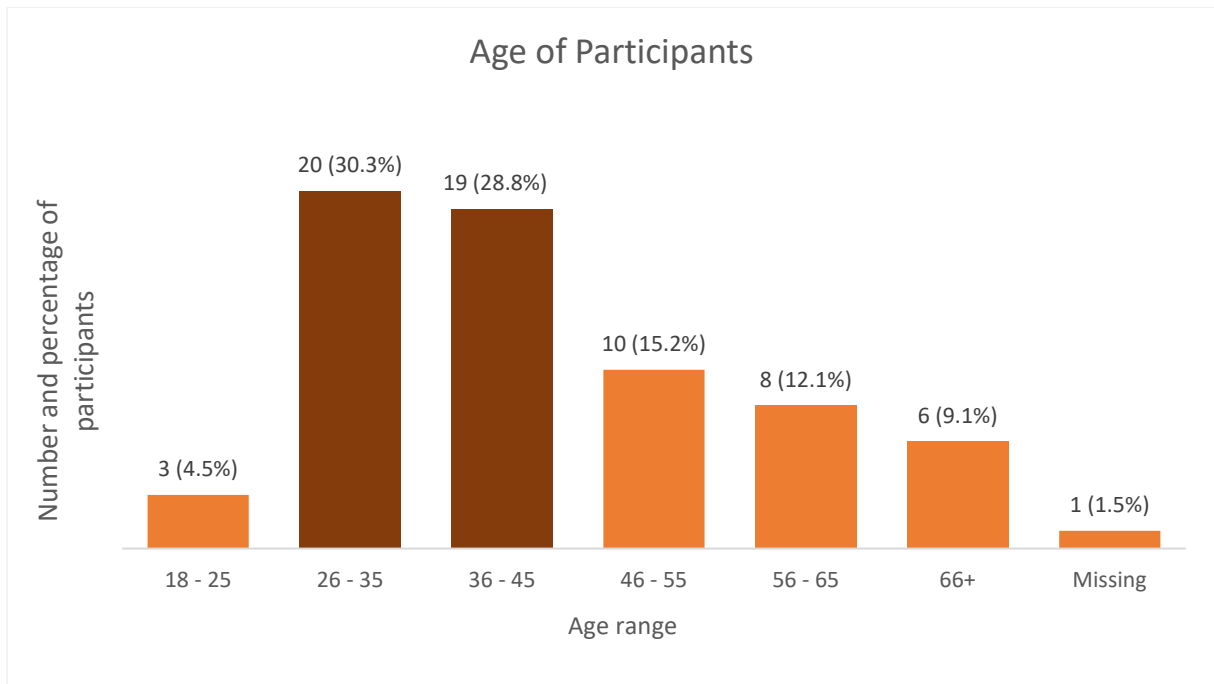


Figure 3: The age range of participants

Participants were asked about their employment status, with multiple options that could be chosen. Figure 4 shows that approximately one-third of the participants (33.6%, n=16) stated that they were stay-at-home parents and the same number of participants (33.6%, n=16) recorded that they were looking for jobs. Among “Other” replies, the following responses were reported: BSP (Behaviour Support Plans), DSP (Disability Support Pension), injured, disabled and unemployed.

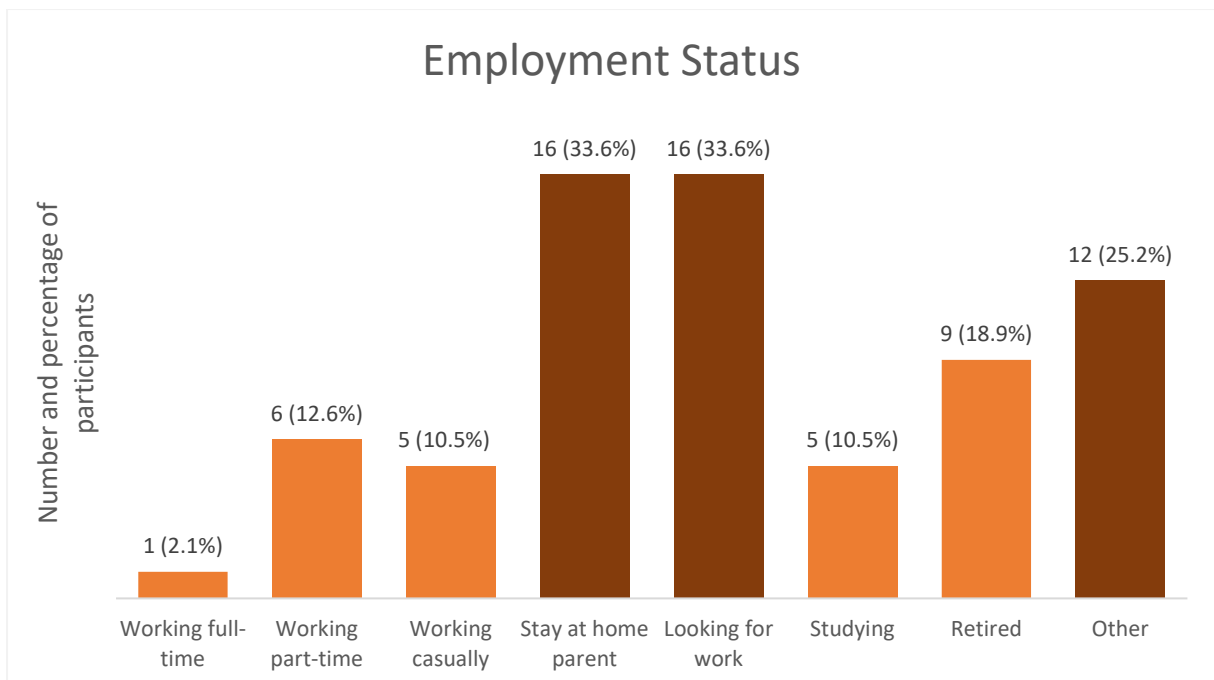


Figure 4: Employment status of participants

## SERVICES AND CLIENT ENGAGEMENT

The participants were asked to state which programs they engaged with. They were able to choose more than one option. As shown in Figure 5, the majority of participants (91.0%, n=61) engaged with Food Bank, and a smaller percentage engaged with Community Breakfast (20.9%, n=14), Social Groups (14.9%, n=10) and People's Kitchen (11.9%, n=8). Three additional responses to "Other" included "Quantum", "Social sisters" and "Lawn mower".

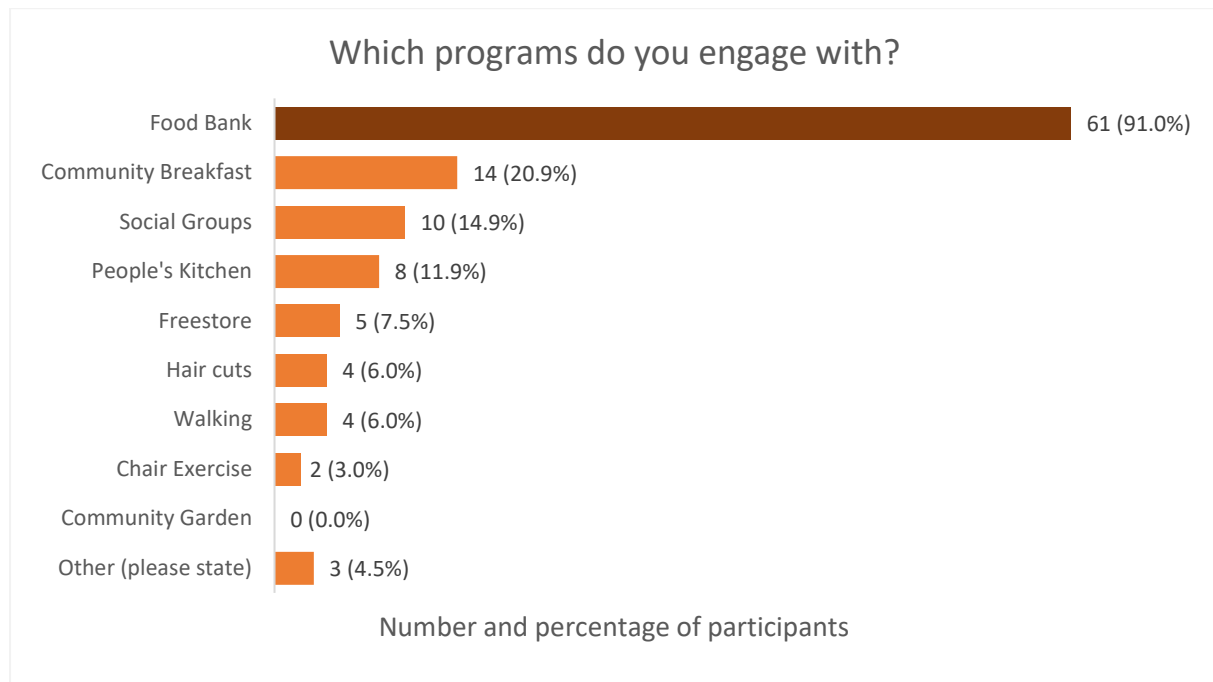


Figure 5: The programs participants engaged with

Figure 6 shows that the most popular responses to the question "How often do you access these services?" were "Once a week" (34.3%, n=23) and "Once a month" (25.4%, n=17). "Every couple of months" were mentioned by 10.4% of participants (n=7). Among "Other" replies, there were few responses of "Fortnightly" and few responses of "First time".

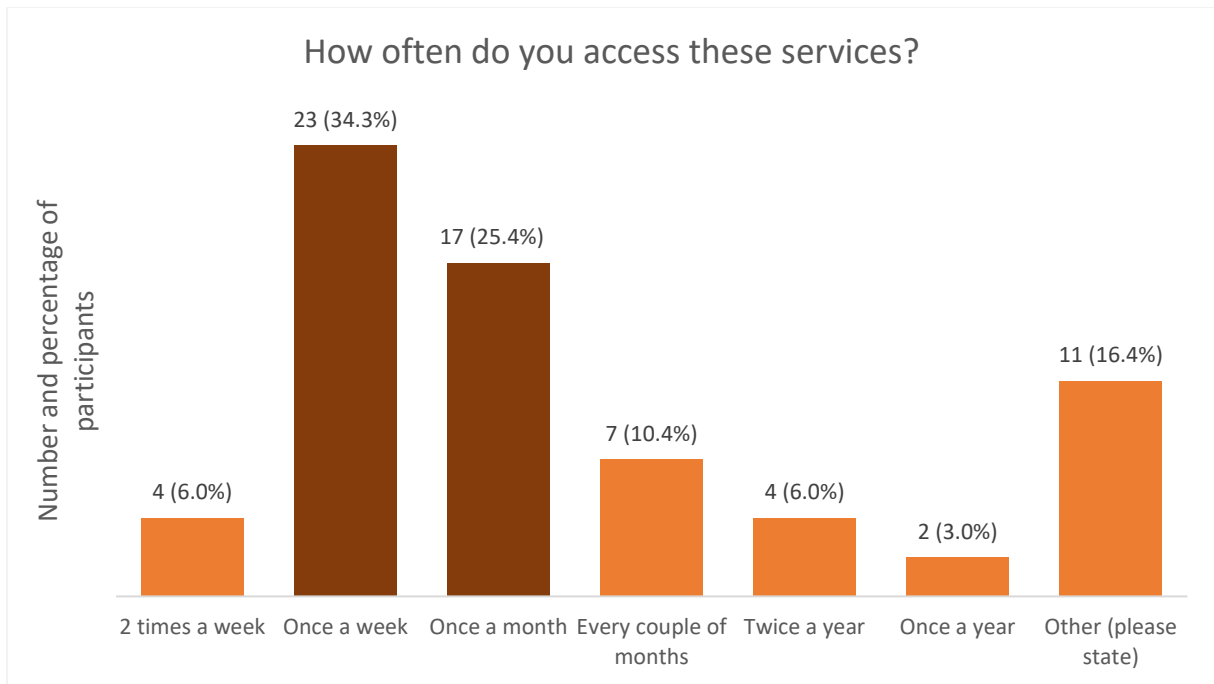


Figure 6: The frequency of accessing the services

For the majority of participants (92.6%, n=62), it was “Very” or “Fairly easy” to access these services (Figure 7). Two participants did not reply to this question. The responses “Very difficult” or “Fairly difficult” were not chosen by any of the participants.

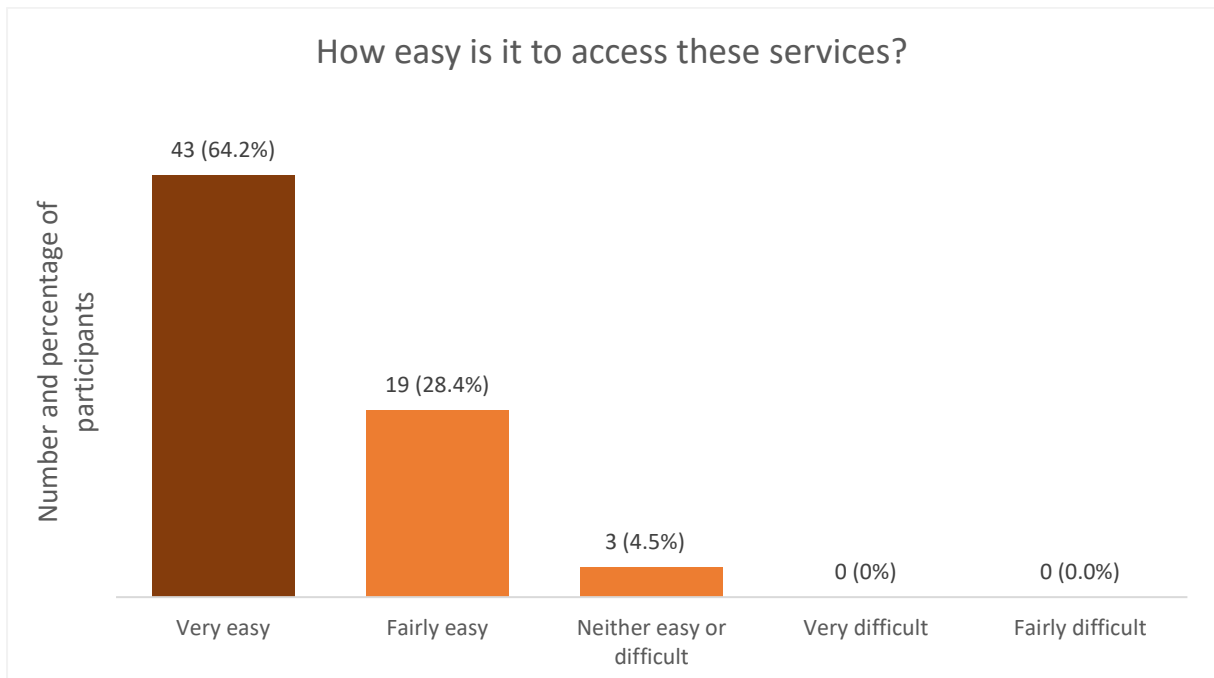
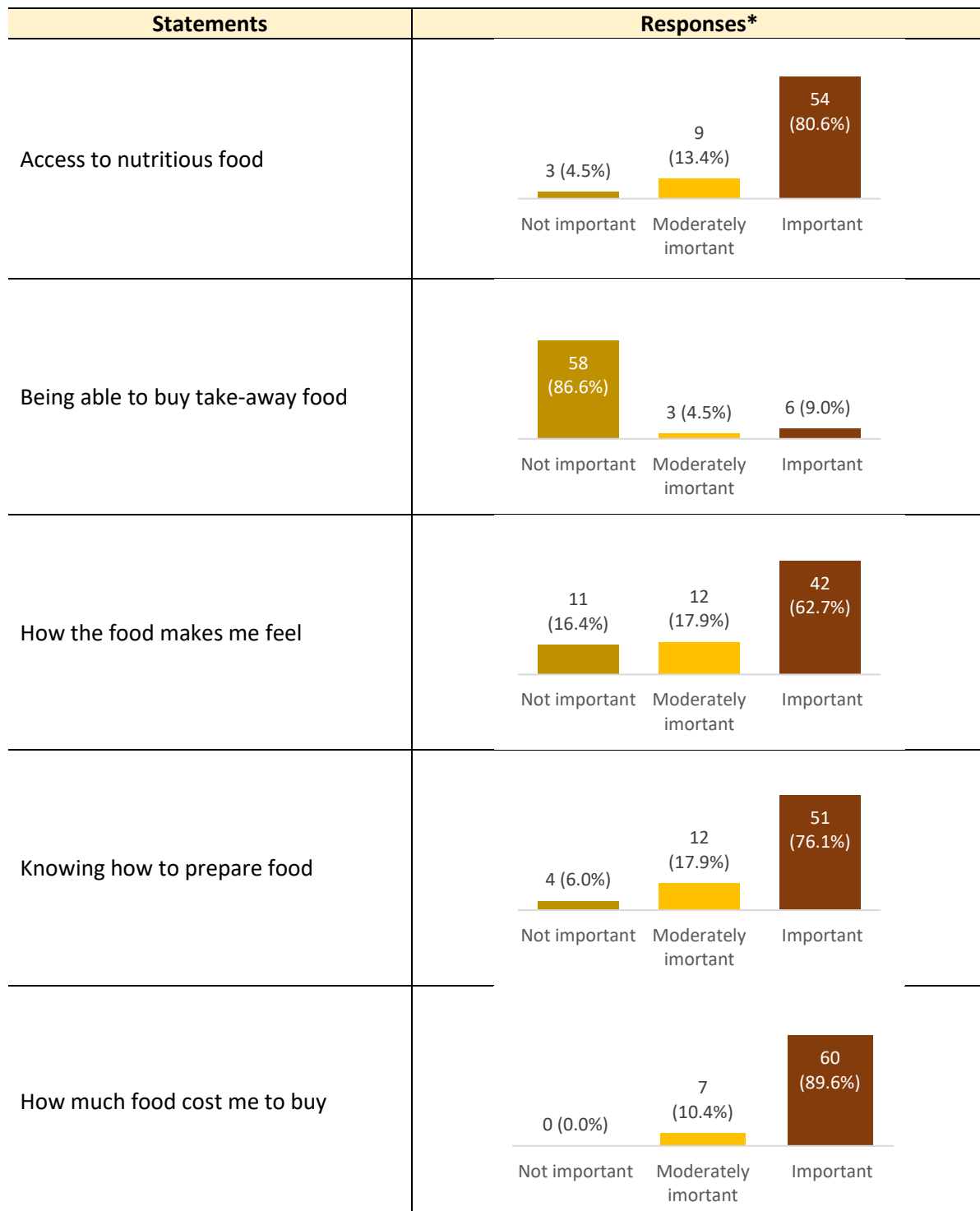


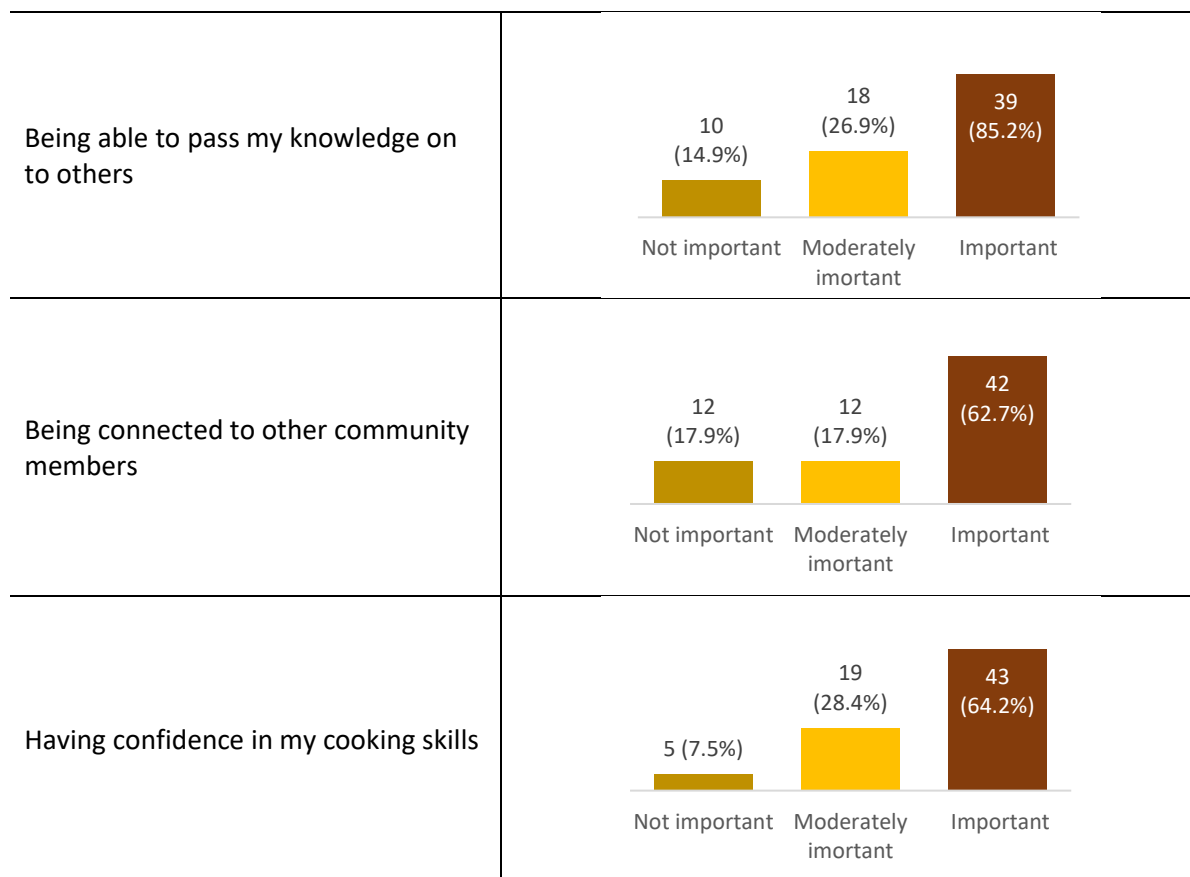
Figure 7: The ease of accessing the services

Participants were given a series of eight statements about provided services and asked to rate each one from “Not at all important” to “Extremally important.” For reporting purposes, “Extremally important” and “Important” have been combined in the positive and “Not at all important” and

“Slightly important” have been combined in the negative throughout this report. Thus, the results are presented using a 3-point Likert scale.

As shown in Figure 8 below, “*Being able to buy take-away food*” was “Not important” for the majority of the participants (80.6%, n=54). All other seven statements were perceived as “Important” by most participants.





\*- Number and percentage of participants

Figure 8: The assessment of provided services by participants

## ACCESSING FOOD

As presented in Figure 9, the main sources of food for participants were “Supermarket” (92.5%, n=62) and “Food Bank” (70.1%, n=47). In addition, “People’s Kitchen” and “Greengrocer, deli, butcher and market” were mentioned by 23.3% of participants equally (n=16). Three participants stated in “Other” additional sources of food: “food truck,” “outside help” and “getting food from a friend”.



