

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A SNAPSHOT OF FOOD ASSISTANCE
IN THE GEELONG/G21 REGION,
VICTORIA



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WE'D LIKE TO THANK YOU

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- 2 & 5 Inc
- Angelsea and Aireys Inlet Foodlink (FOODLINK)
- Barwon Child, Youth & Family
- Christ Church Community Meals Program
- City of Greater Geelong - The fOrt Youth Centre
- Diversitat
- Drummond Street Services
- Drysdale Family Support
- Eat Up Australia
- Forrest and District Neighbourhood House
- Foundation 61
- Geelong Food Relief Centre
- Lara Food Relief
- Lorne Community House
- Magic Moments - Geelong Basket Brigade
- Manifold Heights Baptist Church
- Norlane Community Initiatives (formerly Urban Seed Norlane)
- Ocean Grove Neighbourhood Centre
- OneCare Geelong
- Portarlington Food Assistance Program
- Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre (formerly Barwon CASA/Minerva Community Services)
- Spring Creek Community House
- St Leonards Primary School
- St Mary's Parish Pantry
- The Outpost
- Torquay Food Aid
- Uniting (Victoria & Tasmania) Limited
- Winchelsea Community House

Food For Thought: A Snapshot of Food Assistance in the Geelong/G21 Region, Victoria, October 2018

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT INTRODUCTION

Across the Geelong/G2I region there is a long and established history of providing food and other forms of emergency relief to those experiencing food insecurity.

In 2014 through *Food for Thought: A Needs Assessment of Food Assistance in the Geelong Region, Victoria* this diverse and informal network of charitable, welfare, religious and community-based organisations and the programs and projects that they operate was illuminated for the first time. The report provided an understanding of the food assistance system: who delivers assistance, who uses the system and some of the challenges and gaps in the system. It also provided recommendations based on these learnings.

Over the last 4 years the information gathered from this initial Report has been key to understanding food insecurity and the food assistance system in the region and has provided both data and a roadmap for organisations seeking to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of this system.

The Give Where You Live Foundation has been actively engaged in the issue of food insecurity and supporting the food assistance system since it established the Direct Assistance Voucher Program (DAVP) in the early 1990's. A 'no cost' emergency relief program for socially and financially disadvantaged people experiencing immediate financial crisis in the Geelong/G2I region, the program provides food, pharmacy and material aid vouchers to those in need. To complement this program, in 2011 the Foundation established Feed Geelong. Feed Geelong encompasses an awareness raising and fundraising campaign, supports organisations responding to the issue of food insecurity with grants, provides online and hard copy resources to connect those who need help with those who can help as it relates to food assistance and supports the Geelong Food Assistance Network (GFAN).

As part of its overall support for the food assistance system, the Give Where You Live Foundation has also committed to conducting the *Food for Thought* report to provide an evidence base to inform future planning and guide decision making.

As a result, the current project was commissioned in mid-2017 by the Give Where You Live Foundation as a partnership project with Deakin University Freelance Hub and the participating agencies of the Geelong Food Assistance Network (GFAN). The GFAN is comprised of over 50 agencies which provide informal co-ordination of a regional approach to the food relief service system to best meet the needs of residents experiencing food insecurity due to financial disadvantage.

This report highlights the results from the survey conducted in late 2017 and seeks to describe the current food assistance activity across the region and to identify the key components of supply and demand for food assistance agencies. The report also identifies client profiles and usage patterns to better understand the current demand and where possible identify any duplication or unmet needs thereby signposting possible future direction. Finally, the report seeks to put the experience of the food assistance system into context with the issues and trends impacting our region, state and country.



REPORT BACKGROUND

At the most basic level, food is a necessity and a basic human right.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 25 states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and of their family, including food.

