

## Intergenerational Volunteering Case Study\* Stafford & District Meals on Wheels

Stafford and District Meals on Wheels Service is a leading example of how different generations of individuals are volunteering together for community benefit. Stafford Meals on Wheels has been instrumental in its approach to developing partnerships with the surrounding community including a local high school, and numerous disability services where a multi-dimensional approach and socially inclusive culture has resulted in a range of benefits for individuals and organisations in the local community.

There are a range of programs in the community that offer opportunities for different generations of individuals to interact. Many organisations facilitate specific intergenerational volunteering programs which can be through one of 3 approaches.

1. Seniors and youth volunteering together
2. Senior volunteer working with youth recipient
3. Youth volunteer working with senior recipient

This case study represents an example of different generations of individuals working together to support the elderly.

### Stafford and District Meals on Wheels (MOW) Service

Stafford MOW operates out of their own building located in the northern suburbs of Brisbane providing meals for clients in the suburbs of:

- Stafford
- Stafford Heights
- Everton Park
- Enoggera
- Gordon Park
- Lutwyche
- Alderley
- Grange
- Windsor
- Herston
- Kelvin Grove
- Newmarket



The service, which has been running for 22 years, caters for approximately 85 elderly clients in the community. In addition to their own clients, Stafford MOW service also provides an additional 55 meals each day for the nearby Nundah MOW.

The kitchen is staffed by a fully qualified chef and two kitchen staff who work between 5am and 11am to produce around 700 high quality nutritious meals each week. The meals are designed to cater for a variety of tastes, personal preferences and special dietary requirements including modified texture. Once prepared the meals are packaged, labelled appropriately and placed into eskies ready for the volunteer delivery drivers.

Stafford MOW has approximately 80 volunteer drivers ranging in age from early 20's to 86 years. The service does not actively recruit volunteers, instead finding that volunteers just hear about the service, or may drive past the signage.

*'We have people just come in, 'do you want volunteers?' We've got 6 in the last couple of weeks. There's a husband and wife, a young lady and her partner, and another two individuals who just came in and said 'we'd like to volunteer', and I never knock back volunteers'.*

The volunteers utilise their own vehicles for the runs, working in pairs to deliver the meals in the local area. The drivers are also reimbursed for petrol in cash which covers their out-of-pocket expenses. The service boasts high retention levels of volunteers and longevity of volunteer tenure.

*'We very rarely lose volunteers to be perfectly honest. We would have probably over half of our volunteers have been here in excess of 10 years.'*

Although volunteer retention is generally associated closely with variables such as adequate training, preparation and the actual work itself; the inclusive, friendly nature of the Stafford MOW service has a compounding impact on the length of tenure of its volunteer drivers.

*'What I put that [volunteer retention] down to is working together as a team. It's the reason why I'm here every day. I know everyone of my volunteers by name, and it's a matter of complete teamwork. Any new volunteers are introduced to the staff and everyone works together'.*

Another contributing factor may be that the volunteer rosters are done a week in advance, so that everyone knows what to expect and the runs that they will be doing each week. Some of the older volunteers come along a number of times each week, to develop and maintain friendships with other volunteers. Individual preferences are catered for in the roster with some volunteers preferring to only do the same familiar run, whilst other volunteers happy to help out on any delivery run.



New volunteers are interviewed by the president who takes them through the rights, responsibilities, confidentiality and provides them with a copy of the volunteers' handbook. Following that, new volunteers are provided with on the job training from more experienced volunteers.

*'With any new volunteers, what we do is send them out with one of our older volunteers. The older volunteer teaches them what's needed out there in the field'.*

This collaborative approach allows for vital skills and experience to be transferred between volunteers, which enable relationships between volunteers to be formed and strengthened through the supportive, facilitative environment.

### Volunteer Diversity and Social Inclusion

In addition to their regular volunteers, Stafford MOW also has 5-6 volunteers from differing backgrounds including limited mobility, and disability services to assist in the delivery of meals. Individuals from Crossroads volunteer three times a month, along with their carer and a volunteer bus driver to deliver these meals to the elderly.