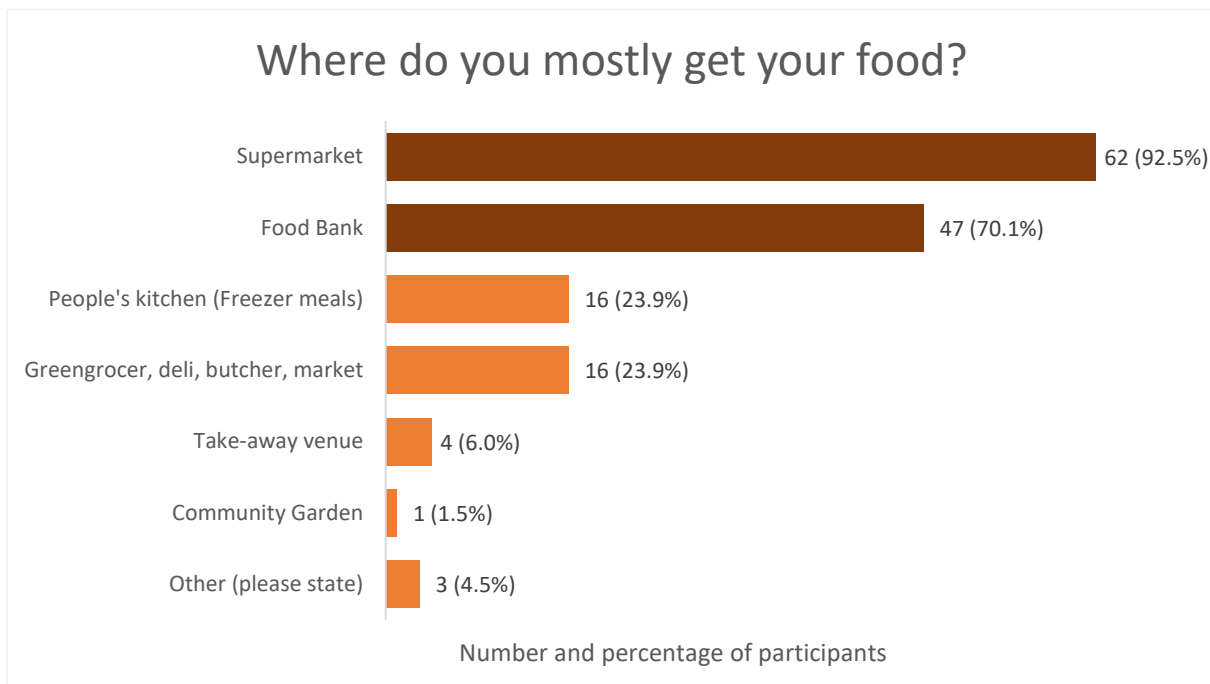


Figure 9: The sources of food

When asked about purchasing take-away food, 37.7% of participants (n=25) stated that they do not purchase take-away food at all (Figure 10). A significant proportion of participants (38.8%, n=26) chose the response “1-2 times a week”. Among “Other” replies, there were few responses “Fortnightly”, “Once a month” and “Rarely”.

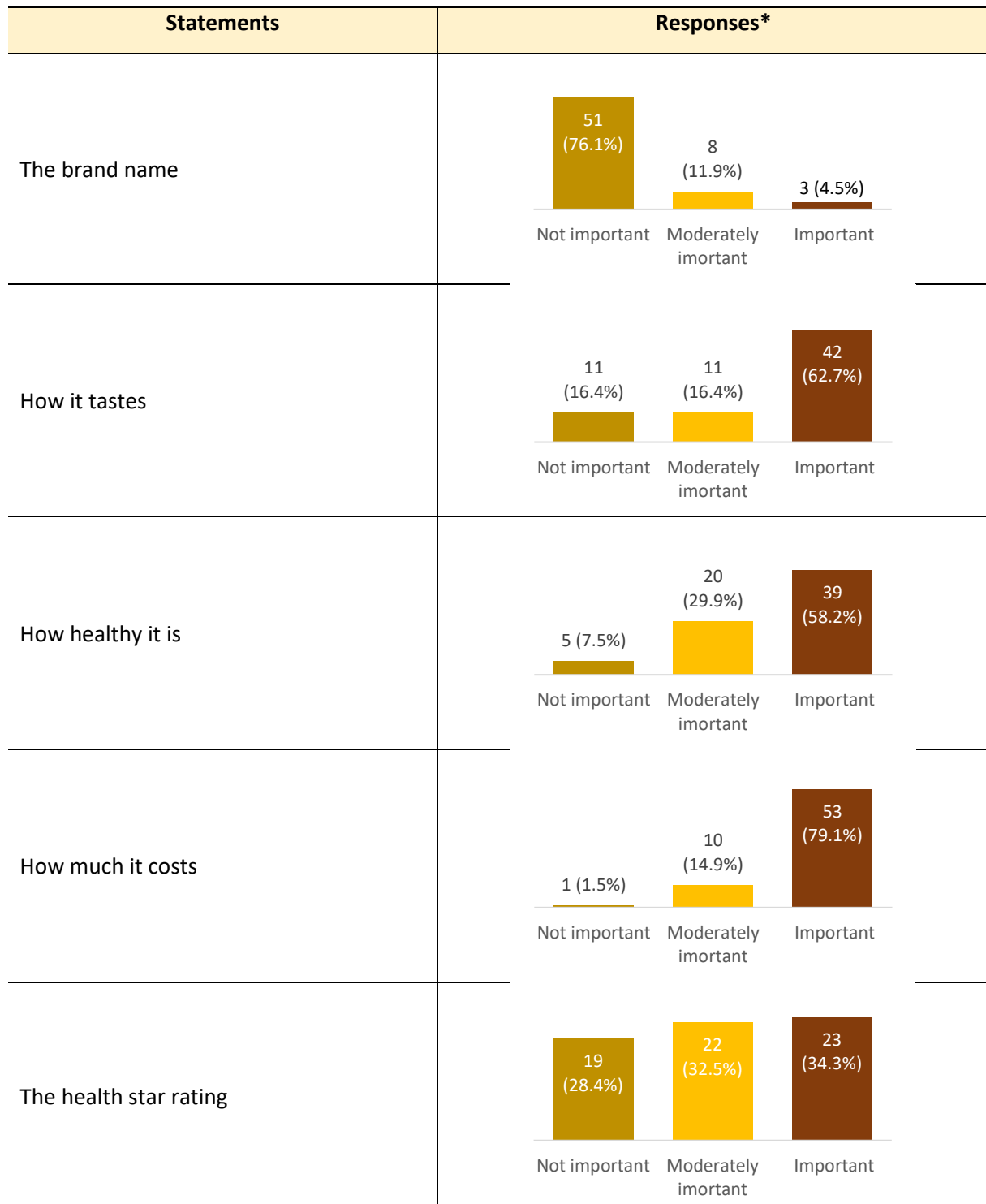


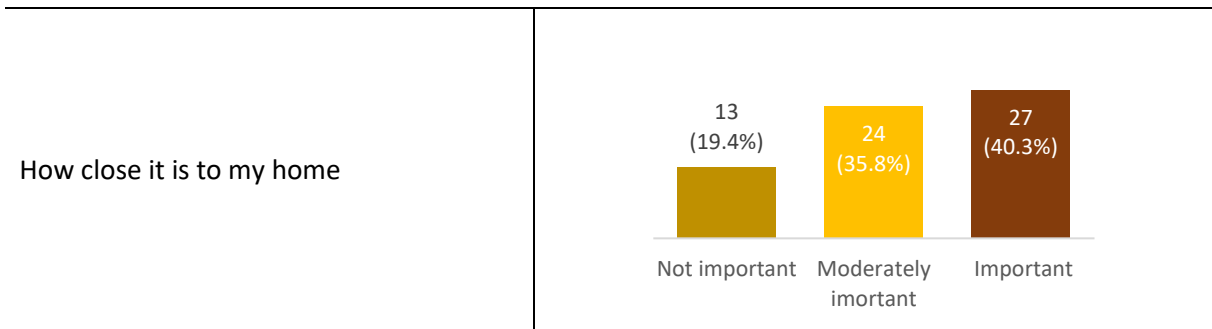
Figure 10: The frequency of purchasing of take-away foods

Participants were asked about the importance of various features of grocery items when they were accessing food. They were asked about the “The brand name”, “How it tastes”, “How healthy it is”, “How much it costs”, “The health star rating” and “How close it is to my home” with their responses rated on a scale of 1 – 5, from “Not at all important” to “Extremely important”. For reporting

purposes, “Extremely important” and “Important” have been combined in the positive and “Not at all important” and “Slightly important” have been combined in the negative throughout this report. Thus, the results are presented using a 3-point Likert scale.

As shown in Figure 11 below, “The brand name” was “Not important” for the majority of the participants (76.1%, n=51). Most participants said that “How it tastes”, “How healthy it is” and “How much it costs” were “Highly important.” “The health star rating” and “How close it is to my home” were perceived as “Moderately important” and “Important”, with a good proportion of those who perceived these two statements as “Not important” (28.4%, n=19 and 19.4%, n=13 respectively).





\*- Number and percentage of participants

Figure 11: Importance of various features of food

For most participants (80.6%, n=54), it was “Very” or “Fairly easy” to get information about food relief services (Figure 12). The responses “Very difficult” or “Fairly difficult” were chosen by the minority of participants (9.0%, n=6).

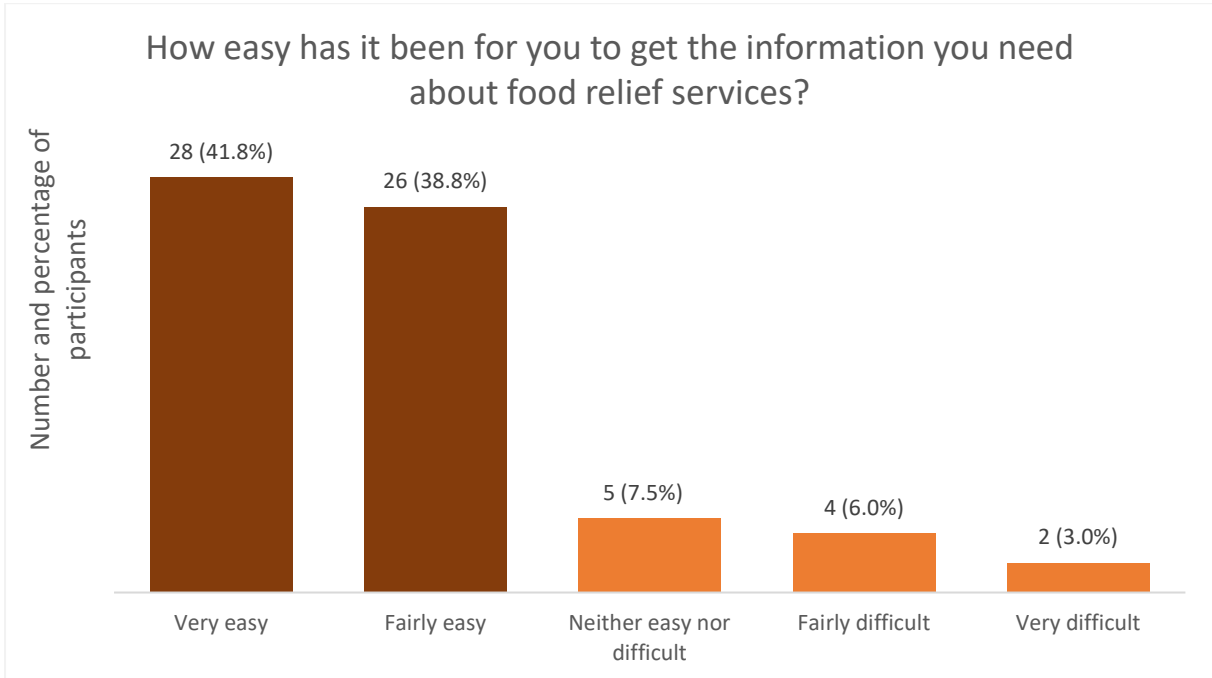


Figure 12: The ease of getting information about food relief services

Participants were asked about their current challenges in getting food. As presented in Figure 13 in a word cloud, the most frequent responses were the lack of money, the high cost of food and the cost of living, and the accessibility problems either because of disability or the absence of a car.



Figure 13: The current challenges in getting food

#### 4.1.2. Community Feedback Comment Cards

##### INTRODUCTION

Blank comment cards were readily available within MNH and provided the opportunity for community members to offer feedback and suggestions anonymously (Figure 14). The community feedback comment cards were collected, reviewed by the manager of MNH and displayed within the House to allow transparency of feedback with the community.

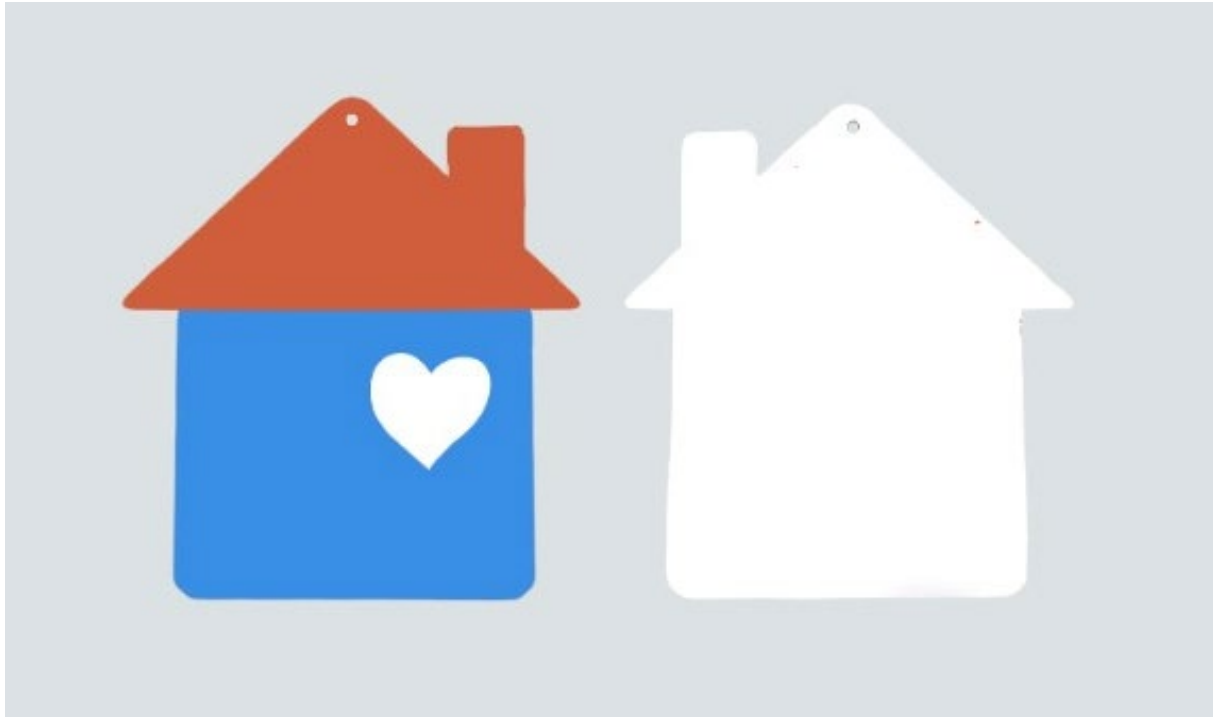


Figure 14: Blank Community Feedback Cards

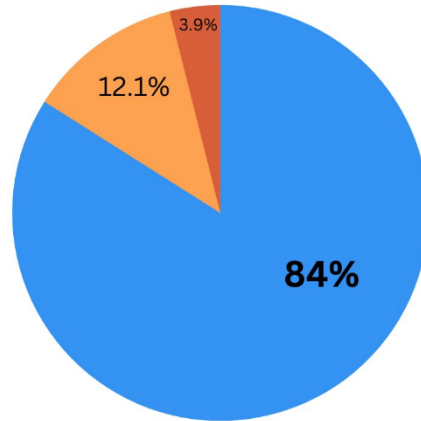
A total of 310 community feedback comment cards were collected and transcribed by the CERC research team in October 2022, and a content analysis was completed by CERC. The feedback provided was overwhelmingly positive, with three clear categories identified within the data:

- Gratitude for the Morwell Neighbourhood House
- Compliments to Morwell Neighbourhood House staff
- Suggestions for future activities

The most common category was “Gratitude to the Morwell Neighbourhood House” (84%), followed by “Compliments to Morwell Neighbourhood House staff” (12.1%). Only 3.9% of community feedback comment cards were suggestions for future activities, potentially indicating that MNH is currently meeting the community’s needs.



Community feedback comment cards were provided by **310** Morwell Neighbourhood House participants



Feedback was classified into three categories




-  Gratitude for the Morwell Neighbourhood House
-  Compliments to Morwell Neighbourhood House Staff
-  Suggestions for future activities

Figure 15: Community feedback card results

### Community Feedback Comment Cards Examples

#### Gratitude for the Morwell Neighbourhood House

- *“Thank you, Neighbourhood House. For all the help. This is a lovely place to come. So welcoming, and friendly and helpful. I appreciate you all.”*
- *“Morwell Neighbourhood House is amazing, everyone is welcome, great friendly people, meeting great people, community services. #thepeoplesplace”*
- *“Our Neighbourhood House: where everyone belongs and is welcome.”*
- *“Neighbourhood House Morwell. Such an amazing community support for so many people from all different walks of life. The Food Bank program is amazing.”*

## Compliments to Morwell Neighbourhood House Staff

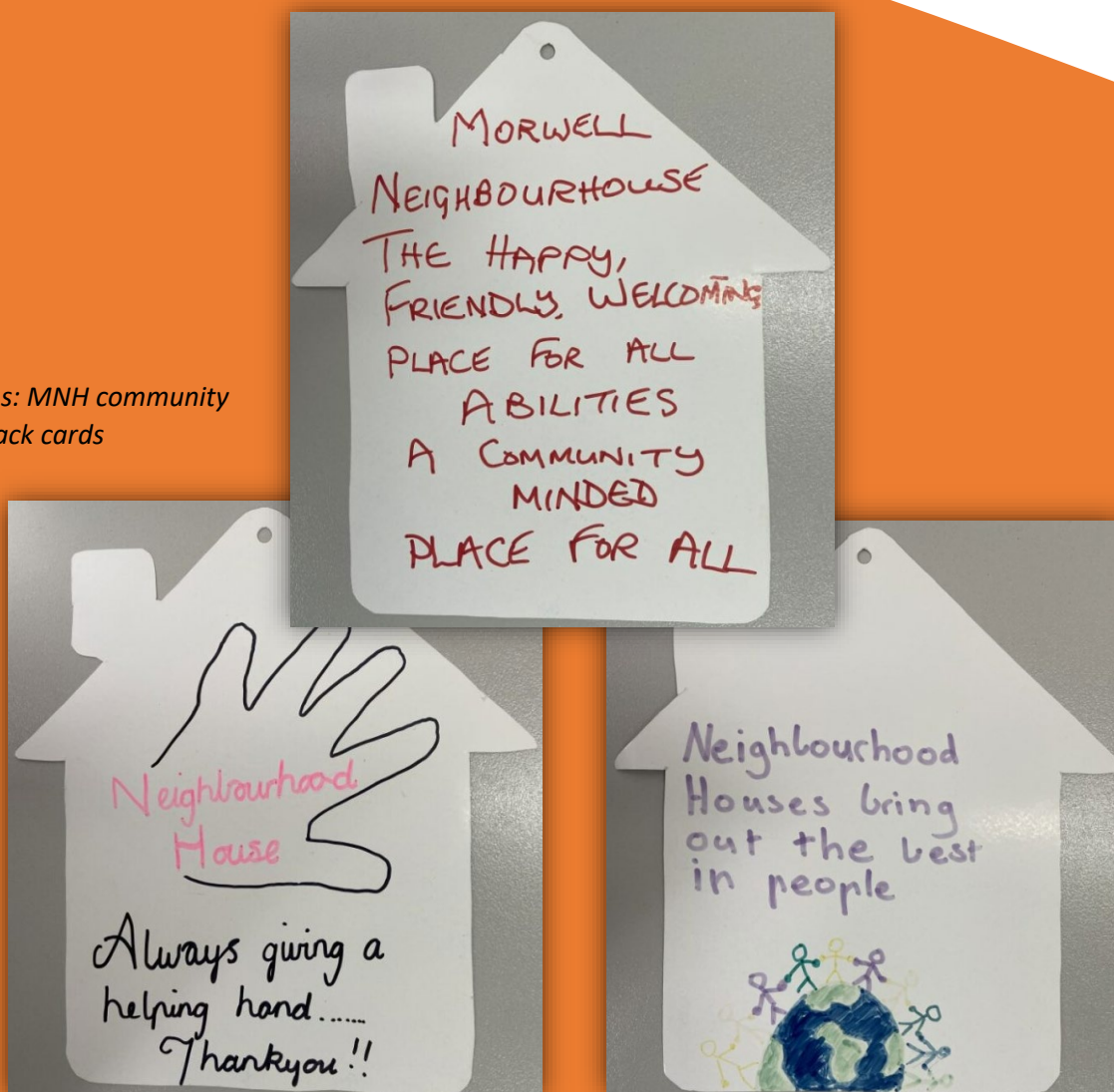
“The best facility for learning, staff is awesome, helping people in need, home feeling environment, comfortable.”

- “We appreciate friendly staff and assisting in the Food Bank. Thank you.”
- “Morwell Neighbourhood House provides support to all members of society. The staff and Volunteers are amazing and kind.”
- “Thank you to Morwell Neighbourhood House for providing for the needy, and the friendly staff. You've all been a great help for us. “

## Suggestions for Future Activities

- “Community vegetable garden”
- “Knitting classes”
- “Karaoke night”
- “Movie night”
- “LGBTQI social group”

Images: MNH community feedback cards



### 4.1.3. Staff and Volunteer Survey

#### INTRODUCTION

Staff and Volunteers of the MNH were invited to complete a survey about their experiences working in the House and providing the service to their community. Data were collected between February – April 2023. A total of 7 participants completed the Staff and Volunteer Survey.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The majority of participants were female (71.4%, n=5), and 14.3% (n=1) were male. One participant did not state their gender. No participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. One participant (14.3%) spoke another language other than English at home.

All participants were over 36 years, with a high proportion of those aged 46-65 (57.2%, n=4). The number of participants for each age category is shown in Figure 16 below.