Food security refers to the ability of individuals, households and communities to access an appropriate and nutritious food supply on a regular and reliable basis using socially acceptable means (i.e. without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing and other coping strategies).¹

In Australia, food security is considered to be an important social determinant of health and a significant public health issue at national and state levels.²

Food security has been shown to affect academic achievement in children, both in school readiness, and in learning over the school year.³ It is also associated with general poor health and may worsen other health inequalities that are apparent in disadvantaged groups such as a higher mortality rate, and higher rates of coronary heart disease, type-2 diabetes and some types of cancers.⁴

Food insecurity and the demand for emergency relief are well recognised as symptoms of underlying poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage. Low income is identified as one of the highest indicators of food insecurity and a difficult economic climate is also acknowledged as having a significant influence on food security.⁵

While many in the Geelong/G2I region are prospering, not all members of our community have benefited or are benefiting from this prosperity. Pockets of disadvantage persist. The Geelong/G2I region is home to some of the most disadvantaged communities in the state and the country. Colac East, Corio, Norlane and Whittington are SEIFA decile 1 and are ranked as the 2nd, 26th, 3rd and 18th most disadvantaged communities respectively in the state.⁶

Food insecurity is an issue that highlights this tale of two cities in our region. In response to concerns of increasing regional food insecurity and demand for food assistance at the local agency level, the Give Where You Live Foundation and the City of Greater Geelong (COGG) formed a partnership and conducted a forum (mid 2013) bringing together the then over 40 agencies working across all aspects of the emergency food relief sector. From this meeting the Geelong Food Assistance Network (GFAN) was established. The purpose of the GFAN was to provide coordination of a regional approach to meet the needs of those experiencing food insecurity in the Geelong/G2I region.

The GFAN membership and other agencies provide a vital service for many people within the Geelong/G2I region, which includes the local governments of City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast Shire, Golden Plains Shire, Borough of Queenscliffe and Colac Otway Shire. Across the region there is a long and established network and history of providing food and other forms of emergency relief to those in need. Until the formation of GFAN there was little empirical data or understanding of the food relief situation, rather anecdotal evidence was often relied on.

To gather information on the reach and impact of these agencies and programs as well as highlighting areas of improvement the "Food for Thought" report was conducted in 2013-2014. The Give Where You Live Foundation in conjunction with COGG undertook an extensive survey over a 6-month period where a large wealth of information was gathered. This led to an extensive data analysis process ending in a report that provided recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the system going forward.

The *2014 Food for Thought Report* (2014 Report) confirmed the anecdotal reports that there was increasing food insecurity within the Geelong/G2I region and an increase in the demand for emergency food relief. It also highlighted

issues across organisations, providing recommendations related to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the system. One of the recommendations was related to developing an ongoing data collection process to strengthen the evidence base. This would allow the Give Where You Live Foundation and the GFAN to ensure that they had accurate up-to-date data and useful information to support and inform the system.

The extensive nature of the *2014 Report* made replication of the report difficult. As a result, the Give Where You Live Foundation has developed a two-pronged approach to fulfil the need for accurate and up to date data to inform the system. The approach includes a repeatable biennial survey that can be used to collect data to provide a snapshot of supply and demand in the system, as well as an in-depth survey in the intervening year on a single element of the system. Together these two surveys will provide a useful tool and contribute to informing ongoing development of an effective and efficient food assistance system in the Geelong/G2I region.

This report contains the results of the repeatable biennial survey that provides a snapshot of supply and demand as it relates to the food assistance system.

¹Expert working group of the American Institute of Nutrition, in Anderson, SA (Ed). *Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult to sample populations. Journal of Nutrition*, 1990; 120: 1557-1600.

²Nolan, M., Rikard-Bell, G., Mohsin, M., & Williams, M. *Food insecurity in three socially disadvantaged localities in Sydney, Australia. Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 2006: 17(3), 247-254.

³Winicki, J., & Jemison, K. *Food insecurity and hunger in the kindergarten classroom: Its effect on learning and growth. Contemporary Economic Policy*, 2003: 21(2), 145-157.

⁴Turrell, G., & Kavanagh, A. M. *Socio-economic pathways to diet: Modeling the association between socio-economic position and food purchasing behaviour. Public Health Nutrition*, 2005: 9(3), 375-383.

⁵Burns, C. *A review of the literature describing the link between poverty, food insecurity and obesity with specific reference to Australia. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2004.*

⁶Census of Population and Housing: *Social-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia, 2016.*





HOW WE COLLECTED INFORMATION

The current report is based on data that was collected over a three-week timeframe in September and October of 2017 via a survey of organisations that provide food assistance in the Geelong/G2I region.