The volunteers (ranging in age from 18 to about 30 years), in their wheelchair carry the meal to the client's home. The client (through prior arrangement with the president) will come outside their home and walk down the few steps to receive the meal from the Crossroads volunteer.



This approach has worked extremely well because volunteers feel like a valued member of the community.

*' At the Christmas party last year they said **'Thank you Jack, because we feel as if we're not being looked after all the time...we're helping to look after other people'**. It helps support them into the community because now they're doing something for the others in the community'.*

The flexible, socially inclusive approach has meant that Stafford MOW is able to sustain and maintain a diverse, generational volunteer base which supports the clients in the local community.

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## Stafford MOW and Everton Park State High School

For the past three years Stafford Meals on Wheels has worked collaboratively with Everton Park State High School providing valuable opportunities for year 10 students to volunteer in the community. The program involves students volunteering for about four hours a week to assist in meal preparation, kitchen duties and delivery of meals to elderly clients. The student attends MOW one morning a week from 8.00am until 11.30am learning valuable catering skills, and having the opportunity to develop intergenerational interactions with elderly individuals in the community.



The program is extremely popular with the students at Everton Park, *'at no stage are the students told they have to do it. They are invited to do it, then, when they agree, there's paperwork done...'* but because of the limitations in the actual kitchen it presents challenges in terms of volunteering on a number of occasions.

*'When you get a few good students that are really into it, what they do is go back and say **'That was a ton of fun, you outa get down there'**. We have a ton of fun, we laugh and joke, and this still happens with the students here. The students become a part of the team here, and it makes them feel as if they want to come back. Then they tell their other peers **'It's great down there'**.'*

During their time in the kitchen, the students are under the guidance and instruction of experienced kitchen staff, who supervise the students in a range of kitchen duties and learning experiences, encompassing:

- Food handling
- Textured meals
- Safe packaging
- Preparation of fruit and vegetables
- Temperature control
- Cooking

Through these interactions, valuable skills are transferred to younger students who relish in the opportunity to learn first-hand from Meals on Wheels chef and kitchen staff. The students spend one hour with the chef, assisting with the cooking and preparation, then the second hour with the kitchen staff, packing the meals.

After two hours in the kitchen, the students (in the capacity of a volunteer aide) accompany the volunteer driver teams on their route to deliver the meals to the elderly clients in the community. The students travel in private cars with two other MOW volunteers, assisting with the run sheet and the delivery of the correct meal to each client. These delivery runs are extremely valuable to all involved as they provide the opportunity for intergenerational interactions outside the scope of each individuals circle of friends or acquaintances.



*'We tell the student to go in and deliver the meal...don't be frightened to talk to the people. A lot of the students think it's absolutely tremendous that they get to talk to these elderly people. On two occasions I had students from other nationalities from Everton Park and when I asked them 'How was that?' they said, **'That was great because we don't have any grandparents here and they just felt like grandparents to us.'***

The students gain valuable experience in working with a range of individuals, from diverse backgrounds through providing a valuable community service.

*'The students are told loud and clear that they cannot misbehave down here, and they stick to the rules and there's no problem.'*

## Testimonials

### Students

"It gives you a different perspective of how older people really are."

"I think it makes you more respectful to older people because you get an insight into their lives."

"I learnt about the way MOW runs, how they actually prepare the meals in the kitchen there and then take the food to the client. I really liked the way it felt like a family."

"I learned how many people need help and that at MOW everyone has a job to do."

### MOW clients

"I think it definitely should continue, especially for older people who can't leave their homes – so nice to see young people."

"Excellent idea for young people to know there is life beyond their four walls, CDs and Xboxes."

"The young people are always so polite and it is so nice to see a young face."

"The kids are very nice and polite, they seem a bit shy – they listen to me talk, I like talking to them."

### MOW staff & volunteers, teachers

(It is important to continue this program) "To show how easy it is to help others."

"I've learned that the kids I have with me are happy to learn, use their initiative and enjoy doing this service."

"It's great because it's about community service."

"I think it's great to get the kids involved in the community and give them a sense of helping others."

The program and partnership with Everton Park State High has been so successful, and relatively easy to set up and maintain that Jack Pool (president) offers the following advice for organisations wanting to encourage younger people as volunteers.

