

MOUNT ALEXANDER FOOD PANTRY

CENTRAL VICTORIAN PCP CASE STUDY

BACKGROUND

Mount Alexander Shire is a small local government area in central Victoria with a population of more than 18,000 people. There is a strong sense of community and the shire benefits from above average levels of volunteering, community engagement and participation in artistic and cultural activity.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local community has been particularly felt by those in hospitality, tourism, artistic communities and those already experiencing disadvantage. People were suddenly unemployed and food security became an issue for the first time. Local first nations service Nalderun began to see a surge in requests for food relief as the initial impact of COVID-19 was felt.

LOCAL NEED PUT INTO ACTION

Mount Alexander Shire does not have a local food bank. However, some organisations have provided relief but with limited capacity. So in response to the increased demand for food relief, Central Victorian Primary Care Partnership (PCP) brought together a group of local organisations and community groups to develop a centralised food relief system.

These organisations and community groups worked quickly to set up the Mount Alexander Community Pantry. The Pantry offered prepared frozen meals and food packages for all Mount Alexander residents on request, with no eligibility criteria and no cost.

Other organisations provided donations or in-kind support including Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative, Bendigo Foodshare, Rotary, Second Bite and SuperCold Coolrooms. Significant monetary donations have also been received from various donors.

Mount Alexander Food Pantry partners

- Mount Alexander Shire Council
- CHIRP Community Health
- Castlemaine Community House
- Maldon Neighbourhood Centre
- Nalderun
- The Salvation Army
- St Vincent de Paul
- Castlemaine Church of Christ
- St Mary's Parish
- Mount Alexander Disability Advocacy Group (MASDAG)
- Lions Club
- Bendigo & District Aboriginal Cooperative



▶ **Central Victorian PCP** brought together stakeholders and provided the backbone support

▶ **Castlemaine Community House** provided the intake and registration for people in need

▶ **The Castlemaine Church of Christ** provided a venue for cooking and storage of food and meal packages

▶ **The Salvation Army** and The Castlemaine Church of Christ developed rosters and processes for volunteers,

▶ **The Lions Club** assisted with training volunteers and software to help the whole process run smoothly and ensure tracking and tracing of volunteer movements

▶ **The Mount Alexander Shire Council** provided guidance to comply with the food safety standards

▶ **Nalderun** chairs the management group to oversee the Mount Alexander Food Pantry

▶ **Other volunteers from local organisations** were involved in packing and delivering the food parcels.



WHY WAS IT SUCCESSFUL

The pantry set-up was achieved quickly and successfully due to the level of pre-existing relationships and trust between a number of the key organisations involved. This meant that roles and responsibilities were easily allocated and implemented by groups or organisations with appropriate skills. Some organisations were also able to redirect staff whose roles were impacted by COVID-19.

Having the Central Victorian PCP facilitate the process initially provided the backbone support required. A management team chaired by Nalderun is providing ongoing oversight.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Mount Alexander Community Pantry has recently reviewed its operations given that we expect community need to continue and perhaps increase as government supports are wound back later in the year. A review was also required to look at the sustainability of volunteer management and to respond to the types of food and donations being received.

As a result, all pantry recipients are starting to transition to food parcels with accompanying recipe cards rather than pre-cooked meals if they are able. This is to reduce dependence on cooked meals and identify those that might need ongoing *meals on wheels* service.

Ongoing evaluation of the process and impact of the community pantry will continue to inform decision making as the service continues to evolve in response to community needs.

DEMAND

Mount Alexander Community Pantry (5 weeks):

- ▶ assisted 86 different household
- ▶ delivered over 1600 frozen meals
- ▶ delivered 250 grocery packs