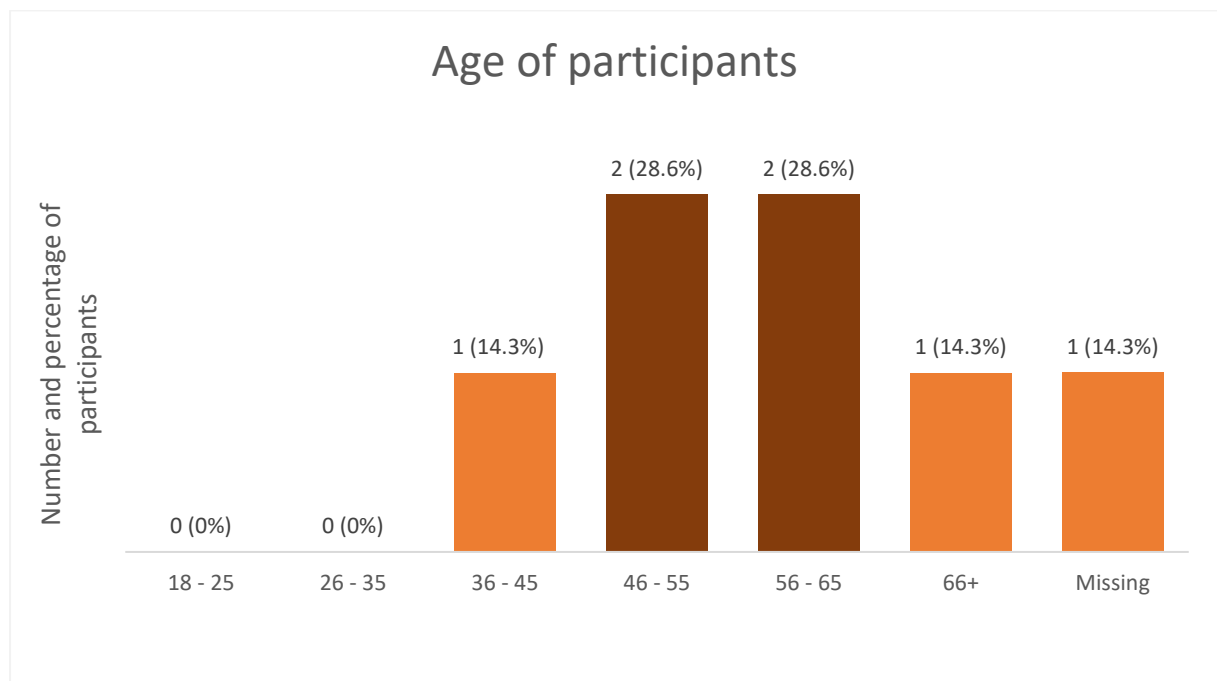


Figure 16: The age range of participants

Participants were asked about their titles or positions within MNH. Figure 17 shows that two participants (28.6%) stated that they were staff members. Two participants chose “Other” indicating that they combined two positions: Staff member and Volunteer. In addition, one project lead, one cultural connector and one Volunteer participated in this survey. Four participants (57.1%) recorded that they had been in their current positions for less than two years, while three participants (42.9%) had occupied the positions for more than 10 years.



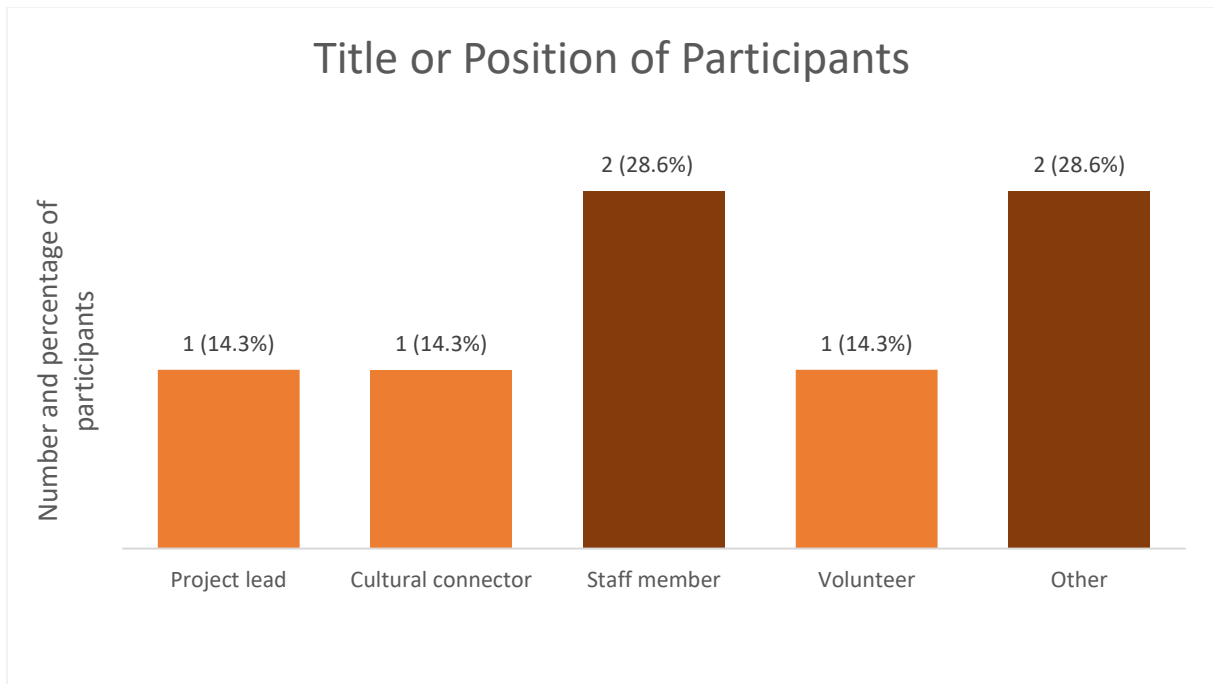


Figure 17: Title or Position of Participants

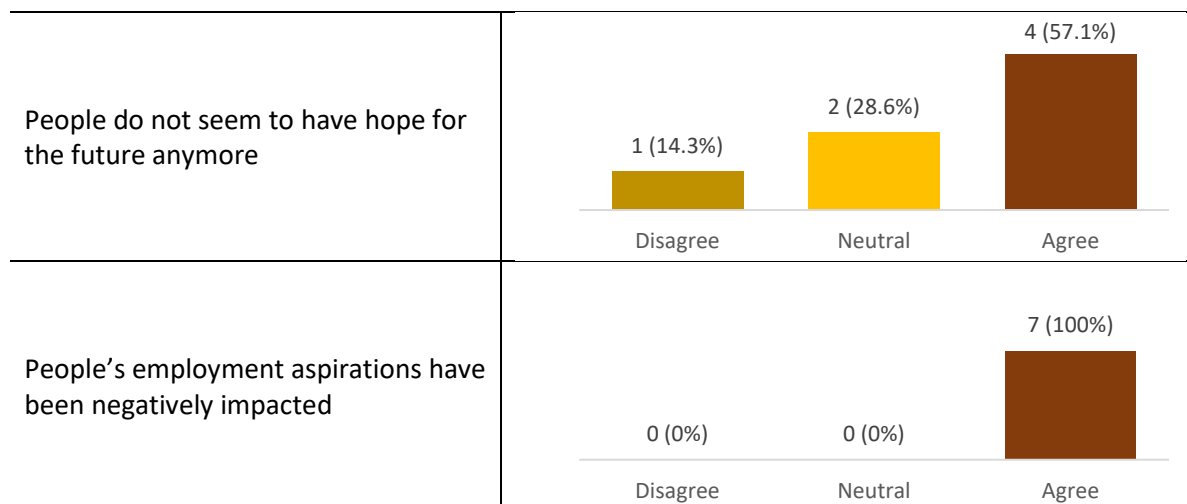
#### STAFF AND VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS

Participants were given a series of ten statements about their experience with clients over the last six months and asked to rate each one from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. For reporting purposes, “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” have been combined in the positive and “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” have been combined in the negative throughout this report. The results are presented using a 3-point Likert scale. The results are shown in Figure 18 below.

All participants had not experienced less demand for their services over the last 6 months and they have been able to help more people with their concerns. As reported by all participants, clients have been able to access the services easily. In terms of the participants’ observation of clients, it was evident that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted the clients’ mental health and more clients had concerns about their future. However, it was noted that people had developed increased resilience and coping skills.

Statements	Responses*		
I have experienced less demand for our services	7 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree

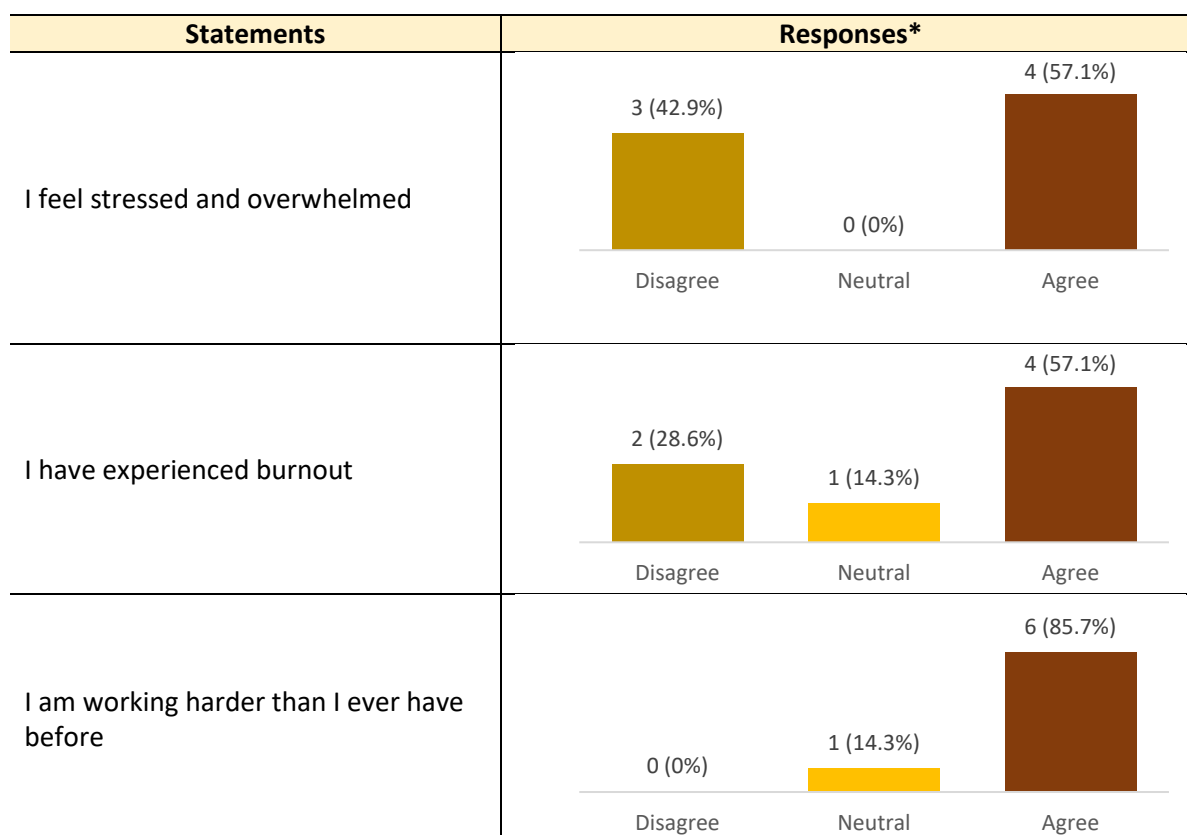
<p>Clients have been able to access our services easily</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disagree</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>7</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Count	Percentage	Disagree	0	0%	Neutral	0	0%	Agree	7	100%
Response	Count	Percentage											
Disagree	0	0%											
Neutral	0	0%											
Agree	7	100%											
<p>I am worried about the people who need assistance and have not been able to receive it</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disagree</td> <td>1</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>2</td> <td>28.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>4</td> <td>57.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Count	Percentage	Disagree	1	14.3%	Neutral	2	28.6%	Agree	4	57.1%
Response	Count	Percentage											
Disagree	1	14.3%											
Neutral	2	28.6%											
Agree	4	57.1%											
<p>I have been able to help more people with their concerns</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disagree</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>7</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Count	Percentage	Disagree	0	0%	Neutral	0	0%	Agree	7	100%
Response	Count	Percentage											
Disagree	0	0%											
Neutral	0	0%											
Agree	7	100%											
<p>I believe the mental health of people accessing our services has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disagree</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>1</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>6</td> <td>85.7%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Count	Percentage	Disagree	0	0%	Neutral	1	14.3%	Agree	6	85.7%
Response	Count	Percentage											
Disagree	0	0%											
Neutral	1	14.3%											
Agree	6	85.7%											
<p>There has been an increase in people presenting with concerns for their future</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disagree</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>7</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Count	Percentage	Disagree	0	0%	Neutral	0	0%	Agree	7	100%
Response	Count	Percentage											
Disagree	0	0%											
Neutral	0	0%											
Agree	7	100%											
<p>The common issues people present with have changed</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disagree</td> <td>1</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>1</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>5</td> <td>71.4%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Count	Percentage	Disagree	1	14.3%	Neutral	1	14.3%	Agree	5	71.4%
Response	Count	Percentage											
Disagree	1	14.3%											
Neutral	1	14.3%											
Agree	5	71.4%											
<p>I have noticed people developing increased resilience and coping skills</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disagree</td> <td>1</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>1</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>5</td> <td>71.4%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Count	Percentage	Disagree	1	14.3%	Neutral	1	14.3%	Agree	5	71.4%
Response	Count	Percentage											
Disagree	1	14.3%											
Neutral	1	14.3%											
Agree	5	71.4%											



\*- Number and percentage of participants

Figure 18: Experience of participants with clients over the last six months

In addition, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements about their experience and their feelings over the last six months. According to results (Figure 19), more than half of participants felt overwhelmed and had experienced burnout, because they have been *“working harder than ever before”*, and they had *“struggled to keep up with the number of people requesting services/assistance”*. However, they felt supported by their organisation and they considered that their efficiency had increased.





\*- Number and percentage of participants

Figure 19: Experience of participants over the last six months

In response to an open-ended question about the perceived barriers that clients were experiencing in accessing the services, the following issues were recorded: location, mobility issues and unable to drive due to health or the absence of a car. It was mentioned that most people used public transport. In addition, the unavailability of Halal food (frozen meals) for Muslim clients was considered a barrier as well. Shame in accessing the service was also noted as a barrier as some people were embarrassed to ask for help.

The majority of Staff and Volunteer participants recorded a change in the number of requests for services from the different populations, as presented in Figure 20.

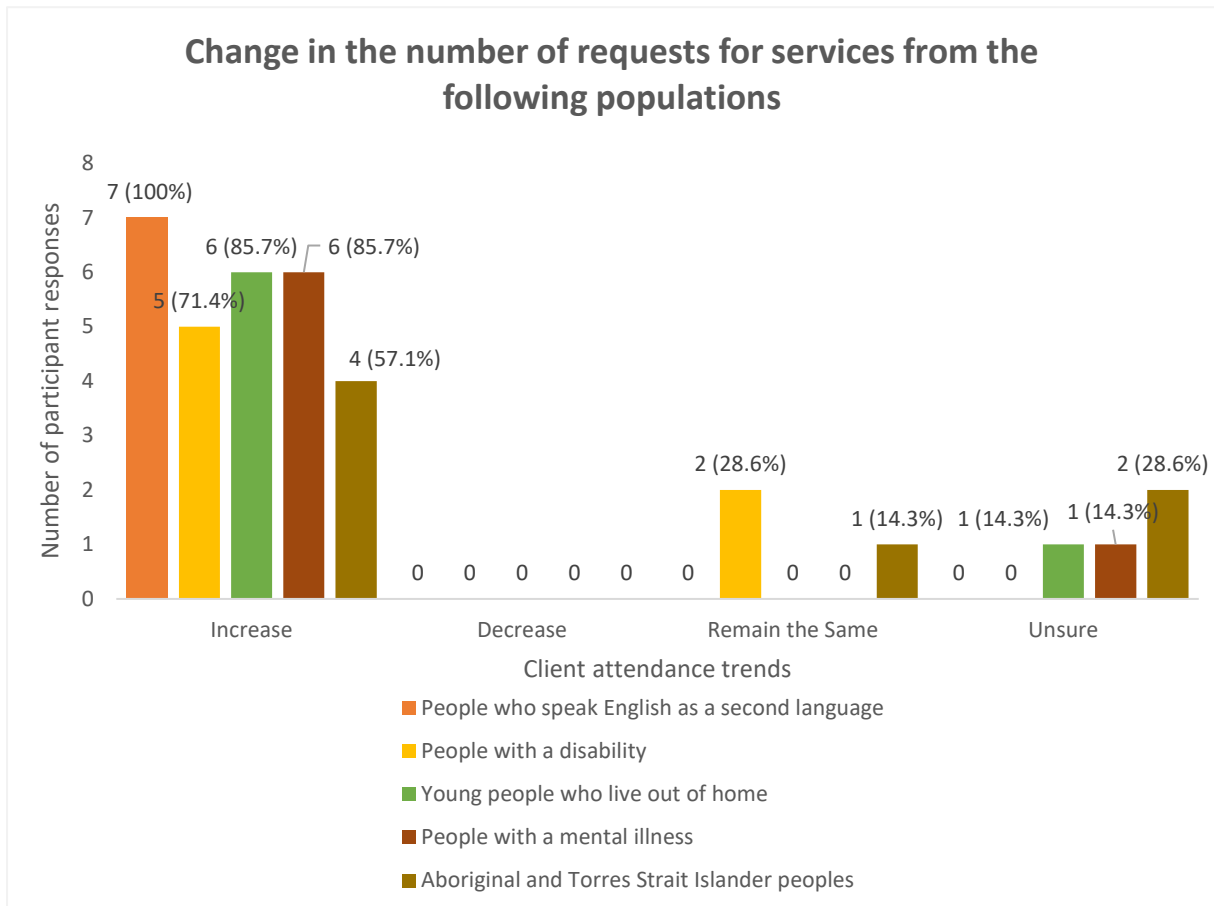


Figure 20: Change in the number of requests for services from the following populations

When Staff and Volunteer participants were asked about their perceived service forecast for clients for the next six months, the responses were not positive. Almost all participants mentioned that there would not be improvement or situations could get worse. Two participants clearly explained the reasons for such a situation highlighting an increase in the cost of living and an increase in the need for the service. *“These will have a huge impact on their food security, paying bills, socialisation, living conditions and mental health”*. One participant has a hope that they will be able to offer culturally appropriate food for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) clients in future.

## REQUIRED ACTIONS AND RESOURCES

Based on the participant responses, some additional activities are required for their organisation to maintain individual and community engagement. In addition, there is a need for the required resources to provide their clients with the services they need. Table 1 below summarises the participant responses.

Required activities to maintain individual and community engagement	Required resources to provide clients with the services they need	The providers of resources they need to operate their service
More work around engaging CALD communities.	More food.	Vinnies.
Add more support staff.	Because we have more food going out of Food Bank than coming in.	Victoria Food Bank.
Have another (second) venue to operate from to spread the load of people coming into one space all at once.	More donations and support from businesses.	Farmbox.
Keep groups running: Social Sisters & Lovable Larrikins walking group, WL2C, Shelebrate resourcing activities etc. with minimal funding and being able keep groups running.	More people resources to meet the demand.	Various sources of funding.
	More cooking space (Programs run where the kitchen is not accessible to keep up with meal prep and more service delivery).	

Table 1: Required actions and resources

#### 4.1.4. People's Kitchen

The People's Kitchen is a service facilitated by the MNH and run by Volunteers. This service provides home-cooked, nutritious meals for people experiencing food insecurity in the Latrobe Valley. The service also provided an opportunity for those Volunteering to learn about food insecurity, vulnerable populations in Latrobe Valley and learn cooking and food preparation skills. A variety of Volunteers cook in the People's kitchen, from local community members and service users, businesses and industry and high school students in the Latrobe Valley.

An organisational video was created by the MNH and LHA to demonstrate the work undertaken at the People's Kitchen: [Morwell Neighbourhood House People's Kitchen Video](#)

A media release was also developed by the MNH with ABC Gippsland to demonstrate the work being done in the People's Kitchen. The article discussed the gap the People's Kitchen was addressing with the rise in the cost of living and increased need for support realised in the Latrobe Valley post COVID-19: [People's Kitchen Media Release - ABC Gippsland](#)

Furthermore, a total of six radio interviews on the People's Kitchen have been undertaken to date, ensuring that the mission of the organisation is shared locally and nationally.

#### **Attendance Statistics - 2022**

Statistics on Volunteer attendance were gained from the MNH Manager in 2023, outlining the progress of the People's Kitchen. In 2022, there was a total of 182 Volunteers that attended the Kitchen, completing a total of 1004.5 Volunteer hours. Figures 21 and 22 outline the variety of Volunteer attendees that assisted in the Kitchen, and the hours of Volunteer work attended. Business and Industry Volunteers included employees of small and large organisations. Ladder Volunteers included those participating in the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program helping youth become more independent. MNH participants included those within the MNH network including service users. Volunteers made a total of 2819 meals, weighing over 1409 kilograms.

