

Summary

Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services' Friday Food Safari started as a way for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to gain skills and share their cuisine with others. During COVID-19, they have adapted their business model to continue the program, using food as a way to connect people and communities during isolation.



Photo credit: Noni Hyett via the Bendigo Advertiser

CASE STUDY

Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services

Background

Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services' (LCMS) Friday Food Safari is a lunch program where community members from migrant and refugee backgrounds prepare and deliver meals for businesses and other groups of people in Bendigo, Victoria. The meals enable people to connect with multicultural communities by experiencing new foods, and offer an insight into different cultures in the region. The menus are themed around a particular country's cuisine, with a different cuisine each month. Each meal also comes with a story behind the recipe.

The program also operates as a social enterprise, supporting people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to develop skills in food preparation, handling and supervision, which supports them to gain employment. In 2019, around 40 people graduated from the program.

Friday Food Safari fosters collaboration with mainstream community organisations, and started with a number of partner organisations including the City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo Regional Food Alliance, the Old Church on the Hill and the Salvation Army.

How did LCMS adapt during COVID-19?

Due to the restrictions introduced in response to COVID-19, LCMS had to adapt their business model to continue the Friday Food Safari. They had to stop their training program, as well as their deliveries to large businesses as more people were working from home.

LCMS realised they had an important role to play in fostering community connection and social cohesion during a challenging period of uncertainty and isolation. In about three weeks, they transformed their program so it could not only continue in this time, but also address the new needs of the wider community.

Now people and businesses order their meals before Thursday through the LCMS website. People then pick up their Friday lunch, and are encouraged to bring it home and reheat it, rather than sharing meals or eating on site. There are some home delivery options available.



There is also the option to 'pay it forward', so people and organisations can order the meals to donate to people in need in the community. This new model has allowed for new partnerships to develop, which has expanded the reach of the program. LCMS has been working with more organisations, including Rural Australians for Refugees, LaTrobe University, Annie North, and SisterWorks to support vulnerable people in the community. In the first week alone, approximately 80 meals were purchased, and an additional 60 meals were donated. In the first fortnight alone, there were about 160 meals sold.

The successful pivot of the program to adapt to COVID-19, resulting in a wider reach and new collaborations, has helped LCMS build social cohesion and support the whole community. LCMS hopes to continue these innovations to the program into and after the COVID-19 recovery phase

Challenges

1. Needing to quickly adapt to a wide range of hygiene and physical distancing restrictions at the same time as changing the structure of the program
2. Suddenly needing to increase digital capability

Outcomes

The program increases goodwill towards migrants and refugees by fostering positive connections between migrants and refugees and the broader community. Participants also benefit from social connection, and get to increase their skills and experience. During COVID-19, Friday Food Safari has also been able to connect with and support more people through their new model and evolving partnerships.

Key Learnings

This experience has generated three key learnings for LCMS:

1. Flexibility and having a supportive resilient team has made the transition during COVID-19 much easier
2. There is an opportunity for new ways of collaborating with other local organisations
3. Crisis sometimes presents the opportunity to expand to foster increased social connection

More information

For more information, visit: <https://lcms.org.au/fridayfoodsafari-2/>

See the program featured in the Bendigo Advertiser here: <https://bit.ly/2W8ZrIs>