*'Go and find the high schools and talk to the principals, to see if they are interested. A lot of the schools are becoming interested, because the governments are wanting them to do community work, and unless the organisations approach the schools, the schools don't know who to approach. It's up to the different organisations that want volunteers to go and approach the schools and talk to them and let them know what they would like the school student to do. It's as simple as that.'*



The service maintains regular and open contact with the teachers at the high school, discussing issues and addressing them through open and regular communication. Although there was some initial reluctance and concerns from the MOW volunteers, and client family members about having student volunteers aids during delivery runs, these were addressed through simple open discussion between stakeholders. Through these discussions, concerns are addressed and issues resolved, fostering greater support for the program.

Another group that volunteers regularly for Stafford MOW is Quest Newspapers who send their staff members to assist on delivery runs. Each Wednesday, these corporate volunteers are paired with an existing volunteer to deliver meals to elderly residents in the community.

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### Stafford MOW's Helping New Mother's Project



This innovative project, spearheaded by one of Stafford MOW's regular volunteers is designed to provide much needed support to young mother's in the nearby community with Post Natal Depression (PND). One of the services younger volunteers, following the birth of her second child, discovered that many mother's with PND, were challenged by providing healthy meals for themselves, which naturally affected the quality of breast milk for their newborn infants.

The pilot program, initially funded by SMOW, is designed to provide these mother's with a nutritious meal, and much needed friendship, emotional support and care. The volunteers, many of whom are mother's themselves, range in age from mid 20's to 50's, deliver the meal and provide a listening ear. In contrast to the regular delivery runs, these volunteers spend up to half an hour at each mother's home, thereby significantly reducing the number of meals in the 'Young Mum's' run, to three meal deliveries.

Although the program was initially unsuccessful in attracting donations or funding, Stafford Meals on Wheels Service could immediately see the benefits for both the mothers, infants and other family members, and rose to the challenge of funding the project during the first month. The mother's in the community are identified by nurses at the Child Health Clinic, and a meal each day is provided free of charge for two weeks. Additional meals are supplied for other children or family members at a cost.

The success of the 'Young Mum's' project (which commenced its first meal delivery in November 2008) has been a victory for SMOW on a number of levels. Firstly, through its healthy relationship with Quest Newspapers, the project obtained much needed media coverage, resulting in additional community interest and support through funding from Queensland Health and a significant number of local business in the community. Secondly, mothers in the community are benefitting from increased nutrition, intergenerational friendships and emotional support which in turn, enhances their capacity to care for their infants. Finally, the project, which is still in its infancy, clearly demonstrates what can be achieved through collaboration, open communication, and a willingness to step outside the boundaries to really address significant community issues.



### Summary

Stafford Meals on Wheels is a leading example of how a socially inclusive culture, combined with open communication and a hands on approach by management can enable an organisation to be responsive to the needs of the community. This is done through several ways. Firstly, the management committee members are involved in the organisation as volunteers, and also in the day-to-day running of the service.

*'It's a matter of communication. This is the crux of many organisations... is that they haven't got the ability to communicate. If they [the committee] got up and communicated instead of talking at the monthly meetings about how bad things are...'*

This open communicative approach, with different generations of individuals has enabled the service to successfully address current issues.

Secondly, the service, whose practices are consistent with their organisational values, operates from the position of delivering meals and caring for people... *We're not here to just deliver meals...we're here to deliver meals and care for people*'. This philosophy has guided and underpinned decision making at an organisational level enabling the service to successfully engage a diverse range of volunteers from different backgrounds, abilities and ages.

*We're all people....we're all equal aren't we? It's as simple as that. We're here to help each other. Everyone can get used to doing it....you just have to be prepared to think outside the square.'*

This has meant that the service has been instrumental in engaging volunteers from all works of life, including disability services and organisations.

Finally, the facilitative, innovative environment has meant that partnerships have been developed with the local community, enabling a greater range of intergenerational relationships and activities to take place between clients and volunteers.



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This case study was derived from interviews with Jack Pool, president, Stafford & District Meals on Wheels.  
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