The survey focused on collecting demographic and quantitative data on the provision of and demand for food assistance, as well as high level client demographics. The survey was sent to 56 agencies/organisations across the Geelong/G2I region known to the GFAN. Respondents could complete the survey online or print out and return a hard copy of the survey. 28 completed surveys were received within the timeframe. This gave the survey a response rate of 50%.

Some organisations acknowledged they were unable to complete the survey. In some cases, this was due to the timeframe, in others it was because organisations simply did not collect the data requested. It should also be noted that several of the organisations that completed surveys in 2014 are no longer operating or are now part of another organisation.

While this is a lower number of surveys received than in 2014, these 28 surveys did represent the work of 63 different organisations across the region as it relates to some elements of the data and as a result provides a significant (albeit conservative) picture of the work of the current food assistance system.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE FOOD ASSISTANCE SYSTEM



ORGANISATIONS
provide and distribute
FOOD ASSISTANCE

46% OF
ORGANISATIONS
reported an increase of clients
**SEEKING FOOD
ASSISTANCE** in the
previous 12 months



ALMOST **HALF** of those
receiving assistance were
FAMILIES with
CHILDREN (includes single
parents & couples with children)

50% OF FOOD

required is being
PURCHASED BY 40%
OF ORGANISATIONS



VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE

\$3.4M

LABOUR SUPPORT
ANNUALLY AND
**50% ARE OVER
THE AGE OF 61**



**FOOD
VOUCHERS**
drive the **GREATEST
VOLUME** of food
assistance

AN ESTIMATED

717,883

MEALS A YEAR
are provided by the food
assistance system

= 2,000
MEALS A DAY

57%

SEEKING FOOD
ASSISTANCE WERE
FEMALE AND

43% MALE



FOR EVERY **ONE PAID
STAFF** THERE ARE
4.5 VOLUNTEERS
providing food assistance

78% OF
ORGANISATIONS
providing food assistance
also refer clients to one or
more **COMPLIMENTARY
SERVICES**



55% of organisations
use **MORE THAN
ONE METHOD TO
DELIVER FOOD** -
most common methods being food
parcels/boxes and fresh food

STORAGE CAPACITY
OR LACK OF
DONATIONS
ARE BARRIERS TO
PROVIDING ACCESS
TO ALL FOOD TYPES



WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED: ABOUT THE FOOD ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

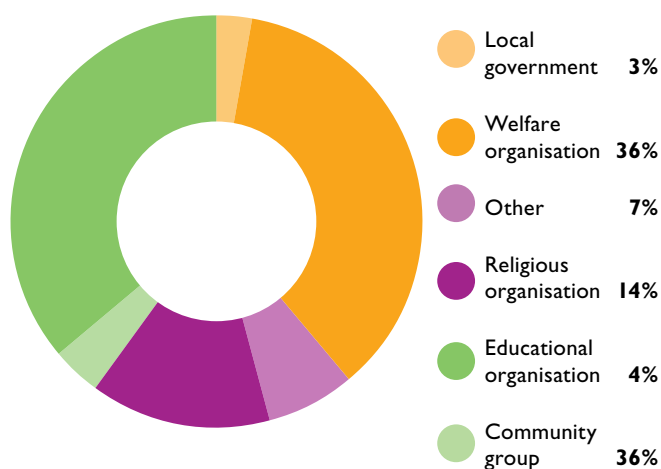
At least 63 organisations provide and distribute food assistance in the Geelong/G2I region.

As noted in Figure 1 (below) the majority of food assistance programs are being run by organisations that identify themselves as welfare organisations or community organisations.

For some of these organisations food assistance is part of their primary mission, for others food assistance is a tool they use to assist them in supporting their clients as they deal with other issues (e.g. family violence, family breakdown, mental health, employment).

These organisations continue to deliver food assistance in a variety of ways, with more than half (55%) using more than one method of delivery. The most common methods as identified in Figure 2 (below, right) are food parcels/boxes and fresh food, followed by prepared meals consumed onsite. Other methods include food vouchers, prepared meals/takeaway and school-based food programs. It should be noted that while vouchers were only identified by 6 organisations as one of their methods of delivery, this method actually drives the greatest volume of food assistance in the region.