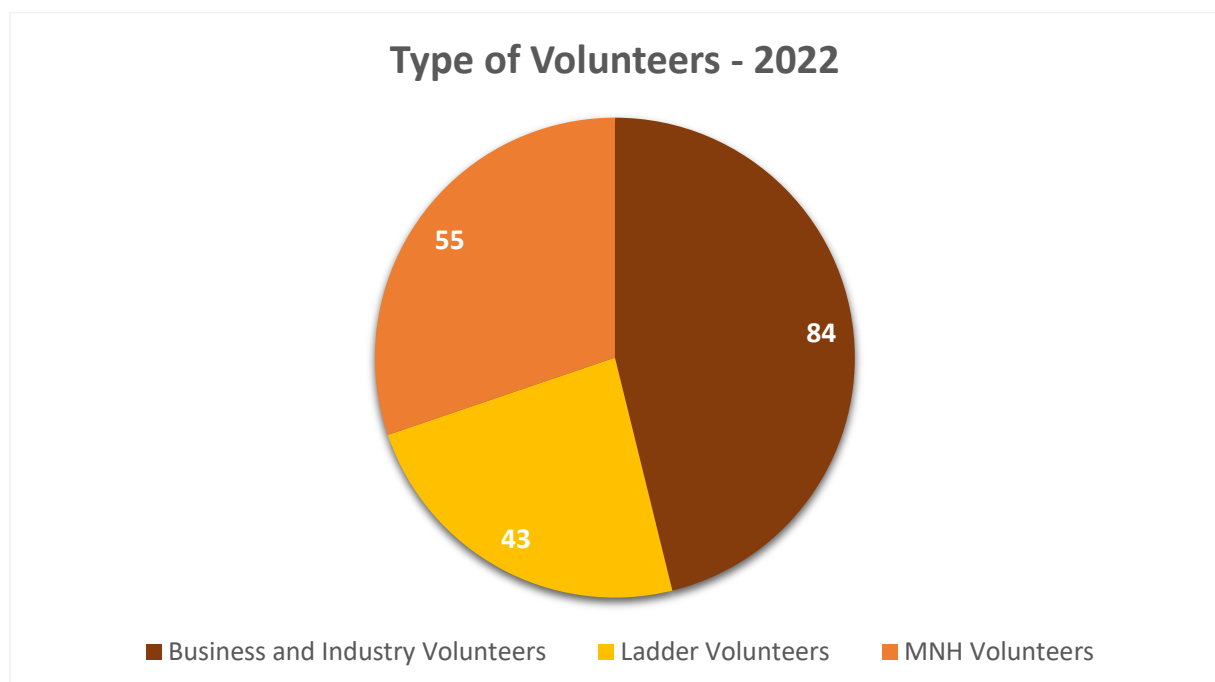
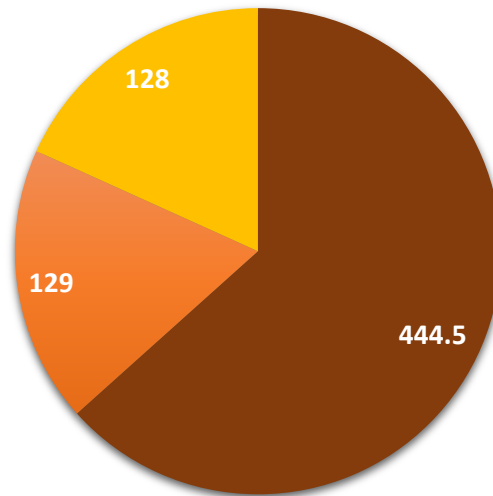


Figure 21: Volunteer type attending the People's Kitchen - 2022

### Hours of Volunteer Attendance - 2022



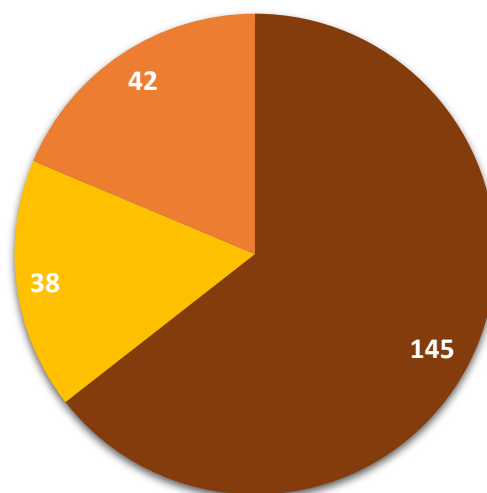
■ Business and Industry Volunteers   ■ Ladder Volunteers   ■ MNH Volunteers

Figure 22: Hours of Volunteer attendance to the People’s Kitchen - 2022

### Attendance Statistics - 2023

In 2023, Volunteer numbers attending the People’s Kitchen had grown, with a total of 304 Volunteers doing 1600 hours within the Kitchen. Figures 23 and 24 outline the type of Volunteers servicing the People’s Kitchen in 2023, demonstrating a significant increase in the number of business and industry Volunteers from 2022. A total of 4483 meals were made in 2023 at the time of reporting, weighing a total of 2241.50 kilograms. This demonstrated a 59% increase in the number of meals cooked and total weight of food produced from 2022 to 2023.

### Type of Volunteers - 2023



■ Business and Industry Volunteers   ■ Ladder Volunteers   ■ MNH Volunteers

Figure 23: Volunteer type attending the People’s Kitchen - 2023



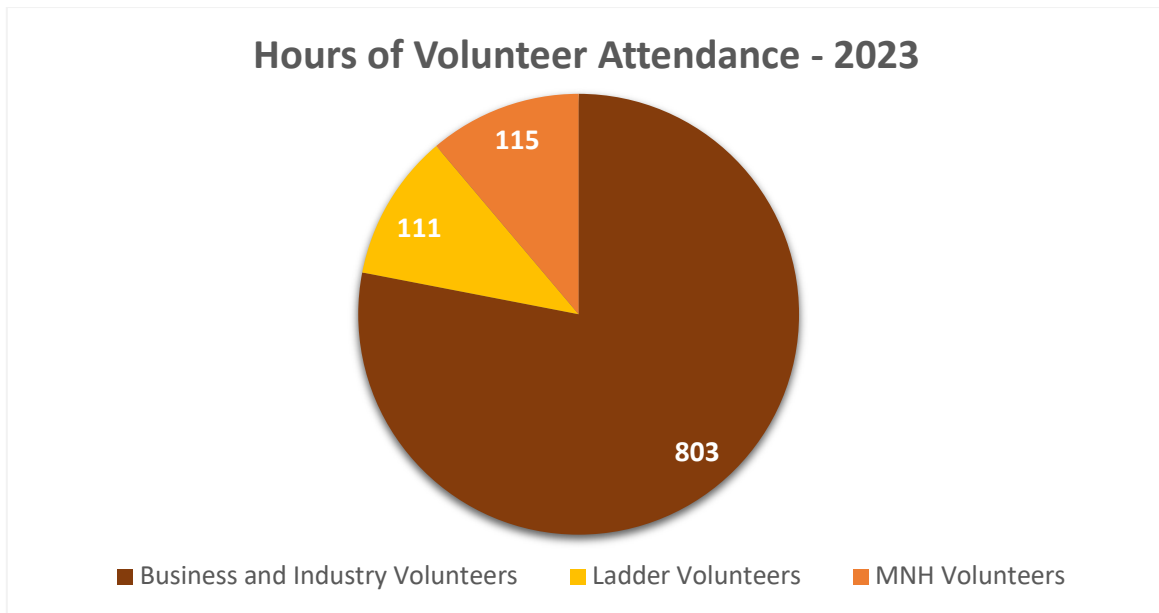


Figure 24: Hours of Volunteer attendance to the People’s Kitchen - 2023

***Volunteer contributions to the People’s Kitchen***

When exploring the number of different Volunteer groups that attended the People’s Kitchen, a total of 33 different organisations, community groups and services provided support in the cooking of meals. Of these 33 different groups, there was a variety of genders, ethnicities, ages and sizes of groups that attended. A varied representation of CALD communities, socio-economic status and level of experience was evident, demonstrating the wide variety of interest in supporting the People’s Kitchen from across the Latrobe Valley.

A video was created by the MNH demonstrating the variety of Volunteers that support the People’s Kitchen and prepare meals for vulnerable populations in the Latrobe Valley: [Cooking Up Connections by Sharing Food Video](#)

Local high-school students in the Latrobe Valley were also connected to the People’s Kitchen, preparing meals in their school cafeteria, which would be delivered to the MNH People’s Kitchen. As part of the Flexible Learning Option curriculum, students who engaged in cooking classes gained skills in safe food handling and preparation. Whilst undertaking this course, students learnt how to prepare nutritionally complete meals for the People’s Kitchen, being required to recognise ingredients, prepare the meal, cook the food and label the meals with their nutritional information. Between May – August 2023, high-school students cooked a total of 456 meals for the People’s Kitchen.

An increase in financial and in-kind support was realised by the People’s Kitchen since its inception, with support being received in the form of sponsorship donations and items to assist in the preparation of food and safety of Volunteers attending the People’s Kitchen. Details of financial support received in 2022 and 2023 of the People’s Kitchen are outlined in Tables 2 and 3 below. Financial contributions increased by 59% from 2022 to 2023.

2022	
Type of support received	Financial contribution
Business and industry sponsorship	\$26,774.82

Table 2: Financial support received for People’s Kitchen - 2022

2023	
Type of support received	Financial contribution
Business and industry sponsorship	\$42,448.71

Table 3: Financial support received for People’s Kitchen - 2023

In-kind support received by the People’s Kitchen since its inception was designed to assist in the daily functioning and expansion of service need. In-kind support is outlined in Table 4 below. A total of \$14,900 of in-kind support has been received from donors to support the People’s Kitchen.

Type of support	Approximate value of support
Oven	\$12,000
Work bench 1	\$ 800
Work bench 2	\$ 800
Kitchen utensils (chopping boards, peelers etc.)	\$ 500
Kitchen knives	\$ 300
Food processor 1	\$ 250
Food processor 2	\$ 250
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$14,900</b>

Table 4: In-kind support received for People’s Kitchen

The increase in financial and in-kind support for the People’s Kitchen allowed the MNH to expand their distribution points for the meals from Morwell to Moe and Churchill. Furthermore, the support facilitated the organisation in attending national conferences and forums to share their work and mission. With the expansion of work and need for the service across the Latrobe Valley, the People’s Kitchen has now begun weighing the waste that they re-direct from landfill. These statistics will form part of their environmental contribution outcomes in future. To date, 94.61 kilograms of food waste has been diverted from landfill.

### ***People’s Kitchen Community Outreach***

The MNH has begun to expand their service of the People’s Kitchen to the community in the form of a road show. In collaboration with the LHA, the initiative named “Healthy YOU roadshow” was designed to take information, support and wellbeing services to communities in the Latrobe Valley that have been historically under-resourced or not frequently visited by other community events. These events featured physical activities, conversations with local service providers and healthcare professionals and free food tastings, merchandise, and products. Figure 25 outlines the attendance numbers for each outreach event.

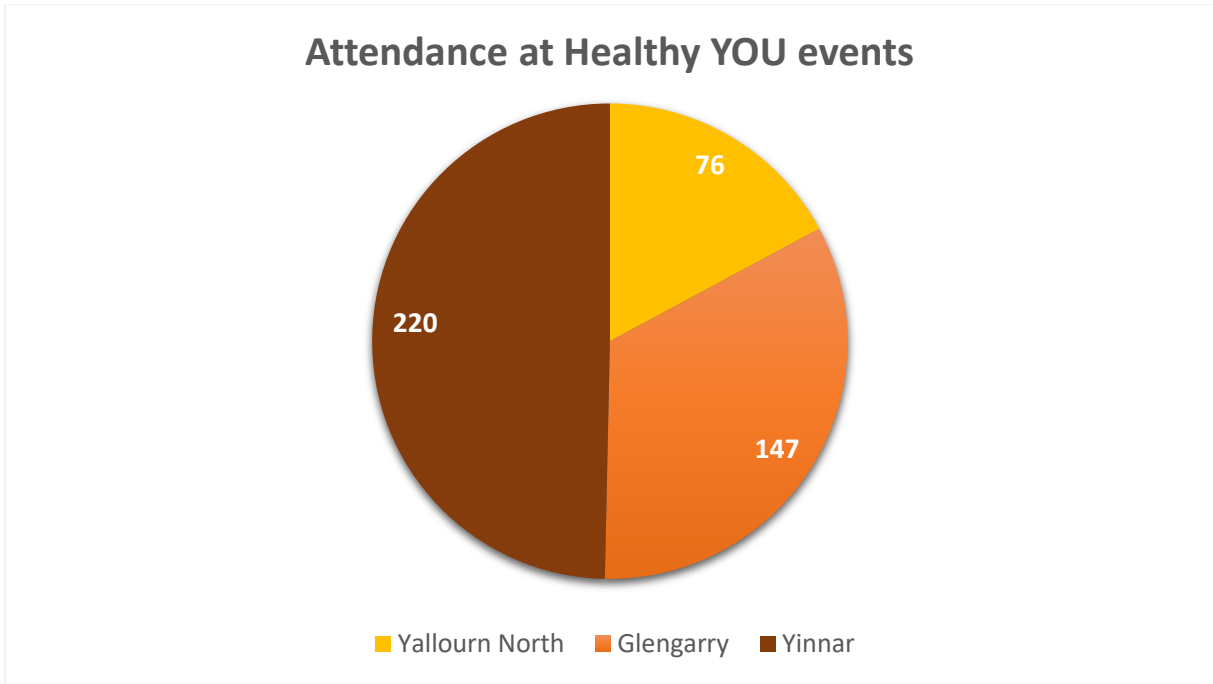


Figure 25: Healthy YOU outreach event attendance

#### 4.1.5. People’s Kitchen Stakeholder Survey

##### INTRODUCTION

At the end of each cooking session conducted through the People’s Kitchen program, stakeholders and community members completed a survey via Survey Monkey, at the request of staff. The data from 170 responses were analysed using the Survey Monkey software by the staff at MNH. All questions were answered to produce a maximum of 5-star ranking for each question. The results of the analysis are presented in this section, analysed by the Survey Monkey software prior to CERC analysis. The final question in the survey allowed for free text to be written by the respondents. The free text within the survey has been analysed by CERC using content analysis and is presented in this section. All quotes have been de-identified to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. The survey questions and graphs are as follows:

The first question in the survey asked:

*“Overall, how would you rate your personal experience at the People’s Kitchen (5 stars meaning ‘loved it’, 1 star ‘wasn’t for me’)?”* Analysis of the respondents’ answers produced a rating of 4.89 out of 5, which is shown in Figure 26. Results demonstrate that Volunteers engaging with the People’s Kitchen had a very positive personal experience.

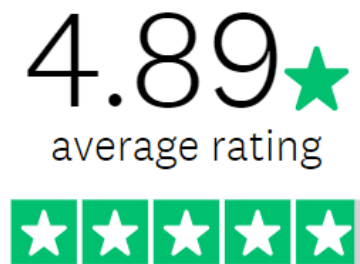


Figure 26: Average star rating of personal experience at the People’s Kitchen

The second question in the survey asked:

*“Looking back on your time at the People’s Kitchen, how would you rate the level of collaboration within your team to get the job done (5 stars meaning ‘amazing teamwork’).”* Analysis of the respondents’ answers produced a rating of 4.88 out of 5, which is shown in Figure 27. Results demonstrate that Volunteers strongly believed that their team collaborated in the meal preparation process.

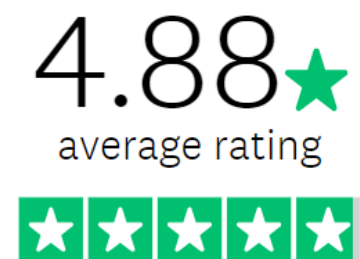


Figure 27: Average star rating of the level of collaboration within the team

The third question in the survey asked:

*“Do [you] feel there was enough support for your team to get the most out of your visit to the People’s Kitchen (5 stars meaning ‘perfect’, 1 star meaning ‘not enough support’)?”* Analysis of the respondents’ answers produced a rating of 4.93 out of 5, which is shown in Figure 28. Findings suggest that Volunteers attending the People’s Kitchen felt supported by the staff and Volunteers they interacted with during the meal preparation process.

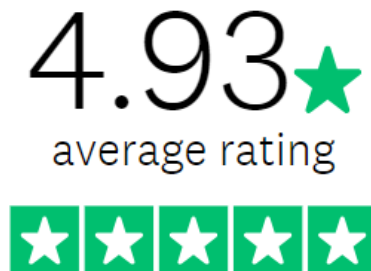


Figure 28: Average star rating of the level of perceived support for the team

The fourth question in the survey asked respondents to *“circle what parts of your experience worked well?”* Figure 29 demonstrates a coloured bar chart that shows the results after analysis. Findings from this Survey Monkey analysis demonstrate that Volunteers who attended the People’s Kitchen perceived that multiple aspects of the experience worked well, and there was not one aspect that was significant over other experiences.

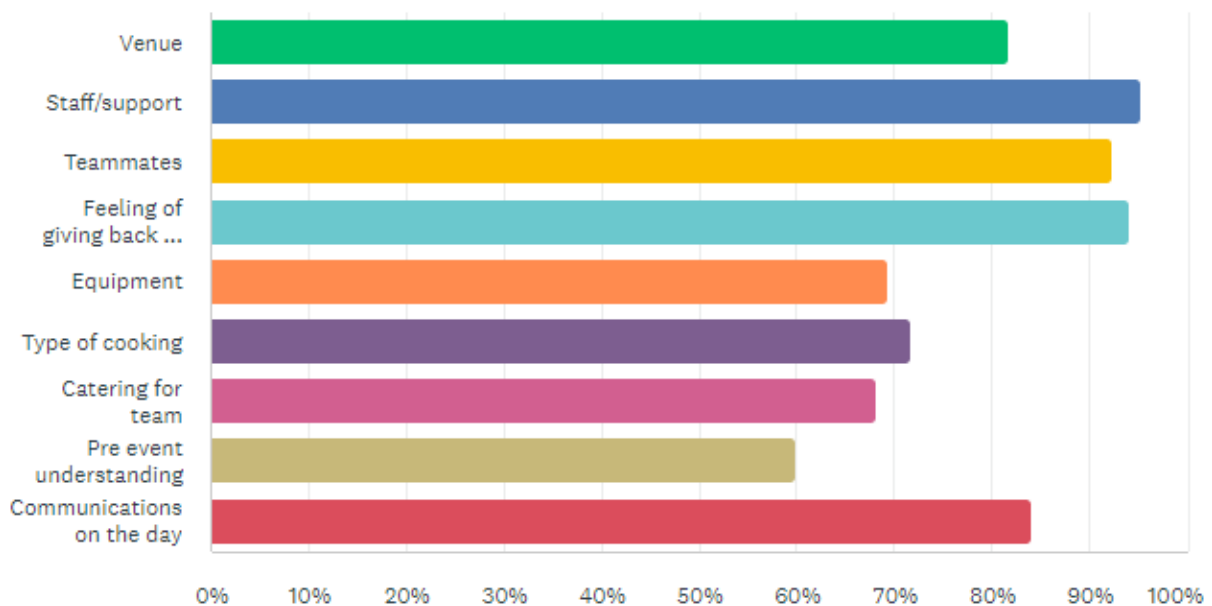


Figure 29: Bar chart showing what parts of the experience worked well

The fifth question in the survey asked respondents:

*“Would you recommend a session cooking at the People’s Kitchen with others (please select from the menu)?”* Respondents were given a selection of three answers to choose from, and the results are shown in Figure 30. These findings demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of Volunteers engaging in the People’s Kitchen would recommend the experience to others.



Those who responded to question six described their experience in the People's Kitchen as a "great", "wonderful", "amazing", "fantastic", "awesome", "tremendous", "education", "bonding" experience. "I loved it" was also written repeatedly, and the word "love" appeared 6 times. One respondent said:

*"Loved the whole day and the stories really help put thing into perspective."*

Respondents were grateful that they had the opportunity to give back to the community in this way and were inspired by the program, as expressed in the following quote:

*"Great time, great experience, great team Even greater cause."*

Being part of the program created such a strong impression that many respondents expressed a desire to "help out again". Other comments included, "I would love the opportunity to do this again!" and "Loved it, would love to do it regularly (once a month)," and "I will definitely be back to help some more." The following respondent wanted to return to the People's Kitchen without the need to be bound to their workplace and stated:

*"Fabulous to give something back. Would be great to hear about other opportunities to Volunteer within the community as an individual."*

Not only did the respondents feel good about the experience, but they also had faith in the team at MNH and the organisation's mission, commenting:

*"[name] and the team were incredible. So much effort and an amazing sense of accomplishment comes with being a part of days like this."*

This sentiment was expressed by another respondent when they said, "I love what the Morwell Neighbourhood House is about" and MNH was "an absolutely wonderful organisation to come and help out with."

Another survey respondent who had been involved with other charity events was impressed with the MNH model and work ethic, and described the People's Kitchen session:

*"A well organised and well-run session. Very willing to accommodate our needs. I've participated in a lot of Volunteering sessions with different charities, and this was a standout. Staff went above and beyond to make it enjoyable for us. Also haven't been to a Volunteering session that provided so much food and coffee for us! Well done!!"*

The respondents commented that listening to the MNH staff talk about food insecurity at the beginning of the session provided a "great background on why we are doing this", a "greater outlook on the challenges facing our local communities" and was "very enlightening":

*"I loved being a part of the program. It was fantastic to sit down at the start with [name] and have a conversation around the program and why it is so important. This opened up conversation that I had with people throughout the day around food security and supporting community which was great."*

For the survey respondents, cooking the meals alongside their work colleagues provided a "great team bonding experience" and resulted in "incredible teamwork":

*"It was a great experience and fabulous for me personally to get to know other members of our organisation in a social environment. The work that MNH & PK does for our community is extremely valuable. The understanding and insight that they have of the social and economic issues that families and individuals are facing in our region is extremely relevant. It is great to*

*see business & industry supporting the fabulous work that they do. I hope that the PK and the work of MNH can continue to evolve to meet and assist those in our community when they are in need. Fantastic work MNH & PK!"*

There were some suggestions for improvements among the respondent's answers, and these are represented in Table 5 below:

People's Kitchen survey suggestions for improvements
<i>"For Melbourne based teams it would be great to plan the day between 10-3pm... We didn't get the pre-Volunteering video but sounds like a good idea".</i>
<i>"The ergonomics of working spaces could be improved".</i>
<i>"It would be great if there was somewhere to compost so we could minimise the waste".</i>
<i>"There are a few tripping hazards when working in the kitchen, dishwasher open while moving hot food and pots on the floor".</i>
<i>"Two things to improve, asking more about our work and running through some simple knife skills".</i>
<i>"I would like a breakdown of the day and an introductory of what's involved prior to coming on the day".</i>

Table 5: People's Kitchen suggestions and improvement comments



## 4.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS – INTERVIEWS WITH CLIENTS / MEAL RECIPIENTS OF THE FOOD BANK

### INTRODUCTION

Interviews were conducted with 10 clients who attended the MNH Food Bank. Three CERC researchers thematically analysed the data from these interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) 6-step thematic analysis technique. Two major themes were generated from the data, namely “Creating a supportive environment” and “A sustainable solution”, as shown in Figures 32 and 33. Quotes from participants have been provided to support the themes. All quotes have been de-identified to maintain the confidentiality of interviewees.

