

# Stories of Active Volunteering

## Delivered Meals

Across Victoria, every day of the working week in many local government areas, there is an army of volunteers delivering meals to older people living at home.

### Did you know...?

- That the first 'meal on wheels' delivered in Australia was delivered in South Melbourne in 1953. Using a tricycle with a delivery box, Mrs E Watts of the South Melbourne Community Chest delivered a meal of soup, roast lamb and plum pudding to Mrs Meehan of Dorcas St.
- That every year, 15,000 volunteers in Victoria deliver more than 3.5 million meals.
- That National Meals on Wheels Day is celebrated on the last Wednesday in August each year. This annual celebration recognises the work of 78,700 volunteers at over 740 branches around the country.

### More than just a meal

Ever since the first meals on wheels meal was delivered nearly 60 years ago, the service has been seen as 'more than just a meal'.

*'...we saw it as a service providing much more than meals. It was a vital community link. For some older people, the only person*



*they saw was the one delivering the meals.'*

Francis Donovan, South Melbourne City Council social worker, 1954 – 1959<sup>1</sup>

'More than just a meal' is the motto of Meals on Wheels Australia, the national association of delivered meals organisations.

Reasons for needing delivered meals vary:

- People may need meals when recuperating after hospital. Delivered meals let people rest and recover.
- One member of a couple may require full-time care and the other partner doesn't have time for meal preparation.
- A couple of meals a week may help out someone who can manage most, but not all days.

Many people receiving meals at home may be restricted physically. Others may be going through temporary changes.

Whatever the situation, delivered meals help people maintain their independence at home.

### **How can Delivered Meals volunteers assist people to stay active and independent?**

Meals on Wheels volunteers can support independence in many ways:

- Through friendly chats. Have the same chat about the weather that you have with your neighbours or colleagues. It keeps people connected to the world.
- Get to know people, their general demeanor and the appearance of their house. Observe any changes that may suggest someone is improving or could be struggling.
- Ask clients how they are feeling. Keep your ears open for any suggestion

that people may be feeling unwell. Equally, be ready to respond when people tell you they're feeling good.

- Remind people to take care during our weather extremes – keeping hydrated in summer; being careful about the use of heaters in the winter.
- Encourage people to come outside when you are around. With you nearby, they may have greater confidence to walk to the letterbox for example.

The Meals on Wheels volunteer is a great monitor for the organisation. Let your supervisor know of any concerns, so that the organisation can follow up. Timely intervention may help prevent a fall or deterioration of someone's condition.

When volunteers are regularly delivering meals, it gives great peace of mind to the person receiving the meal and their family, knowing that someone will be calling by. If a door isn't answered, emergency procedures can be put into place very quickly.

#### **For further discussion**

- What are some of the 'signs' that tell you someone is managing well?
- What tells you they are not managing well?
- What do you find are the best ways to start up conversations?