

Stories of Active Volunteering

Planned Activity Groups – Case Studies

Planned Activity Groups can operate from the same venue every week, or groups can go on regular outings, or they can be a mix of outings and meetings at a centre.

New activities in the Centre

The Evergreen Centre in Balwyn introduced a Community Kitchen. This is a two-fold exercise: a kitchen garden, with vegetables and fresh herbs grown in a raised garden bed, combined with cooking classes.

The ‘Cooking for One’ classes target older men. Most men live alone after losing a partner. Others want to try something new and maybe show their family they can learn new tricks!

Many men in this age group have simply never learnt to cook.

The cooking session involves the group cooking a meal together. The participants learn new skills, get to enjoy a nice meal together and then have another portion to take with them for a meal at home.



Photo: Reproduced with permission of the Evergreen Centre.

Participants are happy to learn new skills, and then to share this with their family – impressing their children and even grandchildren.

While the men are encouraged to do as much of the ‘work’ as possible, volunteers make the sessions run smoothly. The Evergreen Centre’s volunteer look after the garden, help out during the classes and

help clean the kitchen at the end of the day!

Want to see more of the Evergreen Community Kitchen? Have a look on you tube: <http://youtu.be/CAvPOFxXXfl>

Getting out into the community

Brimbank City Council runs a monthly Community Meals group. This group visits a local shopping centre where group members have lunch and do some shopping. Staff and volunteers support the people as they need. Some need assistance to walk around, others just want to know there is someone nearby.

This group used to meet at a community hall and have a group 'meals on wheel' lunch. It was a social occasion for clients – but it wasn't particularly exciting! During conversations, a number of group members mentioned that they had never visited the local shopping mall.

Staff suggested visiting the shopping centre and were met with an enthusiastic response. Brimbank City Council decided to 'give it a go' and they haven't looked back.

Key to the success of this outing is having enough volunteers so that all clients feel safe and supported.

Some people want to stay with the group, others want to go off on their own and others want to window shop with someone by their side. With volunteers helping out, all of these options are possible.

Initially, the Volunteer Coordinator was not sure how the volunteers would adjust to the shopping mall. At the centre, volunteers had clear tasks and a set routine. However, the Volunteer Coordinator reported that the volunteers 'got it' straightaway. *'They knew most clients hadn't been to the shopping mall. They could see how happy and proud they were...and they could imagine the conversations with friends and family... They knew, without this group, these people wouldn't have this outing...'*

Key Messages

- Volunteers can make the difference between a group doing the 'same old, same old' and trying new activities
- With volunteers around, staff can have greater confidence that there is support for all clients
- It can also mean there are more people sharing in the fun!