#### Major theme 1: Creating a supportive environment

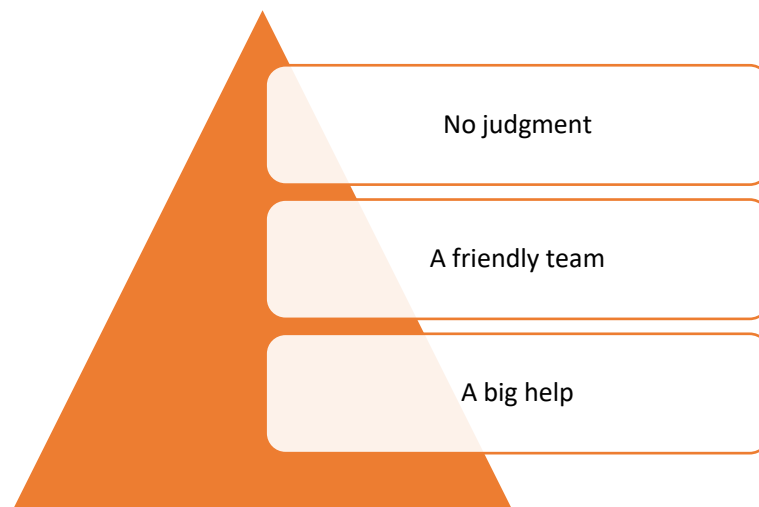


Figure 32: Theme one client thematic analysis minor themes

#### Minor theme 1: No judgment

There was a strong theme from the interviewed participants around the feeling of acceptance and lack of judgment regarding their need to access the Food Bank. Inclusiveness also extended to children, and this was appreciated by a participant when they stated, “*My children are very loud, but they’re very accepting of my children*” (P9). Being treated “*just like anybody else*” (P8) reflected a lack of judgment and was expressed in a similar way by another participant:

*“It’s friendly. They don’t judge anybody. Everybody’s the same. I just feel really comfortable when I go in there. I don’t know how to say it, you don’t feel like you’re a scammer”.* (P1)

Not feeling judged for seeking food relief was essential to the participants, and the staff and Volunteers worked hard to create an atmosphere that was relaxed and friendly to foster that. Participant 8 said, “*It’s a good environment, I find, for people who are reaching out and just needing a little bit of help along the line*” (P8). Even though participants said they did not feel judged by receiving the free food, they only attended when they could not make ends meet, understanding there was a limited supply to go around:

*“I just love going there because it’s no hassle. I only go in there when I really need help. I don’t go in there every week. I haven’t been there for a while because I’ve been doing pretty well... You don’t feel judged when you do go in when you do need it for that couple of weeks when you just can’t manage without it”.* (P1)

Although the participants reported that the Volunteers were “*happy and friendly*” (P8) and treated everyone equally, one participant struggled with a change in their life situation from being independent to dependent on food support. Participant 3 expressed that they felt embarrassed that at the end of their working life, they were no longer self-reliant and needed help from the MNH Food Bank:

*“I get embarrassed going. I don’t really like going there. When you’re relying on assistance from outside help, it’s all appreciated. But when you’ve worked all your life, and then suddenly you’re sick and you’re on a pension - it’s very demoralising when you have to go sort of cap in hand, but I appreciate that there’s no judgment”.* (P3)

The participants reported that Volunteers and staff created a welcoming and friendly environment with no judgment about people’s circumstances. Yet one participant observed that it was underpinned by certain rules and boundaries, which added to the atmosphere of safety:

*“I still remember about two months ago, there were people who were high or drunk, and they were outside, and they wanted to come in and get free food. [The person there] was very firm with them and said, ‘Sorry, you can’t come in if you’re under the influence of alcohol and drugs.’ So that made me have a feeling of, ‘OK. So only sober people can enter.’ So, it gave me a feeling of security, and it was like a safe zone”.* (P6)

### **Minor theme 2: A friendly team**

Friendliness was the second minor theme developed from the analysis of the participant interviews. Staff and Volunteers were referred to as “*happy and friendly*” (P8) and “*really, really good... people... [because] they welcome you; they encourage you*” (P4). Another participant added:

*“It’s been good, and the host people like [name, name] and the other people I like as well. Everyone has just been very welcoming and very nice. Also, the food has been good and the other people there have been nice, and it’s just been a nice atmosphere there”.* (P6)

Positive relationships were developed through encouragement and support. This then affected the atmosphere of the place, which was described as “*just amazing, just an amazing place to be*” (P4). Feeling welcomed, accepted, and known by name created a sense of belonging and provided an essential social connection:

*“You go there, and you talk to different people and sit down and have a cup of coffee. People are there; they all know me down there, and I get along with them all really well”.* (P5)

Not only were the Volunteers and staff reported to be friendly and easy-going, but the participants also commented that they acted professionally and were well-organised:

*“They seem to be professionally running it, but at ease, which also puts the clients more at ease when they’re relaxed... They seem very well organised with how they do things, which is good”.* (P8)

Across the participant interviews, there was a consensus that the MNH was an excellent program, and one participant stated that the staff and Volunteers at MNH “*were just fantastic, and I think they provide a necessary service here in Morwell*” (P7). To continue their valuable work, the participant added, “*If anything, they don’t need less funding; they need more funding to run more programs because they do a fantastic job*” (P7). Another participant added:

*“They do a great job; they work under a tremendous amount of pressure from a lot of other areas... What they're working under, and the limited funds there, they do a really good job”.* (P3)

### **Minor theme 3: A big help**

Participants were more than appreciative to receive fruit, vegetables and non-perishables from the pantry, and meals from the freezer so they could feed their family for that week. Some families were living week to week, and one participant struggled to *“keep them fed and keep them warm and looked after and medically well to worry about much else”* (P3). Another participant stated,

*“I can get the frozen meals and stuff because it really helps out on the weeks that I’m very short on money sometimes... If it wasn’t for them, I’d be buggered at times”.* (P2)

One participant felt that the pantry contained a broad selection of items that could cater to all their needs *“until [they] get paid again”* (P9). Another participant had a large family and reported that the food pantry was able to provide the bulk of her family’s requirements:

*“To feed my five, you can fill your bags up as well. Like some of the stuff you get, it helps because all you’ve got to do is go to the supermarket and get little bits and pieces to go with it and you’ve got a meal”.* (P2)

The participants who attended the Food Bank represented different family compositions and needs. Family pets were important to some of the participants and the supply of dog food was appreciated when money was tight:

*“If you have two dogs, it’s very expensive to feed them. Neighbourhood House has been amazing for that, to give you a big bag of dog food. That is so amazing. And veggies and food and frozen meals. That’s really, really good and helpful. And it helps my family”.* (P4)

Coming to MNH met many needs, not only on a physical level but also emotionally. One participant stated, *“It’s really good because you get rid of some of your problems”* (P5). Another participant received multiple benefits from attending:

*“There are four main reasons actually. One to get a free lunch, or sometimes even a free breakfast. The other reason is the Food Bank because I’ve got two kids..., and they go there and play with the toys and play with other children there. And the fourth reason is just because that is somewhere to go and relax”.* (P6)

The positive social environment was also important to the participants which was created not only by the staff and Volunteers but also by others who attended MNH. Cooking together and sharing meals helped alleviate negative emotions for this participant:

*“It’s full of food and we just pulled out some food and we’re able to cook ourselves a meal. We called it cooking class, but really all the old fellas were kind of ‘meat and potatoes’ type fellas. But it was fantastic just to get together with them. It was so good for me, particularly living alone and being by myself. I suffer from depression and anxiety and just having that group each week just bolstered me”.* (P7)

## Major theme 2: A sustainable solution

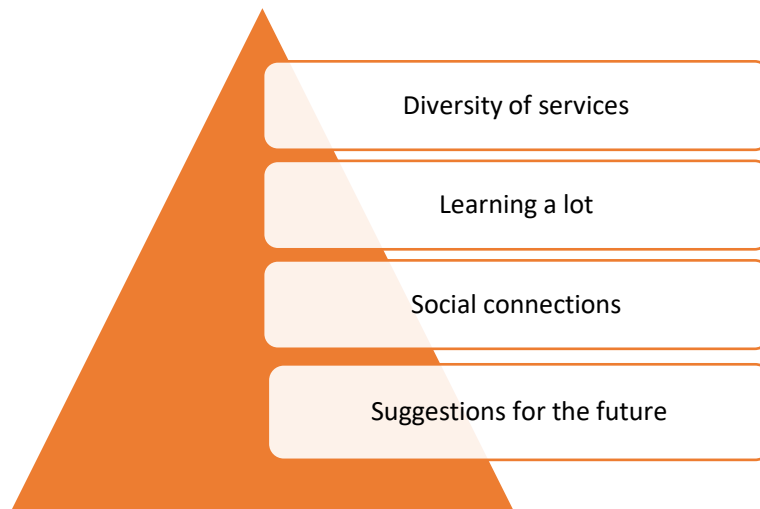


Figure 33: Theme two client thematic analysis minor themes

### Minor theme 1: Diversity of services

The participants reported accessing a variety of different programs and services at MNH depending on their needs at the time, which included *“the Food Bank, the free food, like breakfast and lunch... a toy section [and] it's also got free clothing”* (P6). Being able to come and go was also described by another participant in this way:

*“I've been there several times... and I've been unemployed on a number of occasions. I even studied for a year, and I was on Austudy, and I used to go to the Neighbourhood house, and I utilised their Food Bank. I utilised their men's group... and they've been fantastic with me, to be honest”.* (P7)

The cooking sessions enabled new skill development in meal preparation and exploration of different tastes and recipes. One participant stated they *“now do a bit of cooking here at home... [and] it's really very interesting at times when they have different recipes”* (P5). As well as collecting food from the pantry, some of the participants attended the men's social group and went on outings to various places. This provided a strong social connection and enabled the participants to get out of their houses:

*“We went bowling, we went to the museums, we did the art galleries. We went here, there, and everywhere and that was all organised by the Morwell Neighbourhood House”.* (P7)

### Minor theme 2: Learning a lot

The weekly cooking sessions are held *“every Thursday sometimes, and they're doing now maybe every Tuesday”* (P4) in the MNH kitchen. The participants *“all gather together and cook in there and put it in the freezer and get it used in the Food Bank...”* (P4). Cooking for the Food Bank provided social connection, camaraderie, and an opportunity to *“get taught recipes and what to make from the food”* (P1).

One participant explained that safety and food hygiene were a top priority and described in detail what was entailed in cooking correctly, especially when preparing food for the freezer. Mastering the food-safe habits helped create an overall enjoyable learning experience:

*“Wearing gloves, using safety measures, using the right chopping board, using the right cutting knives, using knives that are sharp, using washing and cleaning and certain habits, good habit forming and everything, most definitely. It's just been positive for me”. (P7)*

Multicultural participants attending the cooking sessions *“learned a lot of things and how to cook Australian food sometimes”* (P4) and shared recipes from their home country. The outdoor garden was used to supplement seasonal foodstuffs, which also provided a learning opportunity:

*“I love working. I love everything. I'm joining the Food Bank, cooking. The people there are so friendly and very different from others, and the service is really, really fantastic, and I really enjoy it. They will all gather together and learn about the garden and learn about some other stuff. We want to know something we don't know. We gather together and cook, and they will want to cook something we don't know”. (P4)*

### **Minor theme 3: Social connections**

Various social activities were offered at MNH, and one participant described their routine as *“going out with the others, say each fortnight to the bowls and 10-pin bowling. And the other Tuesdays we stay at the Neighbourhood House and do cooking”* (P5). Another participant attended two different social connection groups. The first is a multicultural group, and the second is a *“disability/chronic illness social connection group. These groups are ones in which I enjoy a sense of food security, community connection and service”* (P10). These activities provided an important social outlet for the participants and an incentive to get out of the house, as one participant explained:

*“You're not sitting at home in the unit and fiddling with your fingers or anything like that or looking out the window and seeing who's out there and who's not. This way, we can get out and tell what's all around you, and you're in the open air”. (P5)*

Social connection was essential for many participants living alone, retired or with a limited social network. Having a place to belong and feel welcomed was necessary for their mental health, regardless of whether they needed to collect food from the food pantry or attend other activities:

*“If you want to have a coffee, they'd let you have a coffee. It's really nice if you want to chat. I find that very comforting. It makes you feel like you're wanted”. (P1)*

Health service providers or case workers attended MNH with their clients from time to time and also reported having a positive experience when being on site. They noted that the friendly atmosphere was necessary for their client's mental health, and the lack of crowds was less triggering:

*“If we're waiting for the Food Bank or somebody's there before us, we just interact with all the other people there. And that's the other reason I found it good for my clients with mental health was because there weren't that many people there, and they didn't put a stigma on you. And that's why they all really liked it”. (P8)*

One participant commented that they enjoyed the program and camaraderie so much that they missed their company during the Christmas holidays. They understood the need for staff and Volunteers to have a break, but all the same, they missed them:

*“That's just a shame they shut so often, because particularly when I was unemployed. I had one Christmas there, where they were just shut the whole time, and it was just a bit sad, a bit of a shame, really”. (P7)*

#### Minor theme 4: Suggestions for the future

The participants were asked if they had ideas that could improve the services that MNH provided to the community. One suggestion was for the Food Bank hours to commence at 9 a.m. The reasoning for this was because:

*“People that don't work and need their food... want to come early and get it over and done with. Because a lot of them have got mental health problems, and they like going out early and coming home early so that they don't bump into too many people with their depression”.* (P1)

The MNH was known to be *“running all sorts of groups all the time; exercise groups for ladies and men and stuff like that”* (P3). Due to their popularity, one suggestion was to increase social activities *“by providing more regular opportunities for the groups to come together, for example, weekly or fortnightly”* (P10). For many interviewed participants, the connections developed within the social groups at MNH were strong, and one participant missed attending the men's group after he gained employment. He wondered whether a men's group could be started at night, which would allow workers to stay connected to MNH. He expressed:

*“I'd like to see them running more kinds of night groups because I'm working. It's a bit sad for me because I'm working so I don't get there. I can't get there during the day anymore, so I can't do the men's group”.* (P7)

Another suggestion was the implementation of a Narcotics Anonymous group, as he believed there was a need in the area for people to be supported with addiction:

*“I would love to see them run something like a Narcotics Anonymous in the evenings. Something like that would be useful to be used in that way. I believe Morwell hasn't got a Narcotics Anonymous, and it would be a fantastic thing to do”.* (P7)

Currently, community members drive their own cars to social events such as *“bowling... museums... art galleries* (P7), and it was suggested that a minibus would be helpful, which could increase the number of people that could attend, and not restrict the viability of a trip to the availability of car drivers:

*“Anyone who wants a lift, we all help each other out. If we had a minibus to go on excursions, it'd be really good, and then we could pay so much to run that bus out there. Drive it wherever they want to go”.* (P5)

While this participant was willing to contribute to the running of a minibus, money would be needed to purchase it. In addition, for programs to be extended or new activities introduced, more funding would need to be sought:

*“They do a good job, but I would like to see them get a lot more funding than the government does. The government should dig down in their pocket and fork out to these people because they need it. They really do need the money”.* (P3)

## 4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS – INTERVIEWS WITH MORWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

### INTRODUCTION

A thematic analysis was conducted of interviews with six staff involved with the Morwell Neighbourhood House. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) 6-step thematic analysis technique. Two major themes were generated from the data, namely “Connecting with people, making a real difference” and “Building strong, resilient communities”, as shown in Figures 34 and 35. Quotes from participants have been provided to support the themes. All quotes have been de-identified to maintain the confidentiality of interviewees.

#### Major theme 1: Connecting with people, making a real difference

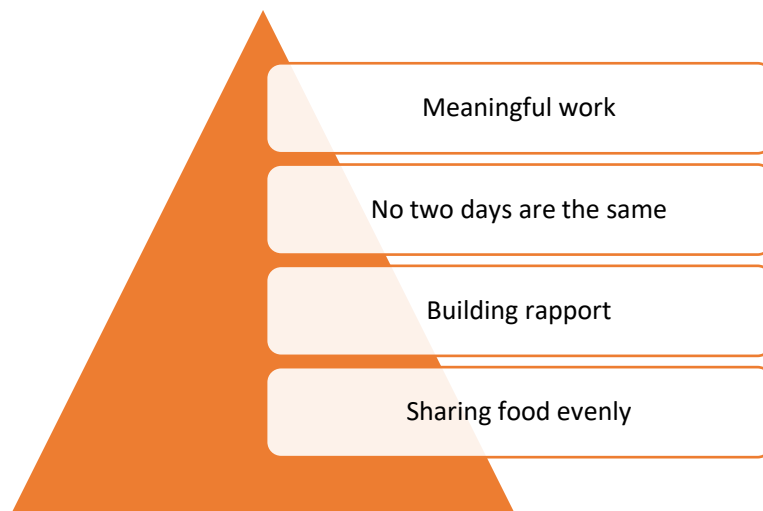


Figure 34: Theme one staff and Volunteer thematic analysis minor themes

#### Minor theme 1: Meaningful work

For staff working within the MNH, seeing the “*impact*” they could have within their local community was inspiring. For them, being able to give their time to a worthy cause gave their work meaning:

*“It’s fantastic, it’s really meaningful and I think it’s just the best work you can be doing really because you’re directly impacting on people’s lives for the better. Even though you can’t solve all their [the clients] problems, and even if they need to come back for food relief, ongoing it’s still there for them and it’s their space. It’s just so beneficial for them and it’s just so meaningful to me”.* (P1)

Staff described an important part of their work was to ensure their clients know “*they’re not alone*”. Being able to foster a “*sense of community*” provides dignity and respects, regardless of where their clients have come from or why they have needed to seek food relief. Staff acknowledged the difficulty in seeing their clients suffering, stating how “*hard*” it can be knowing that there are limits to what they can provide:

*“There are limits to what anyone can do really. But we just try the best we can and that’s it. It’s always good knowing you’ve at least helped somebody, even if it’s just a little bit”.* (P2)

The range of services provided by the House was vast, catering to the needs of many members of the local community. Staff identified that the services they provided were not only good for their clients’ mental health, but also their self-esteem:

*“Being able to come here and get your food shop, get your haircut, pat your dog, have a shower, get a hot meal. For me, it’s a place-based response”. (P5)*

### **Minor theme 2: No two days are the same**

Being able to “*adapt*” to change was a frequent requirement of the staff involved in the House, “*to just be flexible and to not have any sort of rigid expectations*” (P1). Being responsive to whoever walks through the door was important for staff in maintaining a whole of person approach to the wellbeing of their clients. This flexibility extended to both the food relief and wellbeing needs of their clients, but also managing aggression and anti-social behaviours:

*“We have to be really flexible and quite nimble in our response because things can go pear shaped very easily when we’re talking about people that are so marginalised. They have been worked against instead of worked with for so long that they’re already angry before they even walk through the door”. (P5).*

The reward in seeing their clients go from food and wellbeing insecure to well and often thriving made the unpredictability of the work worthwhile for staff:

*“When you see them [the client] from the beginning of the program to the end, it’s really, really good. They’ve got a lot more self-esteem and they’re starting to really enjoy their life and they’re figuring out what they wanna do”. (P3)*

### **Minor theme 3: Building rapport**

When providing a whole-of-person approach to wellbeing, staff were mindful that building rapport and connection with their clients would ensure respect and engagement in programs and support:

*“You build that relationship; you build the trust and then you carry it wherever you go”. (P4)*

Allowing clients the time they needed to become familiar with their surroundings and the staff was highlighted as important in the building of trust. “*Greeting*” clients and “*respecting them*” as they move through the House ensured that mutual confidence was achieved by both staff and clients:

*“So, there was a lot of talking to clients, understanding their needs. The biggest learning for me was that every client that walked in had a different level of need. It was really interesting to understand the nature of what we supplied from a Food Bank versus what people needed”. (P6)*

### **Minor theme 4: Sharing food evenly**

Managing the balance between supply and demand to meet the needs of their individual clients and their communities was often challenging for MNH staff. Due to the pandemic induced increased cost of living, staff saw “*four times the amount of people coming in*” (P2). Ensuring enough food for everyone could get challenging at times:

*“If a single person chooses to take a whole bunch of extra stuff, even if they’re really in need, that leaves less for families and other people that are also struggling. You have to point that out to them”. (P1)*

Staff highlighted how clients could become “*quite desperate*” at times, “*pushing the boundaries*” of what they could and couldn’t take with staff trying to ensure adequate supply for all. This was also



seen in the strict opening hours of the House, where missing out on food due to the pantry closing time might be the tipping point for some clients:

*“There was a young guy who came in and it was once the Food Bank had closed. It was after 2 o’clock. You could see straight away that he was just a mess. He was near on crying; he was just so upset. And I said, ‘Well, the Food Bank is closed, but we’ll be able to help you’, and as soon as I said that his whole demeanour completely changed”. (P2)*

## Major theme 2: Building strong, resilient communities



Figure 35: Theme two staff and Volunteer thematic analysis minor themes

### Minor theme 1: Community engagement

For the local community to understand the work of the Morwell Neighbourhood House, staff would have *“broader conversations about food insecurity and what it looks like”* (P5), as they believed *“it’s not somebody else’s problem, it’s our collective problem”* (P5). It was important to staff that the message of the House and its mission was spread to their local community:

*“They’re [the community] not aware, they don’t know anything, they don’t have any information, they’re not aware that you exist or these things exist. So, you can’t wait for them to come to you. You have to go out there”. (P4)*

The numerous community programs the House facilitated, such as the Melting Pot, Lovable Larrikins, Social Sisters and the Ladder program were key highlights for staff. Seeing the change in clients accessing these programs was encouraging for staff, giving them joy in their work:

*“There was so much scope for providing a holistic approach and they [the House] certainly did with the Ladder program. Teaching young kids how to cook and how to cook for the Food Bank, which was one of my joys seeing these kids really become independent in the kitchen. That was pretty good”. (P6)*

Having corporate groups attend the People’s Kitchen and assist with meal preparation was also a highlight for staff. They felt that corporate groups assisting in this way were *“really tapping into the strengths of the community to band together and create real social change”*. (P1)

## Minor theme 2: Working with diverse communities

The House serviced a number of community groups within the Latrobe Valley, such as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, marginalised groups, gender diverse and those with disability. Being able to offer free services to various community groups was inspiring for staff:

*“They [CALD communities] were not aware of the People’s Kitchen, the Food Bank and even the lawn mower bank that we’re running, the free haircuts, all free. And they were like, ‘Free? Are you sure?’, ‘Yeah, you don’t pay for anything’. So that spread like wildfire”. (P4)*

Being able to support different people with different needs gave insight into the lives of others, allowing staff to learn and develop their own understanding of marginalised groups. Staff realised that there wasn’t one mould that clients fit:

*“You get some people come in and they’re working, but they’re on low wages. Or they’ve got medical bills and they’ve got gas and electricity bills all at once and they just need a bit of help getting more food”. (P2)*

It was a learning experience for staff, understanding how different groups, such as older CALD women, are “feeling isolated” and finding ways to overcome these challenges with them. Furthermore, catering for diverse religious groups and nationalities was often challenging with the food goods that were available in the Food Bank:

*“Another challenge is a lot of the frozen meals that we’re offering to Food Bank clients, we cannot offer them to Muslim members of the community because they need Halal”. (P5)*

## Minor theme 3: Where to next?

Looking towards the future of the Morwell Neighbourhood House, staff were optimistic about what they could provide to their communities:

*“I can see in the future that it’s going to get bigger and better; we’re going to be able to work with high schools and that sort of stuff next year. I’m really looking forward to it”. (P3)*

Staff acknowledged that there were things that could be improved, such as increasing size and location, the need for more staff and more robust kitchen equipment. Accessing greater funds for the House was highlighted by numerous staff, wanting to ensure they could provide the best programs and resources they could:

*“I guess one thing that really stands out is the need for better funding and stuff for food, assistance for people with food because homelessness is a massive issue as well”. (P3)*

Overall, staff were extremely positive about their work within the House and how they address “what are the local issues and what are the local solutions, but also coming from that connected model that looks at what is strong and not what is wrong” (P5). Feeling supported and encouraged within the workplace allowed staff to thrive in a positive culture:

*“It’s just really supportive and inclusive. You just don’t feel judged about anything, and I think not only the people that access the services, but the staff, we’re all very different people from different walks of life, and yet we all feel welcome. I think that’s a great culture to have”. (P1)*

## 4.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS – INTERVIEWS WITH PEOPLE’S KITCHEN STAKEHOLDERS

### INTRODUCTION

Interviews were conducted with 18 community members who attended either MNH or the Kinder Cup Café to cook meals in the People’s Kitchen for the MNH Food Bank. The companies that stakeholders worked for provided their employees time to participate in the program to meet their social responsibility to the community. The interviews with stakeholders were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) 6-step thematic analysis technique. Two major themes emerged from the data, namely “House of learning” and “Renovate and extend”, as shown in Figures 36 and 37. Quotes from participants have been provided to support the themes. All quotes have been de-identified to maintain the confidentiality of interviewees.

