

Stories of active volunteering

Food services

Across Victoria, every day of the working week, in many local government areas, there is an army of volunteers delivering meals and supporting older people to prepare meals, to access the shops or transport them to a community venue or restaurant to share a meal.

Did you know...?

- > The first 'Meal on Wheels' delivery in Australia was 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.
- > Every year, 15,000 volunteers in Victoria deliver more than 3.5 million meals.
- > National Meals on Wheels Day is celebrated on the last Wednesday in August each year. This annual celebration recognises the work of 76,000 volunteers delivering 10 million meals a year across Australia.



More than just a meal

Ever since the first Meals on Wheels delivery in 1953, the service has been seen as being 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

Many people receiving meals at home may have mobility issues preventing them from preparing meals or may be going through temporary changes or need short term support with meals when recuperating after hospital. Whatever the situation, food services and delivered meals help people maintain their independence at home and in the community.

More than meals on wheels...

Contemporary food service programs have expanded beyond delivered meals. These programs provide assistance in a number of ways including preparing meals in the client's

home, group meals, group activities to prepare meals and transport and support for people to share meals at restaurants and cafes in the community.

How can food services volunteers assist people to stay active and independent?

Food services volunteers can support independence in many ways. When you are assisting with meal preparation, sharing a meal or supporting individuals to shop:

- > Get to know the person, their interests and needs through friendly chats.
- > Ask clients how they are feeling. Keep your ears open for any hints they may be feeling unwell. Equally, be ready to respond positively when people tell you they're feeling good.
- > If you are assisting clients with meal preparation, remember the importance of 'doing with, not doing for' the person. Ensure that the client leads the process and makes choices about the meals they eat and how involved they are in the cooking process. Open up opportunities to learn new cooking skills.
- > When out in the community shopping or sharing a meal, invite the client to make decisions about their menu choices, where you shop or share a meal and where they choose to sit.

When you are delivering meals to clients' homes:

- > Get to know the person, their general manner and the appearance of their house. Observe any changes that may suggest someone is improving or they may be struggling.
- > Encourage people to come outside when you are around. With you nearby, they may have greater confidence to walk to the letterbox for example.
- > Remind people to take care during extreme weather– keeping hydrated in summer; being careful about the use of heaters in the winter.

The food services volunteer plays an important role 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 someone's condition getting worse.

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 at home?
- > What tells you they are not managing well?
- > What do you find are the best ways to start conversations when delivering meals to someone at home?