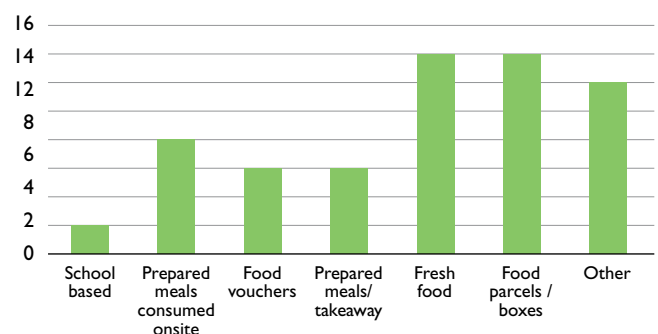
FIGURE 1: TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING FOOD ASSISTANCE (N=28)



Underlying the fact that food assistance is not just about food security, 78% of organisations noted that in addition to food assistance they also referred clients to one or more complimentary services. These referrals may be internal to other programs within their organisation or external to other organisations. While the most common services they made referrals to were financial counselling, mental health service providers and family support services other services they provided referrals to included medical/healthcare practitioners, addiction specialists, training/jobs support organisations, educational support services, accommodation support services, and family/domestic violence services.

The data collected indicates that at least 665 staff and volunteers are spending 2,510 hours a week on the delivery of food assistance. Figure 3 (bottom) notes the breakdown between staff and volunteers providing food assistance. Organisations identified 120 paid staff who were estimated to spend 473 hours a week delivering food assistance. In contrast organisations identified 545 volunteers who were estimated to spend 2,037 hours a week delivering food assistance. That means for every one staff, there are 4.5 volunteers providing food assistance.

FIGURE 2: TYPES OF FOOD ASSISTANCE PROVIDED* (N=28)



*Organisations could nominate more than one type of food assistance provided.

FIGURE 3: PAID STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED IN DELIVERING FOOD ASSISTANCE (N=27)

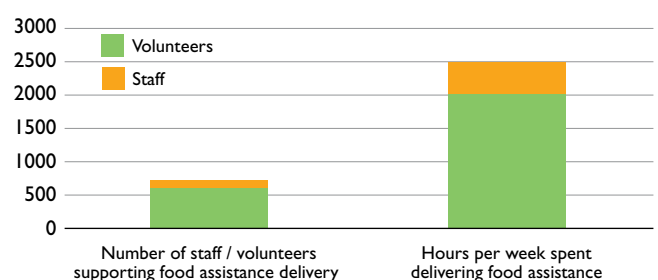


FIGURE 4: AGE OF VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED IN PROVIDING FOOD ASSISTANCE (N=28)

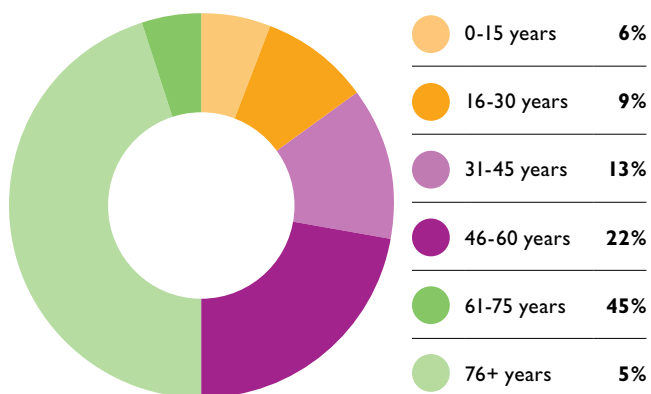
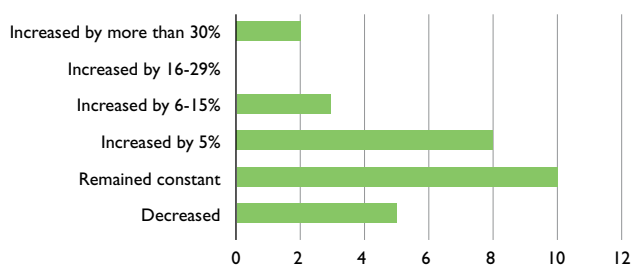