#### Major theme 1: House of learning

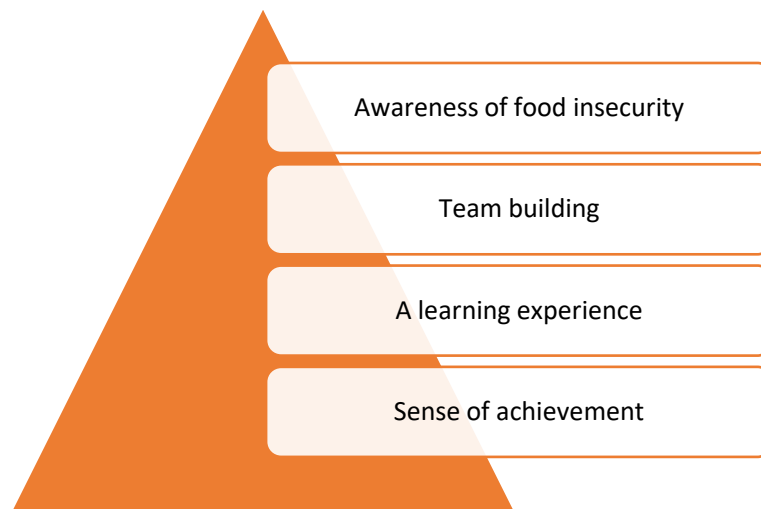


Figure 36: Theme one People’s Kitchen stakeholders thematic analysis minor themes

#### Minor theme 1: Awareness of food insecurity

The community members reported not realising the extent of food insecurity in the Latrobe Valley, which in turn made them feel grateful for what they had:

*“It makes you realise just how fortunate you are that your circumstances are such that you are in paid employment, and you’ve got a roof over your head and a family to support you. But not everyone is as fortunate due to whatever reason... it’s eye opening”. (P2)*

Some of the stakeholder participants already had an awareness of food insecurity through their workplace, but attending the program increased their understanding of the issues, and they could not speak more highly of the program:

*“I think it is a great thing to get behind, and bring into other communities because we really have a problem and life is very hard for a lot of people and you see that all the time. And especially living in Morwell and working in Morwell. I live in Traralgon, but I do see that food insecurity all the time. So, this is a great thing. I can’t speak highly enough of the program itself”. (P8)*

For some stakeholders, one day’s cooking was just the beginning of an ongoing commitment to helping provide food for the community. Stakeholders and their supporting organisations were keen to make this Volunteering a regular part of their workplace culture and activities:

*“I just think it gave me an absolute greater understanding of what all the food insecurities and insecurities generally are in Gippsland and that we want to do our bit to help moving forward, not just as a once-off and tokenism, but we want to be part of this program moving forward”.* (P10)

Different types of businesses across the region donated their time and skills to support the program. Not only do the recipient of the meals receive much-needed food, but a group of young people that attended a cooking session learned cooking skills as well as an understanding of the services that MNH can provide to them and their families should they be in need:

*“I think the thing that we’ve found is that one, the young people participants did not realise that these programs and places like the Neighbourhood House were there if they ever needed food, so it was a way for them to learn about the programs there and what they can offer for them. It was a way for the kids to actually learn some life skills in cooking, and they could take those skills home with them”.* (P17/C)

The participants also heard personal stories shared by staff who facilitated the sessions during their time cooking in the People’s Kitchen, which strengthened their awareness of the plight of many people in the Latrobe Valley:

*“The most significant impact for me was hearing the personal story from the participant, or recipient of the People’s Kitchens meals [and] what those meals meant for that person specifically at that point of their life. But then what they’ve been able to do because of that. It was an amazing story. It was very inspiring”.* (P1)

Another stakeholder participant described the impact of the meals and the power and strength this may provide to the recipients in their time of need:

*“What that good meal can provide for them in terms of being able to actually think properly and make decisions and access supports in that moment because... they have their basic needs met is really, really powerful stuff”.* (P1)

## **Minor theme 2: Team building**

Another benefit the stakeholder participants received was the opportunity to work as a team, seeing the components broken down and the result. Not only did they provide much-needed food, but they had fun doing it:

*“It’s good fun. I loved all of it, but I think the most enjoyable part was working with the other members in our group and our team, and we all had one little bit to do. We’d all be cutting things up or cooking, and it was just a great environment, and it was a lot of fun”.* (P7)

Participants shared that having a common goal, which was to provide the community with nutritious meals, helped to create a bond among the team. Some participants outlined that without the People’s Kitchen cooking day, they would often not see other colleagues within their organisation due to working in different departments:

*“But that was really great, and one of the reasons I wanted to get behind it... was that it would build camaraderie across our team... but on another level, it’s a really great opportunity for a team-building experience for people to be able to bond”.* (P1)

Some workplace teams used the cooking opportunity as a competition, to see how many meals they could produce during their session. This spirit of competition fuelled teams on how many meals they could cook each session and inspired them to come back multiple times to cook:

*“So, it’s good to know that you are contributing somewhat to relieving the problems that they’re experiencing, but also it was a good day for us to come together as a team and work on a joint objective to get as many meals out as we could within the ingredients that we were provided with and have a bit of fun as well; not take ourselves too seriously. So, I think really it could be sold as a bit of a team building activity as well”. (P2)*

Participants reflected on how connections with others were missed during the COVID-19 lockdowns, and the opportunity to come together while cooking met needs on many levels personally and professionally:

*“I think on a personal level... I really missed the connection with people during COVID. It was actually one of the first activities that I undertook after that as a group... It was just a really good group of people and being able to share stories and... roll up your sleeves and meet people and actually connect with people”. (P1)*

One of the many positive outcomes was the sharing of experiences when the stakeholders returned to their workplaces. The popularity of the program spread through word of mouth to the point where there was now a waiting list to participate in the People’s Kitchen:

*“You go back, and you talk in your workplace and to other people that come in and talk about the People’s Kitchen and word spreads. So, the days book up pretty quickly... It is really becoming well known and I think that’s great because it does pull us together as a community”. (P8)*

One of the stakeholder participants advised that getting the most out of the opportunity and fully embracing its purpose required a switch-off from work for the day. This meant that being present, not checking emails or taking business calls was essential to “immerse” themselves in the experience:

*“I think if I was to work with HR to run another one, I’d be saying, ‘Don’t come unless you can be there for the whole day and really switch off from work. Turn your phone off. Turn your computer off and actually really immerse yourself in the experience. Put your ‘out of office’ on your email and make sure that you are involved for the entire day’”. (P1)*

### **Minor theme 3: A learning experience**

The opportunity to cook at the People’s Kitchen provided community members with an avenue to learn new skills. Not all who attended knew how to cook prior to attending the session, but were willing to learn:

*“I saw one man trying to cut up carrots. It was just hysterical to watch and he’s like, ‘I’m really sorry, my wife cooks all the time. I don’t do any cooking.’ So, actually, it can be a learning experience for some people”. (P8)*

For stakeholder groups that were young adults or high school students, it was a steep learning curve they did not shy away from participating in, learning new skills and building teamwork during the cooking session. The team leader for this stakeholder group outlined how they were surprised by the effort and engagement:

*“I think I've noticed just these young people, like most of them, had such difficult upbringings and you would expect them to be so disengaged with something like this. I was really surprised at just how willing they were to help... and they'll just jump in. And it was actually so much easier than I thought it would be. I think they've made me really proud of just how willing they were to get involved in the system and have a go and even things they've never done before. I think that's probably a big thing I've learned from it”. (P18/C)*

Some participants stated that although learning about the reality of food insecurity in the Latrobe Valley was not pleasant, and at times confronting, it was nevertheless important and provided a positive experience:

*“I quite enjoyed learning about – well it wasn't that I enjoyed learning about it – that this was... [happening] right in front of us and we're not noticing it. Yeah, that was really good. And I think it's really, really good that the businesses are coming in and they're Volunteering their time, and they were learning, and they were really enjoying it too. Everybody loved it”. (P11)*

Stakeholder participants highlighted that the feeling of accomplishment they had experienced whilst being involved in the People's Kitchen was an important aspect of the program. A part they felt could be shared by people in the community accessing food relief services:

*“If people had access to learn how to make nutritional meals for themselves and be involved in that process, I think they would get a greater sense of accomplishment out of it for themselves”. (P12/A)*

#### **Minor theme 4: Sense of achievement**

Many of the stakeholders participants reported that the cook-up day at the Kinder Cup Café was well-organised and they felt supported by the MNH team to do their tasks. A sense of achievement was felt in the production of hundreds of well-balanced meals:

*“The first thing for me that stood out was just how welcoming the Neighbourhood House was. We had an idea of what to expect on the day... [The manager] and her team... made sure we all had coffees and were all safe to go ahead and they were really good at delegating the jobs so everyone had something to do at the same time that would eventually come together in 140-something meals for people to eat”. (P14/B)*

Stakeholder participants reported feeling good and having a “sense of achievement” that they served the community by cooking nutritious meals. They outlined feeling more connected to their local communities and those who were suffering:

*“I just think it is the community spirit that you feel when you are there working and the sense of achievement that you get as you walk away and feel like you've done something. Sometimes you'll look at situations and think, 'How can I help?' And you have no idea how to be able to help people and it really pulls at your heartstrings... There's got to be a way to help these people, but this is one way of helping and knowing that someone will have a warm meal in their stomach”. (P8)*

The realisation of the gap between those who were struggling to provide for their families and those who had plenty left some community member participants feeling a sense of guilt, recognising the privilege that they experienced in their own lives:

*“It served two purposes, because not only were we doing a great thing for the community which makes you feel good about yourself. And in some ways... when you go in there and you hear how other people struggle from day to day to provide for their family and things, you almost feel a little bit guilty”. (P2)*

Many stakeholder participants stated that the program made such a strong impact on them that they wanted to return for further cooking sessions as they could see the difference their contribution was making in the lives of others:

*“The concern is that people go, they do their day, they feel good about themselves, and they go back to their lives. Whereas I’ve really had trouble shaking that experience. It’s just [that] I want to make things better so that they get more meals”. (P9)*

Being involved in the program was a positive experience for the stakeholder participants as they understood its value and the difference their involvement made to struggling families:

*“I think it’s something that is really a valuable thing to have, and we all enjoyed what we did and knowing that we were doing something to assist people in the community that were less fortunate and probably for families... that are struggling as well and not being able to make ends meet. It’s nice to know that they can go somewhere and get a well-prepared meal and know that it’s there and there’s no expectation on them. There’s no cost. So, I think it’s a really valuable resource in the community”. (P7)*

## Major theme 2: Renovate and extend

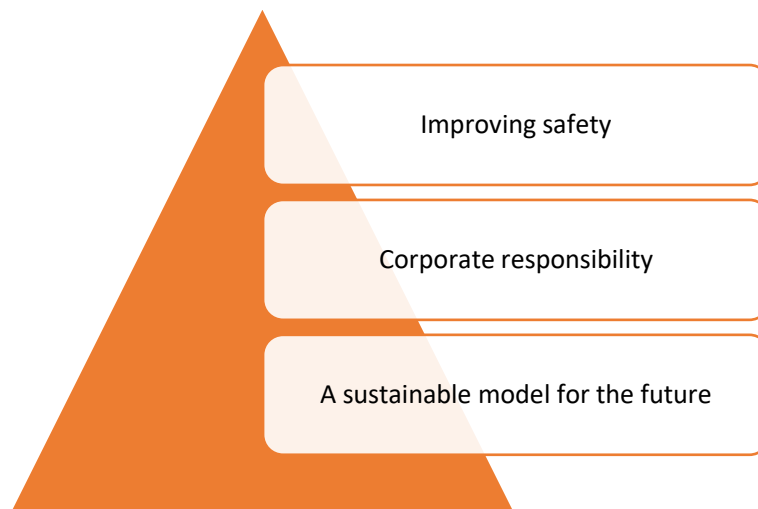


Figure 37: Theme two People’s Kitchen stakeholders thematic analysis minor themes

### Minor theme 1: Improving safety

The stakeholder participants were asked if they faced any challenges during the cook-up sessions at the People’s Kitchen. While most participants did not believe they had any difficulties or challenges on the day, one comment related to cooking in an environment that was not fit for purpose for large-scale meal preparations:

*“We enjoyed it, but I think it was harder than it needed to be because we didn’t have good tools necessarily and was an awkward environment to work in. The middle of a café isn’t designed for preparing a couple of hundred meals”. (P9)*

The participants made the best of the facilities, but another stated that they felt the kitchen area was unsafe due to space limitations. The teams ranged between 8 to 10 people, which created space issues at times, as reported by one participant:

*“It... can become unsafe because if you’ve got too many people, particularly in the kitchen space, you can end up with people tripping over each other. And it probably actually makes things a bit more difficult actually if you’ve got too many people, so that’s probably the only limitation”. (P3)*

The participants discussed safety in the kitchen not only related to having enough space and not too many people moving around but it was felt that carrying heavy cooking pots and pans posed a danger:

*“For me, there was a few safety issues I thought could be addressed and it could be almost eliminated, like the need to do certain tasks. They’ve got these massive fry pans, and we were using them... I have never seen a fry pan so large. We had to actually get two people to lift them up and take them over to a spot to mix all the ingredients together in another larger pot”. (P13/A)*

Feeling safe as a team during the cooking session was important to the people helping. One team leader learned that they had to trust the members of the team with the knives which was a reciprocal experience as each team member rose to the occasion and understood the responsibility they had as individuals in the program:

*“It’s trust. When we’re chopping up stuff, all these knives get rolled out. We’ve got ten young people that potentially have some really bad history... And you trust these kids with them [the knives]”. (P18/C)*

## **Minor theme 2: Corporate responsibility**

By releasing a small number of workers from their rosters to attend the program, companies were able to meet their KPIs regarding social responsibility and service to the community. This also granted the company good standing in the eyes of the community:

*“I think that they’re more aware that... [the company] is working on that whole social licence locally, just to give back to the community as a whole. I think the workforce can see that it’s not just tokenism, that we’re actually fully engaged because we’ve got an office here in Traralgon and we’re not going anywhere, and we want to be part of that because we all live in this community. Ninety-five per cent of the workforce is actually living in the Latrobe Valley or in the Gippsland region. So, this affects all of us or someone we know. So, it’s really important for us to continue this program”. (P10)*

In the initial stages of Volunteering in the People’s Kitchen at the Kinder Cafe, some of the stakeholders were unsure of what to expect and were perhaps hesitant. After one session though, they wanted to return and instead of being approached by the team leader to be put back onto the People’s Kitchen roster, they were asking when they could help again:

*“But I think people are worried in the initial sense that perhaps they were going to be serving up a meal on a plate in the soup kitchen type thing, and once they understood that we get really good feedback. So, it’s got to the stage now where I get individuals or groups saying, ‘Hey, when’s the next Volunteering opportunity?’ It’s driving a bit of demand now for Volunteering which is good”. (P3)*



Volunteering to support those in need within their local community was seen as an important activity by the corporate team leaders who had signed up to support People's Kitchen. They needed to explain clearly to their workforce what the cook-up day involved, as many people did not have an awareness of what the program entailed:

*"It's been a really good program to be involved in actually. Certainly, some of our people will Volunteer, others will be 'voluntold'. The 'voluntold' ones will come back and say, 'Geez I really enjoyed that.' And I said, 'Well, what were you expecting?' and they said, 'I wasn't sure.' We've got an insular workforce, they come to Yallourn, they work, they go home. A lot of them, disappointingly so, aren't really that involved in community activities other than perhaps some sporting stuff. I had to make it really clear, there's no public engagement here, and the Kinder Cup Café is shut. All you're doing is working with the staff there and your colleagues to produce meals. There's no engagement with the local community or serving people". (P3)*

Seeing the need for new equipment within the People's Kitchen prompted some stakeholders at one company to take it upon themselves to assist, providing support by way of equipment donations that would help other cooking teams in future:

*"So, for me, I think it's made me want to do more. So, we walked away and thought, 'Oh, well, you know, there's no reason why we couldn't purchase those things to make things more efficient in the kitchen for future Volunteer days.' So, we went ahead and did that. We delivered the things that we had purchased, a few weeks ago". (P2)*

At times stakeholders attending the cooking days were not all from the one company. This provided an opportunity to meet new people and develop relationships that could create a positive synergy for future ideas and community service:

*"It probably strengthens our relationship with other organisations because we obviously built this better relationship with Neighbourhood House but also when we did that Kinder Cup cook-up there were various other companies and organisations and things involved in that as well. So, you end up building these ties with other people in the community which I find quite useful. And then that's got a flow-on effect because you're building that network". (P18/C)*

### **Minor theme 3: A sustainable model for the future**

Stakeholder participants were asked whether they had ideas to strengthen the People's Kitchen program. Some thought the program was so well run that they could not suggest any new ideas, whereas others had a suggestion to improve the service even more. The following participant thought the program could be utilised as a teaching platform at the same time:

*"If I could change one thing it would be either let's change up the menu a bit or ask the kids what they would like to cook. Is there a meal that they would like to be able to learn how to cook so they can cook it at home? I think that might be one thing that I would look at doing". (P17/C)*

A good problem to have was the demand for stakeholders to be involved. One of the corporate team leaders said his staff would attend more cooking sessions if there were more available days in the week for the program to run:

*"The only thing is that everyone around here just wants it more. They want to be able to participate more. They want to be able to make more meals. When you've only got four Fridays*

*in a month, there's only so many meals you can make. So that is the only thing that we would want, that is more of them". (P4)*

Another participant was so impressed with the People's Kitchen program that they wanted more people to hear about what an impact it was making in the community:

*"It was an amazing model and as somebody who works and runs a lot of community service activities, I was really quite inspired to take that sort of model away and think, 'Ok, so how else can I get those impactful stories out there?'" (P1)*

All stakeholders interviewed highlighted the work of the MNH Manager as the driver of the People's Kitchen program. One concern was around the program's sustainability if the Manager was no longer involved or could no longer commit this level of time and energy:

*"How long can [the Manager] keep doing it for, and what happens there? Is it a self-sustaining model, can it survive past having one person drive it? So, that's what I would worry about. So, any process where you are solely dependent on one person always comes with that risk if that person goes and then somebody else might try and do the same thing". (P9)*

A final suggestion from the stakeholder participants interviewed was around connecting the voices of the meal recipients with those who were cooking. Participants were keen to know more about how their work was impacting their communities in real time, closing the loop in the helping process:

*"I would love to get a community member who's actually relied on their meals, and I do understand that they may not want to come in face to face and actually speak to us about it. But even if they were to write a letter about how important and how much they really relied on the meals or they really appreciated the meals and were very grateful to hear that it was actually a local group of young kids that actually prepared the meals for them. Just so the kids can see what their work is doing and where it's going". (P17/C)*

## 4.5 THEMATIC ANALYSIS - FOCUS GROUP WITH STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

### INTRODUCTION

A focus group interview was conducted in December 2023 with the year 11/12 students at a local high school in the Latrobe Valley. Students were part of cooking classes within the school, which received funding to cook for the People's Kitchen in 2023. Students prepared approximately 50 meals per week for the People's Kitchen and were involved in the cooking and packaging process. A total of 8 students and 2 program facilitators were invited to join a focus group discussion in the school cafeteria. The focus group discussion was approximately 35 minutes in duration. Some students spoke more during the focus group than others, however all students outlined that they shared each other's sentiments throughout the interview.

