

NEWS

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Food Link all set to provide meals during second lockdown

by LIZ MELLINO



Greater Shepparton Foundation chief executive Cheryl Hammer and Food Link founder Amy DePaola.

After an extremely successful four months, Shepparton's Food Link program will continue providing meals to local families during the second COVID-19 lockdown.



The program, which originated during the first statewide lockdown earlier this year, saw a total of \$44,000 raised which was distributed back into the local economy to help provide 3660 meals to people in need.

Founder Amy DePaola said the service was in the process of winding down when they heard about the Stage 3 restrictions imposed on Greater Shepparton at the start of August.

Because of this, Ms DePaola worked to secure more funding through Smartmeals and the Greater Shepparton Foundation, which has enabled the program to pick back up and continue delivering meals to the community.

“Smartmeals is an Australia-wide charity which has been running a similar meals program to Food Link - they assisted with funds during the first lockdown and with the announcement of further lockdowns they were happy to come on board again,” Ms DePaola said.

“The Greater Shepparton Foundation have also provided some seed funding to help kick start round two.

“These funds will enable us to once again pay local hospitality businesses to make meals which we can then donate to agencies who will deliver the meals to vulnerable members of our community.”

The meals organised through Food Link are then distributed to a number of local agencies, including Shepparton Family and Financial Services, UnitingCare and Mooroopna Life Op Shop.

UnitingCare Goulburn North East programs manager Sara Noori said the support through Food Link had been extremely helpful in assisting community members who had lost their jobs and did not receive income support through Centrelink.

“Overall, everyone is experiencing mental health issues and are expected to navigate all the restrictions to ensure they are doing the right thing, so when we have delivered food to them it has definitely made their day,” she said.

Food Link also provided meals to a number of local schools earlier this year, who then distributed them to their more vulnerable families.

“This enabled them to maintain contact, show their support and see how they were coping during isolation,” Ms DePaola said.

“We really would like to be able to support these schools again now that we are back to learning from home.”

The program is once again calling for community donations and support to ensure it can keep running during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms DePaola said during the first lockdown there were many locals wanting to help the community, with the Food Link program providing them an opportunity to support both local business and those doing it though.

She urged the community to once again get behind the service and help them support the local economy.

“I have been constantly impressed by both the resilience of our local business owners and the dedication of the staff working with vulnerable members of our community,” Ms DePaola said.

“Food Link provides support to all these groups and we are really hoping the community get behind this again so we can provide this service in this second lockdown.”

To find out more or to make a donation, visit the Food Link Facebook page.

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