FIGURE 5: CHANGE IN PERCENTAGE OF CLIENTS SEEKING FOOD ASSISTANCE COMPARED TO PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS (N=28)



Volunteer labour is an essential resource to the operation of the food assistance system. The estimated value of the volunteer hours provided weekly is \$72,327.⁷ Annually the value of this volunteer labour is estimated at a staggering \$3,471,696.⁸

As noted in Figure 4 (top), more than 50% of the volunteer base of the food assistance network is over the age of 61 and furthermore 72% of volunteers fill the three oldest age brackets. A third of the organisations rely mostly on volunteers over the age of 61 i.e. volunteers over the age of 61 make up 65% or more of these organisation's volunteer base.

The survey provided some insight into the number of meals these staff and volunteers provided in the previous 12 months. Considering some possible overlap of assistance, conservatively the number of meals provided into the region in the previous 12 months was 717,883. This number considers meals delivered through all methods of delivery (e.g. prepared meals, vouchers, food parcels, breakfast programs). This would suggest that on average 1,967 or just under 2,000 meals a day were provided by organisations in the Geelong/G21 region.

Demand has at least remained constant in the previous 12 months, for most organisations as noted in Figure 5 (bottom). However, 46% of organisations did report an

FIGURE 6: BUSIEST MONTHS FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE (N=24)

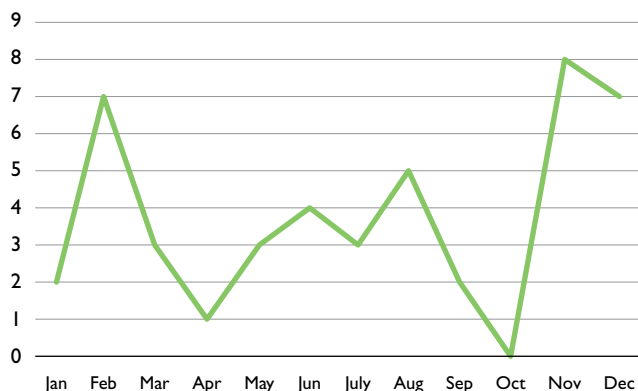
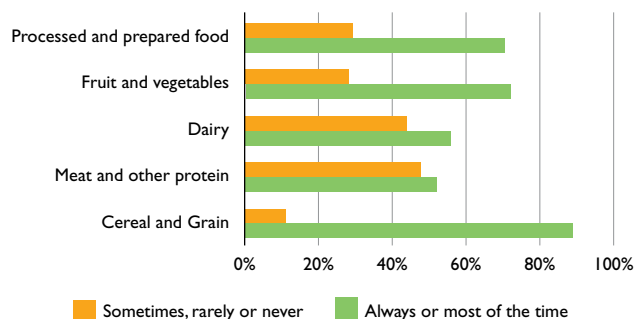


FIGURE 7: TYPES OF FOOD ORGANISATIONS CAN OFFER (N=28)



increase of 5% or more in those seeking food assistance in the previous 12 months.

This demand is not consistent across the year. Organisations were asked to identify the two busiest months of the year for their food assistance program. As noted in Figure 6 (top) the three busiest months for food assistance were February, November and December. This aligns with the start of the new school year and Christmas. Both events have been identified anecdotally as pressure points for those already on the line financially.

As noted in Figure 7 (bottom) the majority of organisations were able to always or mostly offer access to cereal and grains (88%), fresh vegetables and fruit (72%) and processed and prepared food (70%). More organisations found it challenging to consistently offer meat and other proteins (48%) and dairy (44%). In explaining why they could not offer some food types consistently, most organisations answered storage capacity or lack of donations.

In terms of food donations, it is generally assumed that most of the food provided in the system is sourced via donations. However, 40% of the organisations indicated that they purchase 50% or more of the food they require to provide food assistance.