### Student Focus Group Discussion

Students at a local high school in the Latrobe Valley shared their experiences of being involved in catering classes within their school curriculum, and how this connected them with the People's Kitchen. They outlined how this cooking course allowed them to learn skills in food preparation, food handling and improved their understanding of nutrition:

*"We're learning each skill, a new skill with each meal. For say, fried rice, we have to make sure that we're not burning the rice and we're cooking with big woks and then we might make curried sausages. So, we have to make sure we're not making the Curry too spicy. So, it gives us life skills. But then we also get to give back to the people that need it. And just to help out and then gain a skill with it, sort of like a win-win". (Student 4)*

The students outlined their progression from starting small, with snack foods such as "brownies, slices, cookies" (Student 2) and cooking for their school cafeteria. Once their cooking skills had been improved and they had made stronger connections as a "team" (Student 1, 2 and Staff 10) the students graduated to cooking for the People's Kitchen:

*"We would work in different groups, so you'd be put with people that you knew, but people that you don't know as well. So, you would be put in situations where you gotta help each other out, but you don't know how to work with other people because they're different. So as a year [level], we've all worked together. I didn't know [Student 1]. I didn't know [Student 6] much. We didn't know [Student 3]. And now we're all pretty much a tight knit group because we all just connected well, and we've been talking and communicating and helping each other all at once and it just comes along as the year progresses". (Student 2)*

When discussing teamwork and building connections, the students recognised that the class helped them make new friends, "I wouldn't know any of these people if it wasn't for catering" (Student 3). They highlighted that they had "a lot of laughs" (student 5) in the process too:

*"You gotta be willing to be able to work with different people and accept that you're not gonna know everything. Like me, I just think I know everything, and I don't care what other people say. But as I've gone throughout the year, I listen to a lot more, I listen to [Student 4] a lot more unfortunately, I've listened to [Student 1] a bit. I've listened to [Student 8] a bit, even [Student 6]. And this dude (pointing at other student). \*laughter\*. You're always gonna have someone to guide you. You just gotta be able to take that next step and keep working towards that next step". (Student 2)*

The students discussed how through working with the People's Kitchen, they were able to gain a deeper understanding of the suffering of people in their local communities, and how they may be able to help:

*"When I started going to high school and started cooking, I always thought everything was given to you and I always thought, the right people get the right stuff. And then when I got into this more, I was like oh, nah some people actually don't have the money where they actually do have to get out and ask for help and a lot of times people don't ask for help. So that help comes to them. And so, it's pretty good. They may not know we're doing it for them. They may not know us personally, but they're probably like, thinking, oh, yeah, these kids are pretty good. Doing this for us just helping out". (Student 1)*

The students understood that the meals they were making were going to families that don't "have enough money or like the single mums or single dads that need the extra help" (Student 5). The students recognised that members of their local communities were "really struggling" (Student 2) and that some were "still trying to find jobs because of COVID" (Student 1). One student empathised with those who were suffering from food insecurity, outlining the joy and comfort gained when consuming a home-cooked meal:

*"I moved out from my parents' house. I was living in Melbourne. I think I'd eat 2-minute noodles like 5 days of the week and just stupid stuff like that... I really struggled down there, I went back to my parents... having a real meal for the first time in months was just like you really forget how much it makes you feel better and just how much energy, just comfort you get from eating a proper meal". (Student 4)*

Not only did the students learn how to cook and prepare nutritious meals, they also outlined the inter- and intra-personal skills they learned from working as a team and stepping outside of their comfort zone. For some, it was "a way of making more connections" (Student 9) and for others, the skills and confidence gained was greatly important:

*"I didn't really join cooking class until about term two, term three and I was like really shy at first and I wasn't really confident with myself to cook, like chicken and meat and stuff. So, every day I go into the cooking class, every time I had the lesson, I'd always pick cookies because it's easier for me but eventually I had to push myself to build new skills and learn how to cook more harder things and that has made my skill better". (Student 6)*

Staff and facilitators running the cooking classes with the students echoed these sentiments, highlighting that the experience "gave them [the students] opportunity to understand pressures" (Staff 7). The students believed they were able to step outside their comfort zone as the facilitators encouraged them to have "a growth mindset" and helped them "achieve" great things in the class (Student 2)

Learning life skills in catering class empowered the students to understand what may be required of them when they move out of home or gain employment. The students discussed how their newfound skills were being put into practice at home, helping family members with household chores:

*"Me and [my brother] actually have to go down the shops and buy the food and we have to manage the money and then we have to go home, prep, cook and it's not just for the one night, we have to plan out the three or four nights and just the fact that being here and learning skills I can go take them home and I can talk to my younger brother about it and be able to go, yeah,*

*this is what we've done in cooking, maybe this can help us in this area of trying to become stable adults". (Student 4)*

When asked how they felt about cooking for the People's Kitchen, and the impact of this Volunteer work on them as individuals, the students stated that they were "appreciative" (Student 5), that it helped them realise "how lucky you are" (student 3), and that "it makes you feel better" (Student 2), especially knowing that "we're helping a family out and making sure they're getting through a rough time" (Student 1):

*"For me, it's knowing that I had done something to help my community, that most of it is going through rough patches and are struggling more than what I am and knowing that I've done something that can help them in so many different ways. And knowing that could have changed their life just by simply making a meal. Like, just knowing that impact that could have on some families is amazing". (Student 2)*

Students wanted to share their experience cooking for the People's Kitchen with the MNH, furthermore, they wanted MNH to share with other schools that the program "builds work ethic, it builds teamwork, it builds leadership skills, it builds everything that you want in young teenagers these days" (Student 2). Some students shared the comment that initially, they "didn't hear anything about them [MNH]" (Student 2) and "didn't understand what they [MNH] were" (Student 1). The students suggested that promoting the work more within the community and demonstrating the impact of the meals to the students may benefit everyone involved:

*"Just lay down that it's like a really good thing to do. Maybe inform the people that wanna do it, the results maybe when we go and deliver these meals. These people are so thankful because they finally have a meal. And so you sort of know what the reward is going to be and then they could also say that you get the add on of gaining the life skills. So not only are you helping the community your gaining skills". (Student 4)*

The students felt that they wanted to know more about "what we achieve afterwards" (Student 9) and where the meals go once they are delivered to the People's Kitchen. Staff assisting the students shared this sentiment, hoping that the efforts of their students would be more recognised in future:

*"They [MNH] come, they bring their trolley in, they load up and they leave, and that's about it. They don't really say anything, maybe just to, you know, even just like a yell out a "thanks, guys, that was awesome". Like that would be nice". (Staff 10)*

Sometimes the students had to stay back to finish cooking the meals in a team, but when they did, "we all stayed back as one. It wasn't as one person stayed back or two people stayed back. It was the whole team who stayed back to help out because it was a team effort" (Student 2). To make sure they met their meal quota of 50-60 meals each session cooking for the People's Kitchen, the students outlined "we have a system" (student 3) and it was worth the hard work as "you just know it's going somewhere special" (student 3).

Despite this hard work in catering for the school cafeteria, local events and the People's Kitchen, the students mentioned "we can always go the extra mile to help out" (Student 2) and to "just go for it. Work hard and have a smile on your face while you're doing it" (Student 1). The students took comfort in knowing that their hard work meant that "we know that now someone's not gonna go to bed and hear their stomach grumble all night" (Student 4). The students could see their work having a wider impact on their communities, and how this ripple effect may encourage others to gain skills in cooking too:

*“I just like how we make the meals for people don't have enough money to buy the meals for themselves. Maybe the kids who need them might think about doing the same, what we do”.*  
(Student 8)

The positivity of the program was evident in the student responses, who were keen to continue cooking for the People's Kitchen, knowing the benefit it had to members of their local communities. Students were excited to share their newfound skills, friendships and hopes for the future, with some now keen to secure work in the hospitality industry.

*Image: Students and teachers of the high-school cooking class (photo shared with permission)*



## 4.6 CONTENT ANALYSIS - INTERVIEW WITH MORWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE MANAGER

### INTRODUCTION

An interview was conducted with the Manager of the MNH in October 2023 to gain insight into the functional processes, experiences and suggestions in the facilitation of the People's Kitchen. The interview was semi-structured and was approximately 28 minutes in duration. Names and identities have been removed for confidentiality purposes.

### Interview with Project Lead

The Manager of the Morwell Neighbourhood House oversees the broad functions of the organisation, supporting staff and Volunteers, clients who utilise the MNH services and ensuring the direction of the organisation is maintained. A key function of this role is managing the People's Kitchen, a service that provides nutritious home-cooked meals for vulnerable individuals and families in the Latrobe Valley:

*"So [Food Bank's] traditionally shelf-life items that absolutely fill a hole and a need but they're not nutritionally sound or that good for you. And what this program [People's Kitchen] is doing is actually providing a variety of options. So nutritional meals, fruit and veggies, also their shelf life items which we know are so important in the response to food insecurity. But we're actually looking at that more health literacy space".*

The MNH Manager could see the need for the People's Kitchen service within the Latrobe Valley, recognising that *"Latrobe punches above its weight and all the wrong directions"*, particularly in regard to health and wellbeing. This was considered when exploring the need for fresh nutritious meals for food insecure members of the community, and how this could be delivered in a *"socially just manner"*:

*"One of my initial focuses was how do we connect all of community into what is a response to a wicked issue like food security and how do we connect them at a local level? Because we know that food insecurity is experienced by people across the globe, but what can we do in our little patch?"*

When implementing the service, it was anticipated that it would be a *"smaller in-house scale"* operation and include local Volunteers to service the Kitchen. The Manager outlined that there was a large amount of interest from the *"business and industry"* sector and *"big corporate events"*:

*"What we found is as people started to understand what we were doing, there was a considerable amount of buy-in, people wanted to be part of it and wanted to contribute".*

The Manager of the People's Kitchen highlighted that the business and industry sectors were interested in how you could *"actually Volunteer in your community and you can directly see where it goes in your community"*. This benefit of Volunteering locally increased business *"buy-in"* and saw numbers attending the Kitchen to cook meals grow to *"extraordinary numbers"* and over *"3000"* meals being made to date:

*"They're [the businesses are] on that shared mission with us. We want them to share the goal, we want them to buy in. We want them to be warriors around this issue of food insecurity with us".*

The logistics of “*resourcing and management*” of these larger corporate groups within the small-scale kitchen was not without its challenges. As this shift was largely unanticipated by the MNH organisation, it required deeper planning and coordination of activities:

*“We've gotta make sure people have the right information and they know what time to come and they've got the promo video and we've got their dietary requirements and if they are a bit short, how do we work with their groups to make sure they can do it and then we bring some other people in... it's a big logistics piece that we weren't expecting to happen in the project, but absolutely outstanding social and economic returns for both the Community and the Neighbourhood House”.*

When ensuring the People’s Kitchen could be sustainable in the longer term, the MNH manager outlined that they were required to respond to the rising costs of living in Australia, particularly the increasing “*cost of groceries and meat*” with their original sponsorship fees “*not covering its costs*”. This response saw them tailor the attending business sponsorship fee to the organisation to ensure they would “*pay a certain amount of sponsorship that includes the food that we're cooking for the day, so they may cook 150 meals*”.

The results of the growth in the People’s Kitchen were being seen by staff and Volunteers serving the Latrobe Valley community. Having a “*unique connection to community*” and a “*local response*” enabled staff and Volunteers to see the impact the meals were having on their communities:

*“It's heartening to know that the investment in the work and the time that I've invested is coming in almost full circle and you are seeing such significant benefits to our community now”.*

It was identified that this positive impact on the ground required expansion to other Latrobe Valley localities, with the MNH Manager describing how “*more people are asking for the meals*” and the program has “*changed and broadened*”. The Manager discussed how this expansion may look going forward, such as further development in “*schools*” to ensure its accessibility to the broader community:

*“So now we've got Churchill and Moe Neighbourhood House distribution points for the People's Kitchen. So, people that are experiencing food insecurity don't necessarily have to come to me, they can actually go into their own communities. And I think that's something that we need to expand as we as we go forward”.*

Expansion and service for the wider community was a key priority for the MNH Manager. They outlined how it was “*extraordinary*” to think where the program might be in “*five years*” and how a “*humane approach*” to managing food insecurity in the short to long term might positively impact those who receive the food and those who assist in preparing it:

*“I speak about the People's Kitchen outside of the People's Kitchen, and we're starting to get quite a lot of interest outside of Latrobe Valley in that sort of social enterprise, social innovation response, those sorts of spaces. And I think it's really something that will be a growth area for us going forward is how we share our learnings and our knowledge for others to build their own versions of this for their communities”.*

When describing the “*power of the work*”, the MNH Manager demonstrated that the service was largely beneficial to all those who are involved, filling a local gap in a global issue of food insecurity.



## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

### MORE THAN JUST A MEAL. CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY: AN INTEGRATIVE SCOPING REVIEW

The aim of the systematic review was to explore the access, use and facilitation of Food Banks globally, identifying the ways Food Banks assist in maintaining the holistic health needs of the communities they serve. The review was guided by a number of research questions, including “What is currently known about the access, use and facilitation of community Food Bank services globally?” and “How does access, use and facilitation of Food Banks impact the health of populations?”.

#### **Key findings**

A total of 33 papers were included in the final review. Of these 33 papers, eight were of Australian origin, while 25 were international, mainly originating from the United States of America. There were a number of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies included in the final scoping review. Three overarching themes were identified from the review, which included Accessing food relief, Education and skills development and Facilitation and staff experiences. Some studies intersected with their scope of Food Bank facilitation. Accessing food relief encompassed the single use food relief provided to individuals and families, discussing whole of person health and access barriers and enablers for clients. Education and skills development outlined the access and use of community gardens and community kitchens, with the nutritional education programs offered to clients. Finally, Facilitation and staff experiences described the operations of Food Banks and the perspectives and experiences of staff within them.

#### **Discussion**

Global access, use and facilitation of Food Banks is diverse and often challenging. Food Banks were often used by those with physical and mental health comorbidities and those experiencing complex and situational poverty such as impacts from higher costs of living and domestic violence (MacLeod et al., 2019; Mungai et al., 2020; Rivera et al., 2021), however, one study identified that food insecurity did not discriminate on neighbourhood or client demographics (Schramski et al., 2023). Shame and stigma of accessing the service were highlighted in the global literature, with some clients highlighting that they did not have the physical resources or food literacy to prepare food themselves (Hill & Guittar, 2023; Long et al., 2023; Pritt et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2018). Research suggested that clients using traditional methods of food relief (food pantries) were more concerned with survival than nutrition compared to those engaged in alternative food relief opportunities (community gardens and people’s kitchens) (Roncarolo, Adam, et al., 2016; Roncarolo, Bisset, et al., 2016). Those engaged in alternative food relief however, gained greater confidence in their cooking skills and food literacy, potentially leading to longer-term, sustainable food security (Stephens et al., 2020; West et al., 2020). It was identified that the goods provided by Food Banks including fresh food varied in their availability, which ultimately impacted what clients could prepare for themselves and their families (Kihlstrom et al., 2019; Long et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2020). Furthermore, minimal and varied hours of operation provided barriers to clients accessing food relief (Ginsburg et al., 2019; Loopstra et al., 2019). Staff and Volunteers were altruistically motivated to help their clients, frequently engaged in increasing work flows, partnerships with organisations and bettering buying habits to improve the food security within

their communities (Agostinho & Paço, 2012; Bush-Kaufman et al., 2019; Cahill et al., 2019; Higgins et al., 2017; Poulos et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

The impact of Food Banks within communities is vast. The role of a Food Bank to meet the wholistic health needs of individuals and families is achieved through the numerous activities they perform and facilitate. Food Banks face a number of barriers with food supply, costs and distribution; however they maintain their capacity to educate, motivate and empower members of their community to access food relief services.

*\*Note that an extended literature review has been drafted and will be submitted for publication to a research journal.*

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## 6. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion will focus on the three research questions that were addressed in this significant body of work to explore the Food Security and Wellbeing Program Evaluation.

### Research Question 1:

#### **How does access to People’s Kitchen, Food Bank, and other MNH activities impact individual and community health and wellbeing outcomes and food security status?**

Utilisation of, and a need for the MNH organisation is evident in their food and service distribution statistics gathered by Staff and Volunteers. In 2022, from January to December the Food Bank completed a total of 1882 transactions. These transactions were from a range of clients, including 2840 adults and 2402 children. A total of 12,859 kilograms of food products were distributed to clients in 2022; of this 2418 kilograms were fruit and vegetable produce. In 2023 from January to December, the Food Bank completed a total of 2261 transactions. Of these clients who received support, 3455 were adults and 2450 were children. A total of 17,246 kilograms of food were distributed, of these, 3884 kilograms were fruit and vegetables. Statistical data to date in 2023 demonstrates that figures have greatly exceeded 2022 statistics. There was a 20% increase in total transactions, and a 34% increase in the food weight distributed in 2023. There had also been a 60% increase in the amount of fruit and vegetable weight being distributed in 2023. These findings demonstrate an increased demand for the MNH Food Bank services in a 12 month period, and the ongoing impacts of increased cost of living and livelihood insecurity may still be increasing in the Latrobe Valley post the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, findings from an interview the MNH Manager outlined the need for the People’s Kitchen service within the Latrobe Valley, recognising that *“Latrobe punches above its weight and all the wrong directions”*, particularly in regard to health and wellbeing. This was considered when exploring the need for fresh nutritious meals for food insecure members of the community, and how this could be delivered in a *“socially just manner”*:

*“One of my initial focuses was how do we connect all of community into what is a response to a wicked issue like food security and how do we connect them at a local level? Because we know that food insecurity is experienced by people across the globe, but what can we do in our little patch?”*

Staff and Volunteers working within MNH outlined their experiences providing services to their community. Results outlined that Staff and Volunteers were experiencing a greater demand for the MNH services within the last 6 months. In this increased demand, Staff and Volunteers highlighted that clients were presenting with increased concerns about the future, and less hope for the future. Staff and Volunteers highlighted that they could see the negative impact COVID-19 was having on their communities, and some were concerned that they couldn’t provide enough services to those in need. Positively, Staff and Volunteers noted that the resilience of their clients appeared to have increased, and they believed their service was easy to access and felt that they had been able to help more people in the preceding 6 months.

When Staff and Volunteer participants were asked about their perceived service forecast for clients for the next six months, the responses were not positive. Almost all participants mentioned that there would not be an improvement or situations could get worse. Two participants clearly explained the reasons for such a situation highlighting an increase in the cost of living and an increase in the need for the service. *“These will have a huge impact on their food security, paying bills, socialisation, living*

*conditions and mental health*". One participant has a hope that they will be able to offer culturally appropriate food for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) clients in future.

Despite their being an increased need for services evident in the data, community members accessing the services were greatly positive about the support they had received from MNH. A total of 310 community feedback comment cards were collected and transcribed by the CERC research team in October 2022. The feedback provided was overwhelmingly positive, with three clear categories identified within the data including Gratitude (84%), Compliments (12.1%) and Suggestions for future activities (3.9%). Some gratitude comments received by the MNH from clients included *"thank you, Neighbourhood House. For all the help. This is a lovely place to come. So welcoming, and friendly and helpful. I appreciate you all"* and *"Neighbourhood House Morwell. Such an amazing community support for so many people from all different walks of life. The Food Bank program is amazing."*

Surveys of clients accessing MNH services highlighted the diversity and needs of community members in the Latrobe Valley. Participants were asked about their employment status, with multiple options that could be chosen. Approximately one-third of the participants (33.6%, n=16) stated that they were stay-at-home parents and the same number of participants (33.6%, n=16) recorded that they were looking for jobs. Among "Other" replies, the following responses were reported: BSP (Behaviour Support Plans), DSP (Disability Support Pension), injured, disabled and unemployed. When participants were asked the question *"How often do you access these services?"*, answers included *"Once a week"* (34.3%, n=23) and *"Once a month"* (25.4%, n=17). *"Every couple of months"* were mentioned by 10.4% of participants (n=7). Among "Other" replies, there were few responses *"Fortnightly"* and few responses *"First time"*. These findings are indicative of the vulnerable populations that require the most assistance from the MNH, aligning with global literature that describes where services may be most needed in vulnerable populations. However, findings from this evaluation and from the literature review suggest that at times, food insecurity does not discriminate on demographics or neighbourhood of residence.

There was a strong theme identified from the interviewed clients utilising MNH services around the feeling of acceptance and lack of judgment regarding their need to access the Food Bank. Inclusiveness also extended to children, and this was appreciated by a participant when they stated, *"My children are very loud, but they're very accepting of my children"*. Being treated *"just like anybody else"* reflected a lack of judgment and was expressed in a similar way by another participant:

*"It's friendly. They don't judge anybody. Everybody's the same. I just feel really comfortable when I go in there. I don't know how to say it, you don't feel like you're a scammer"*.

Across the client interviews, there was a consensus that the MNH was an excellent program, and one participant stated the staff and Volunteers at MNH *"were just fantastic, and I think they provide a necessary service here in Morwell"*. To continue their valuable work, the participant added, *"If anything, they don't need less funding; they need more funding to run more programs because they do a fantastic job"*. Another participant added:

*"They do a great job; they work under a tremendous amount of pressure from a lot of other areas... What they're working under, and the limited funds there, they do a really good job"*.

Participants were more than appreciative to receive fruit, vegetables and non-perishables from the pantry, and meals from the freezer so they could feed their family for that week. Some families were living week to week, and one participant struggled to *"keep them fed and keep them warm and looked after and medically well to worry about much else"*. Another participant stated:

*"I can get the frozen meals and stuff because it really helps out on the weeks that I'm very short on money sometimes... If it wasn't for them, I'd be buggered at times".*

One participant felt that the pantry contained a broad selection of items that could cater to all their needs *"until [they] get paid again"*. Another participant had a large family and reported that the food pantry was able to provide the bulk of her family's requirements:

*"To feed my five, you can fill your bags up as well. Like some of the stuff you get, it helps, because all you've got to do is go to the supermarket and get little bits and pieces to go with it and you've got a meal".*

The positive social environment was also important to the participants which was created not only by the staff and Volunteers but also by others who attended MNH. Cooking together and sharing meals helped alleviate negative emotions for this participant:

*"It's full of food and we just pulled out some food and we're able to cook ourselves a meal. We called it cooking class, but really all the old fellas were kind of 'meat and potatoes' type fellas. But it was fantastic just to get together with them. It was so good for me, particularly living alone and being by myself. I suffer from depression and anxiety and just having that group each week just bolstered me".*

The cooking sessions enabled new skill development in meal preparation and exploration of different tastes and recipes. One participant stated they *"now do a bit of cooking here at home... [and] it's really very interesting at times when they have different recipes"*. As well as collecting food from the pantry, some of the participants attended the men's social group and went on outings to various places. This provided a strong social connection and enabled the participants to get out of their houses:

*"We went bowling, we went to the museums, we did the art galleries. We went here, there, and everywhere and that was all organised by the Morwell Neighbourhood House".*

Social connection was essential for many participants living alone, retired or with a limited social network. Having a place to belong and feel welcomed was necessary for their mental health, regardless of whether they needed to collect food from the food pantry or attend other activities:

*"If you want to have a coffee, they'd let you have a coffee. It's really nice if you want to chat. I find that very comforting. It makes you feel like you're wanted".*

Evaluation findings suggested that the service provided by the MNH was immensely important to vulnerable community members in the Latrobe Valley. The diversity of services ensured that clients were not only supplementing their nutrition with the Food Bank, but they had the opportunity to build social connections through social groups, gain life skills through education sessions and cooking classes in the People's Kitchen and receive holistic lifestyle support that assisted with whole of person wellbeing.

## **Research Question 2:**

### **What impact does Volunteering have on those who support the work of the MNH Food Security and Wellbeing program?**

When exploring the impact of Volunteering within the MNH, results were overwhelmingly positive and demand for service expanded greatly in 12 months. Findings from this evaluation suggest that this expansion may have been due to the positive responses from Volunteers who worked in the kitchen

and the increased demand for the meals cooked by members of the local community. In 2022, there was a total of 182 Volunteers that attended the Kitchen, completing a total of 1004.5 hours. Volunteers made a total of 2819 meals, weighing over 1409 kilograms, and included groups from business and industry, community volunteers, clients accessing MNH services and high-school students assisting the People's Kitchen. In 2023, Volunteer numbers attending the People's Kitchen had grown, with a total of 304 Volunteers doing 1600 hours within the Kitchen. A total of 4483 meals were made in 2023 at the time of reporting, weighing a total of 2241.50 kilograms. This demonstrated a 59% increase in the number of meals cooked and total weight of food produced from 2022 to 2023.

When exploring the number of different Volunteer groups that attended the People's Kitchen, a total of 33 different organisations, community groups and services provided support in the cooking of meals. Of these 33 different groups, there was a variety of genders, ethnicities, ages and sizes of groups that attended. A varied representation of CALD communities, socio-economic status and level of experience was evident, demonstrating the wide variety of interest in supporting the People's Kitchen from across the Latrobe Valley.

An increase in financial and in-kind support was also realised by the People's Kitchen since its inception, with support being received in the form of sponsorship donations and items to assist in the preparation of food and safety of Volunteers attending the People's Kitchen. Financial contributions increased by 59% from 2022 to 2023, which demonstrated that post experiencing the People's Kitchen, Volunteer sponsors were more likely to provide financial and in-kind support to the MNH as they were aware of the vision, mission and values of the organisation. The Volunteers had also experienced firsthand the impact these services were having in their communities by being involved. The Manager of the People's Kitchen highlighted that the business and industry sectors were interested in how you could *"actually Volunteer in your community and you can directly see where it goes in your community"*. This benefit of Volunteering locally increased business *"buy-in"* and saw numbers attending the Kitchen to cook meals grow to *"extraordinary numbers"* and over *"3000"* meals being made to date:

*"They're [the businesses are] on that shared mission with us. We want them to share the goal, we want them to buy in. We want them to be warriors around this issue of food insecurity with us".*

At the end of each cooking session conducted through the People's Kitchen program, community members and stakeholders completed a feedback and satisfaction survey. Of the 170 responses received in this survey, the overwhelming majority were positive. When asked about their personal experiences Volunteering in the People's Kitchen, respondents gave it a 4.89 out of 5-star rating, demonstrating positive support for the experience as an individual. Similarly, when participants were asked how they found their team collaboration whilst in the People's Kitchen, respondents also gave a very high rating of 4.88 out of 5 stars. The majority of the respondents would recommend the experience to their colleagues, and in long answer question responses, described their experiences as a *"great"*, *"wonderful"*, *"amazing"*, *"fantastic"*, *"awesome"*, *"tremendous"*, *"education"*, *"bonding"* experience. *"I loved it"* was also written repeatedly and the word *"love"* appeared 6 times. One respondent said:

*"Loved the whole day and the stories really help put thing into perspective."*

Respondents were grateful that they had the opportunity to give back to the community in this way and were inspired by the program, as expressed in the following quote:

*"Great time, great experience, great team even greater cause."*

Being part of the program created such a strong impression that many respondents expressed a desire to “help out again”. Other comments included, “I would love the opportunity to do this again!” and “Loved it, would love to do it regularly (once a month),” and “I will definitely be back to help some more.” Cooking the meals alongside their work colleagues also provided a “great team bonding experience” and resulted in “incredible teamwork”:

*“It was a great experience and fabulous for me personally to get to know other members of our organisation in a social environment. The work that MNH & PK does for our community is extremely valuable. The understanding and insight that they have of the social and economic issues that families and individuals are facing in our region is extremely relevant. It is great to see business & industry supporting the fabulous work that they do. I hope that the People’s Kitchen and the work of MNH can continue to evolve to meet and assist those in our community when they are in need. Fantastic work MNH & PK!”*

One of the many positive outcomes was the sharing of experiences when the stakeholders returned to their workplaces. The popularity of the program spread through word of mouth to the point where there was now a waiting list to participate in the People’s Kitchen:

*“You go back, and you talk in your workplace and to other people that come in and talk about the People’s Kitchen and word spreads. So, the days book up pretty quickly... It is really becoming well known and I think that’s great because it does pull us together as a community”.* (P8)

For some Volunteers participating, the realisation of the gap between those who were struggling to provide for their families and those who had plenty left some stakeholder participants feeling a sense of guilt, recognising the privilege that they experienced in their own lives:

*“It served two purposes, because not only were we doing a great thing for the community which makes you feel good about yourself. And in some ways... when you go in there and you hear how other people struggle from day to day to provide for their family and things, you almost feel a little bit guilty”.* (P2)

Many stakeholder participants stated that the program made such a strong impact on them that they wanted to return for further cooking sessions as they could see the difference their contribution was making in the lives of others:

*“The concern is that people go, they do their day, they feel good about themselves, and they go back to their lives. Whereas I’ve really had trouble shaking that experience. It’s just [that] I want to make things better so that they get more meals”.* (P9)

The participants made the best of the facilities, but another stated that they felt the kitchen area was unsafe due to space limitations. The teams ranged between 8 to 10 people, which created space issues at times, as reported by one participant:

*“It... can become unsafe because if you’ve got too many people, particularly in the kitchen space, you can end up with people tripping over each other. And it probably actually makes things a bit more difficult actually if you’ve got too many people, so that’s probably the only limitation”.* (P3)

A final suggestion from the stakeholder participants interviewed was around connecting the voices of the meal recipients with those who were cooking. Participants were keen to know more about how their work was impacting their communities in real time, closing the loop in the helping process:



*“I would love to get a community member who’s actually relied on their meals, and I do understand that they may not want to come in face to face and actually speak to us about it. But even if they were to write a letter about how important and how much they really relied on the meals or they really appreciated the meals and were very grateful to hear that it was actually a local group of young kids that actually prepared the meals for them. Just so the kids can see what their work is doing and where it’s going”. (P17/C)*

Volunteer feedback about engaging with the MNH was extremely positive. The increase in interest from Volunteers had now seen the wait time for a cooking session in the People’s Kitchen to be over a year. Organizations were keen to create a regular Volunteering Day within their organisations, as it provided their staff with a sense of accomplishment, team building and aligned with company corporate social responsibilities. With the high level of support and buy-in from local community members, stakeholders and businesses, leveraging the Volunteer network could see the expansion of the MNH and People’s Kitchen to assist in supporting vulnerable populations in the Latrobe Valley.

### **Research Question 3:**

#### **What impact does food preparation for the People’s Kitchen have on secondary school students who are engaged in formal training on food preparation and nutritional education in schools?**

Students at a local high school in the Latrobe Valley shared their experiences of being involved in catering classes within their school curriculum, and how this connected them with the People’s Kitchen. They outlined how this cooking course allowed them to learn skills in food preparation, food handling and improved their understanding of nutrition:

*“We’re learning each skill, a new skill with each meal. For say, fried rice, we have to make sure that we’re not burning the rice and we’re cooking with big woks and then we might make curried sausages. So, we have to make sure we’re not making the Curry too spicy. So, it gives us life skills. But then we also get to give back to the people that need it. And just to help out and then gain a skill with it, sort of like a win-win”.*

Students discussed how they had made stronger connections as a “team”, recognising that the class helped them make new friends, “I wouldn’t know any of these people if it wasn’t for catering”. They highlighted that they had “a lot of laughs” in the process too:

*“You gotta be willing to be able to work with different people and accept that you’re not gonna know everything. Like me, I just think I know everything, and I don’t care what other people say. But as I’ve gone throughout the year, I listen to a lot more, I listen to [Student 4] a lot more unfortunately, I’ve listened to [Student 1] a bit. I’ve listened to [Student 8] a bit, even [Student 6]. And this dude (pointing at other student). \*laughter\*. You’re always gonna have someone to guide you. You just gotta be able to take that next step and keep working towards that next step”.*

Staff and facilitators running the cooking classes with the students echoed these sentiments, highlighting that the experience “gave them [the students] opportunity to understand pressures”. The students believed they were able to step outside their comfort zone as the facilitators encouraged them to have “a growth mindset” and helped them “achieve” great things in the class. Beyond the classroom, learning life skills in catering class empowered the students to understand what may be required of them when they move out of home or gain employment. The students discussed how their newfound skills were being put into practice at home, helping family members with household chores:

*“Me and [my brother] actually have to go down the shops and buy the food and we have to manage the money and then we have to go home, prep, cook and it's not just for the one night, we have to plan out the three or four nights and just the fact that being here and learning skills I can go take them home and I can talk to my younger brother about it and be able to go, yeah, this is what we've done in cooking, maybe this can help us in this area of trying to become stable adults”.*

When asked how they felt about cooking for the People's Kitchen, and the impact of this Volunteer work on them as individuals, the students stated that they were *“appreciative”*, that it helped them realise *“how lucky you are”* (student 3), and that *“it makes you feel better”*, especially knowing that *“we're helping a family out and making sure they're getting through a rough time”*:

*“For me, it's knowing that I had done something to help my community, that most of it is going through rough patches and are struggling more than what I am and knowing that I've done something that can help them in so many different ways. And knowing that could have changed their life just by simply making a meal. Like, just knowing that impact that could have on some families is amazing”.*

Students wanted to share their experience cooking for the People's Kitchen with the MNH, furthermore, they wanted MNH to share with other schools that the program *“builds work ethic, it builds teamwork, it builds leadership skills, it builds everything that you want in young teenagers these days”*. Some students shared the comment that initially, they *“didn't hear anything about them [MNH]”* and *“didn't understand what they [MNH] were”*. The students suggested that promoting the work more within the community and demonstrating the impact of the meals to the students may benefit everyone involved:

*“Just lay down that it's like a really good thing to do. Maybe inform the people that wanna do it, the results maybe when we go and deliver these meals. These people are so thankful because they finally have a meal. And so, you sort of know what the reward is going to be and then they could also say that you get the add on of gaining the life skills. So not only are you helping the community your gaining skills”.*

The students felt that they wanted to know more about *“what we achieve afterwards”* and where the meals go once they are delivered to the People's Kitchen. They were keen to build stronger connections with the MNH in future, with many students now more interested in how they were helping their communities.

Students spoke regularly about the physical life skills they were gaining through formal cooking and food handling education, whilst also highlighting the inter- and intra-personal skills they gained with their peers. Students felt more able to work as a team, share their ideas, collaborate with peers and seek opportunities outside of the classroom to further their education. It was evident from focus group interviews with students that this program had a profound positive impact on them and should therefore be continued in future. Fostering the connection between local high schools and the MNH allows students to gain life skills, whilst also feeling more connected to their local community.

## 6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue operations of the Morwell Neighbourhood House with all current services available, including the Food Bank and People's Kitchen.
  - a) Sustaining current operations is vital to support those who rely on the services.

- b) Continuing operations allows Morwell Neighbourhood House to be a pilot and learning opportunity for other localities considering implementing similar programs.
2. Provide information for stakeholders and Volunteers on where meals prepared in the People's Kitchen go.
    - a) Providing follow-up to stakeholders and Volunteers involved in the People's Kitchen ensures they understand the impact of their service.
    - b) Building relationships with stakeholders and recipients may create a stronger desire to Volunteer more regularly.
    - c) Demonstrating these outcomes may increase buy-in from other business and industry stakeholders.
  3. Expand the opportunities for community gardens within Morwell Neighbourhood House.
    - a) The development of a working community garden can provide educational opportunities and foster a sense of achievement for workers/Volunteers.
    - b) Growth of the community garden may assist with reducing operating costs of the People's Kitchen by using produce grown in-house.
  4. Expand Volunteer support for the People's Kitchen to local secondary schools to increase skills and confidence of local young people.
    - a) Invite additional secondary schools to participate in the People's Kitchen program to increase their food handling and nutritional understanding.
    - b) Expansion to additional secondary schools may increase output capacity for the People's Kitchen to provide meals for the Latrobe Valley.
  5. Consider formal education opportunities within the People's Kitchen.
    - a) Leveraging the People's Kitchen cooking sessions as formal educational courses may provide Volunteers with greater confidence and vocational qualifications.

## 7. LIMITATIONS

There were limitations related to this evaluation that must be considered. These include:

1. Consideration for the vulnerable populations represented in this report. Vulnerable community members suffering from food insecurity may have chosen not to engage with any part of this evaluation, and therefore experiences shared may not be representative of the entire population accessing services in the MNH.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation is considered to present a credible assessment of the project.

## 8. METHODOLOGY

### 8.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The approach of the CERC to this evaluation was informed by a Participatory Evaluation and Co-Design Framework.

#### PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

A participatory evaluation framework puts people from the community and those delivering the programs, projects and services at the centre of the evaluation. Participatory evaluation is a distinctive approach based on the following principles:

- That evaluation should be a co-designed, collaborative partnership through 360° stakeholder input including project participants and project funders;
- That integral to evaluation is an evaluation capacity-building focus within and across projects;
- That evaluation is a cyclical and iterative process embedded in projects from project design to program assessment;
- That evaluation adopts a learning, improvement and strengths-based approach;
- That evaluation supports innovation, accepting that projects will learn and evolve;
- That evaluation contributes to the creation of a culture of evaluation and evaluative thinking;
- That there is no one or preferred data collection method rather the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods will be tailored to the information needs of each project.

#### CO-DESIGN

Co-design is a process and approach that is about working with people to create ‘interventions, services and programs which will work in the context of their lives and will reflect their own values and goals’<sup>7</sup>. Co-design can be done in many ways but is about collaborative engagement that is bottom-up, creative, and enables a wide range of people to participate and importantly steer decisions and outcomes. Co-design is not a consultation process but a partnership approach where ‘end-users’ actively define and shape strategies and outcomes. The role of the ‘expert’ is to facilitate this process.

### 8.2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of this project utilised a variety of data collection tools in a mixed methods approach, providing information about process, outcomes and impact. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed as described below.

#### QUANTITATIVE DATA

There were four main sources of data as part of the quantitative data collection which included the development and administration of a community survey, the development and administration of a staff and stakeholder survey, analysis of MNH community feedback cards and analysis of People’s Kitchen attendance statistics and organisation owned feedback survey. Design of the surveys:

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<sup>7</sup> VCOSS (2015). *Walk alongside: Co-designing social initiatives with people experiencing vulnerabilities*. V. C. o. S. Service. Melbourne.

- Allowed for the collection of information from a defined group of stakeholders
- Enabled a large amount of data to be collected quickly.

The community and staff surveys were distributed via hardcopy (paper based) and/or electronic means such as Qualtrics or SurveyMonkey platforms by CERC staff. Community feedback cards and survey data from the People's Kitchen were provided by the MNH Manager for analysis. This data was not collected by CERC.

## QUALITATIVE DATA

There were five main sources of data as part of the qualitative data collection which included interviews with the Project Manager, staff and related agencies, interviews with community members accessing services, interviews with Volunteers of the People's Kitchen and a focus group with students volunteering with the People's Kitchen.

Interviews with client and staff participants were invited to participate through a voluntary consent form included in the survey data collection distributed by the CERC staff. Focus group participants were invited to participate through their supervising teacher who organised an appropriate date and time that suited all participants during school hours. Each interview participant was provided with a copy of the plain language statement and was required to sign a consent form prior to being interviewed. Interviews lasted approximately 15 to 60 minutes and were conducted using a semi-structured interview technique. Interviews were visual and/or audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis or content analysis. The transcriptions were completed by the CERC where participants were given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis, with representation of participant demographics. A thematic analysis technique and content analysis technique were used for the qualitative data with findings presented under theme headings together with participant quotes. The thematic analysis technique utilised Braun and Clarke's six step process, which included familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Figure 38)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. SAGE Publications Ltd

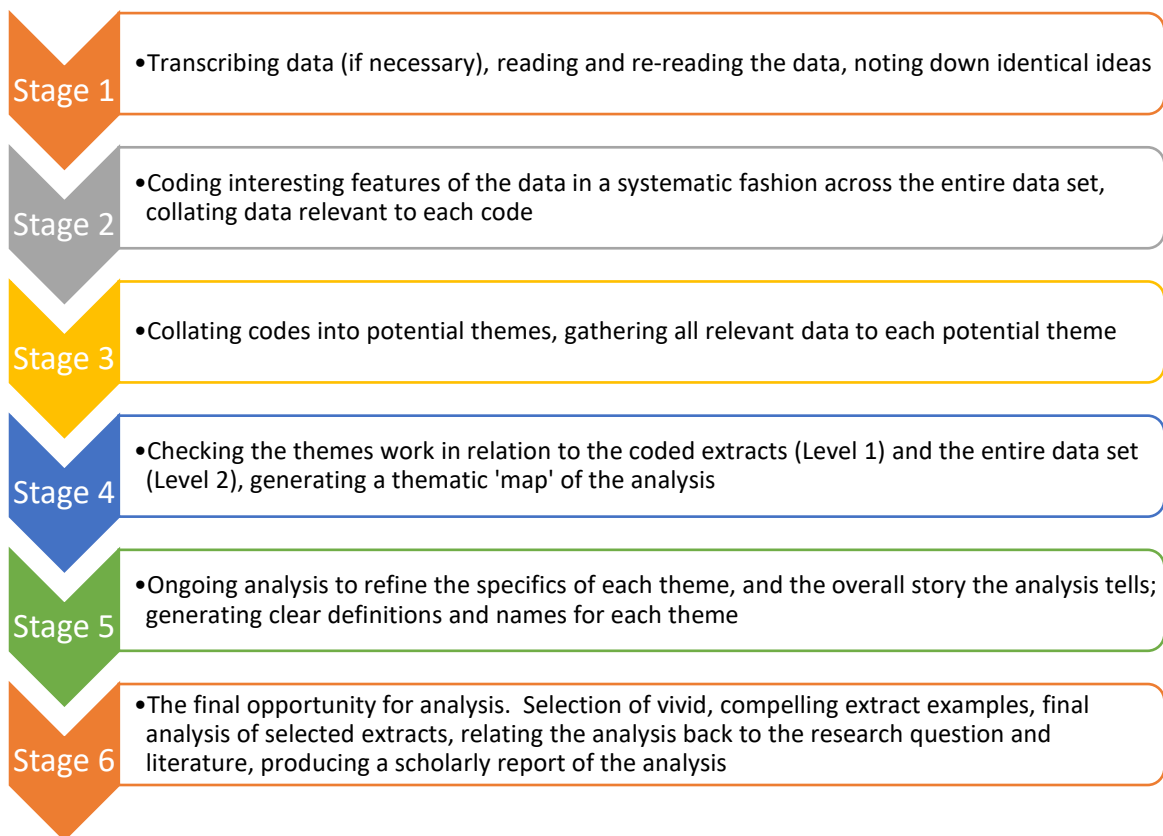


Figure 38: Six Step Thematic Analysis

As qualitative analysis is an inductive process, some interpretation of the data was required to create the thematic map. It was actively acknowledged that the researchers' interpretations would inform the results of this study, hence, any prior conceptions of the topic were reflexively bracketed to the best of the researchers' abilities<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>

## 9. ETHICAL APPROVAL AND PRACTICE

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Federation University aims to promote and support responsible research practices by providing resources and guidance to our researchers. We aim to maintain a strong research culture which incorporates:

- Honesty and integrity;
- Respect for human research participants, animals and the environment;
- Respect for the resources used to conduct research;
- Appropriate acknowledgement of contributors to research; and
- Responsible communication of research findings.

Human Research and Ethics applications, *Evaluation of the Food Security and Wellbeing Project (Approval number: 2022 - 150)* was approved by the Federation University Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 2) prior to data collection and analysis. Consent to participate in the study and for participant's de-identified transcripts to be used for research and evaluative purposes was obtained via signed informed consent forms before commencing the interviews. Participant anonymity was maintained by removing any identifiable information from the evaluation.

## 10. ABBREVIATIONS

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CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CERC	Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre
LHA	Latrobe Health Assembly
MNH	Morwell Neighbourhood House
PK	People's Kitchen

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## APPENDIX 1: PROJECT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### MNH STAFF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me about your role at Morwell Neighbourhood House?
2. Can you tell me what is/was your role in the program (People's Kitchen, Food Bank, Community Garden Activities)?
3. Tell me about some of the experiences and observations you made during the program.
4. What did you learn as a part of this program?
5. What did you enjoy most about the program? (Discuss strengths and weaknesses)
6. Has there been any challenges faced during the program?
7. In your view, what impact do you think the program has had in your community?
8. Thinking about your experiences, what impact do you think this program has had on you personally?
9. If this program were to continue in the future is there anything that you would like to see change?
10. Are there any other comments or thoughts you would like to share about your experience of the program?

### FOOD BANK PARTICIPANT/CLIENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about some of the experiences of attending MNH
2. Have you learnt anything about food and food preparation from MNH?
3. What do you enjoy most about MNH? (Discuss strengths and weaknesses)
4. Were there any challenges faced during your visit to MNH?
5. What would you like improved at MNH?
6. Are there any other comments or thoughts you would like to share about your experiences at MNH?

### PEOPLE'S KITCHEN STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you please tell me what was your role in the program was?
2. Tell me about some of the experiences and observations you made during the program. (What sort of meals did you make and how many?)
3. What did you learn as a part of this program?
4. What did you enjoy most about the program? (Discuss strengths and weaknesses)
5. Where there any challenges faced during the program?
6. In your view, did (how do you think) this program make a difference?
7. Thinking about your experiences, what benefit, if any did this give to you?
8. What would you like improved/what was a weakness of the program? Discuss
9. Are there any other comments or thoughts anyone would like to share about their experience of the program?

## APPENDIX 2: HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

<b>Principal Researcher:</b>	Associate Professor Joanne Porter	
<b>Co-Researcher/s:</b>	Dr Michael Barbagallo Val Prokopiv Megan Jackson	Dr Alana Hewitt Professor Carolyn Unsworth Dr Blake Peck
<b>Institute:</b>	<b>Collaborative Evaluation and Research Group (CERG)</b>	
<b>Project Number:</b>	<b>2022-150</b>	
<b>Project Title:</b>	<b>Evaluation of the Food Security and Wellbeing program Project.</b>	
<b>For the period:</b>	27/07/2022 to 27/07/2027 (standard 5-year project approval has been introduced)	

*Quote the Project No: 2022-150 in all correspondence regarding this application.*

Approval has been granted to undertake this project in accordance with the proposal submitted for the period listed above.

Please note: It is the responsibility of the Principal Researcher to ensure the Ethics Office is contacted immediately regarding any proposed change or any serious or unexpected adverse effect on participants during the life of this project.

In Addition: Maintaining Ethics Approval is contingent upon adherence to all Standard Conditions of Approval as listed on the final page of this notification.

### **COMPLIANCE REPORTING DATES TO HREC:**

Annual project reports:

**27 July 2023 27 July 2024**

**27 July 2025 27 July 2026**

Final project report:

**27 August 2027**

**A final report must be submitted within six months of the project completion, which may be prior to the date noted above. Submission of a final report will close off the project.**

The combined annual/final report template is available at:  
HREC Forms



Fiona Koop

**Coordinator, Research Ethics**

**27 July 2022**

**Please note the standard conditions of approval below:**

## **STANDARD CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL**

1. Conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal required by the HREC.
2. Advise (email: [research.ethics@federation.edu.au](mailto:research.ethics@federation.edu.au)) immediately of any complaints or other issues in relation to the project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of the project.
3. Where approval has been given subject to the submission of copies of documents such as letters of support or approvals from third parties, these are to be provided to the Ethics Office prior to research commencing at each relevant location.

Submission for approval of amendments to the approved project before implementing such changes. A combined amendment template covering the following is available on the HRE website: <https://federation.edu.au/research/support-for-students-and-staff/ethics/human-ethics/human-ethics3>

- Request for Amendments
  - Request for Extension. Note: Extensions cannot be granted retrospectively.
  - Changes to Personnel
4. Annual Progress reports on the anniversary of the approval date and a Final report within a month of completion of the project are to be submitted by the due date each year for the project to have continuing approval.
  5. If, for any reason, the project does not proceed or is discontinued, advise the Committee by completing the Final report form.
  6. Notify the Ethics Office of any changes in contact details including address, phone number and email address for any member of the research team.
  7. The HREC may conduct random audits and / or require additional reports concerning the research project as part of the requirements for monitoring, as set out in the National statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

**Failure to comply with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* 2007 (Updated 2018) and with the conditions of approval will result in suspension or withdrawal of approval.**



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**Federation University Australia** acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where its campuses are located, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present, and extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations Peoples.