⁷The hourly value placed on volunteering varies from \$41.72 (<https://www.fundingcentre.com.au/grant/help/>) to \$30.30 (<https://good360.org.au/value-volunteers-grant-applications/>). The rate used here is \$34.89 (this figure is based on the projected gross opportunity cost wage rates for volunteers based on Australian Bureau of Statistics Unpaid Work and the Australian Economy 2000 for 2016 (<http://volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Facts-Stats-10-Jan-2018.pdf>))

⁸This figure was calculated using the weekly value of volunteer hours of \$72,327 and is based on a 48-week work year.



WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED: ABOUT WHO USES THE SYSTEM

As noted in Figure 8 (top) of the clients receiving food assistance during the previous 12 months 57% were female and 43% were male.

The ages of those receiving assistance is quite dispersed. As noted in Figure 9 (middle) those at the older end receive less assistance, while those aged under 30 represent the largest age group (35%) with those aged 15 and under representing about half (17%) of that total.

Family types receiving food assistance is also instructive. While individuals seem to make up the single largest family type receiving assistance (43%), as noted in Figure 10 (bottom) people with children (single parent families and couples with children) actually make up the largest family type receiving assistance (45%). Of families receiving assistance 60% of these are single parent families.

FIGURE 8: GENDER OF THOSE RECEIVING FOOD ASSISTANCE (N=28)

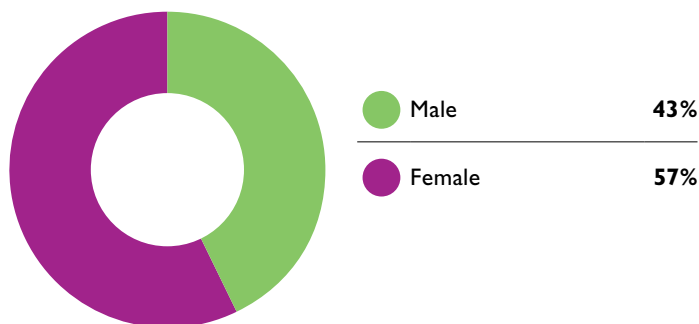


FIGURE 9: AGE OF THOSE RECEIVING FOOD ASSISTANCE (N=28)

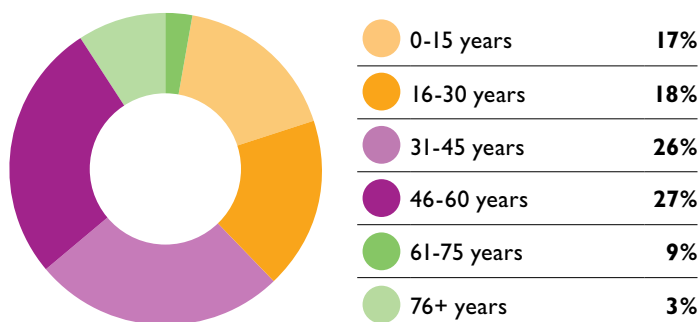
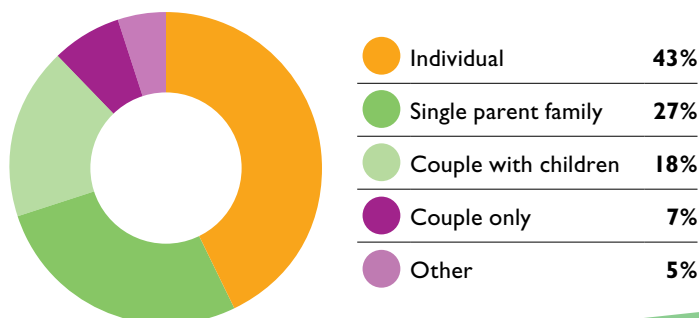


FIGURE 10: FAMILY TYPES RECEIVING FOOD ASSISTANCE (N=28)



THE RESULTS IN CONTEXT

While the 2014 Food for Thought Report (2014 Report) and this report are not directly comparable due to different methodologies, much of what we know about the food assistance system has remained consistent with the 2014 Report:

- While some organisations have come and others have gone, the number of organisations in the system has remained relatively the same.
- The system is still heavily reliant on volunteers to operate, and has an aging volunteer base.
- Some food types are still difficult to access (meat and other proteins and dairy).
- Capacity to store food is still an issue.
- Many organisations still purchase a significant amount of food to be able to provide assistance to those in need.
- The system has continued to experience an increase in need.

The last statement is perhaps the most disconcerting and requires a bit more insight as neither the 2014 Report nor this report directly cite the number of people receiving food assistance. Measuring the number of people receiving food assistance accurately is challenging due to possible duplication i.e. the same person/family receiving food assistance from the same organisation or multiple organisations multiple times. Anecdotally this is known to be true. As a result, in both the 2014 Report and this report the number of meals provided has been used as a proxy for understanding the increase in need.

In the 2014 Report it was estimated that 368,732 meals were provided annually.⁹ In this report the estimated number of meals provided annually is 717,883. This almost doubling of meals provided certainly suggests there has been an increase in need. It is important however, to note that there are some differences in how the two numbers were estimated. In the 2014 Report the number was based on a Data Collection Census Week and then extrapolated. For this report organisations were asked in a survey for the number of meals they provided in the previous 12 months.

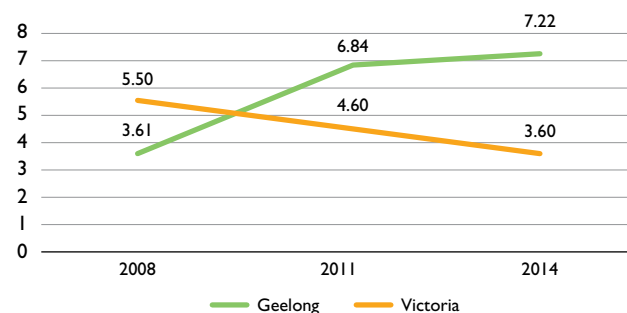
The 2014 Report methodology assumed that the Census week was an average week - this may not have been the case. The 2014 Report methodology also did not explicitly take into account organisations that provided vouchers or other multi-meal methods of food assistance. This report methodology did. As a result, the increase from 2014 is probably not as extreme as it seems because the 2014 estimate was low. However, these differences in methodology cannot be expected to account for such a large difference, as a result it would be reasonable to assume that there has been an increase in need.

Other data in the 2017 Report also supports there has been an increase in need. In Figure 5 (page 9), 46% of organisations reported an increase of 5% or more in those seeking food assistance on the previous year.

This increase in need is also consistent with data from other sources. The Foodbank Hunger Report 2017 found that there was a 10% increase in individuals seeking food assistance from charities in the last 12 months.¹⁰ This report also found that food insecurity is more likely to occur outside of capital cities (25%) and in single parent families (44%)¹¹, which is consistent with our findings.

Finally looking at trends related to food insecurity can also be instructive. The Victorian Health Population Survey has collected data related to food insecurity over the last 10 years. As noted in Figure 11 (below) the trend line for Geelong (which is home to the majority of the region's population) shows an upward trend since 2008 related to the percentage of people experiencing food insecurity.¹² This trend would again support the conclusion that the need for food assistance is growing.

FIGURE 11: PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE THAT HAD RUN OUT OF FOOD AT ANY TIME DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR



⁹Food for Thought: A Needs Assessment of Food Assistance in the Geelong Region, Victoria October 2014, p. 8.

¹⁰Foodbank Hunger Report 2017, p 7.

¹¹Foodbank Hunger Report 2017, p 7.

¹²Victorian Population Health Survey 2008, Victorian Population Health Survey 2011 and Victorian Population Health Survey 2014. In: Victorian Health Information Surveillance System, Victorian Health Population Survey Interactive Reports.





FOOD FOR THOUGHT CONCLUSION

This report provides another snapshot in time of the food assistance system in the Geelong/G2I region.

It highlights that food insecurity continues to be a need that requires attention and that there are still opportunities as presented in the *2014 Food for Thought Report* to create a more efficient and effective system to meet this need.

The Give Where You Live Foundation looks forward to working with the GFAN to implement the first in depth survey in 2018-2019 which will explore in more detail who is seeking and receiving food assistance, why they are seeking food assistance and the difference that food assistance makes to them. It is hoped that this additional information will provide more insights into the system that can be used to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the system.



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