

Full plate for meal program

FOOD LINK SET TO SERVE UP FULL 16-WEEK PROGRAM AFTER GENEROSITY FROM GV BUSINESSES, ORGANISATIONS

- Shepparton News
- 6 Jul 2020
- By Charmayne Allison



Offering vital assistance: Fairley Leadership Program 2020 cohort members Jessica Watt, Wayne Sutton, Craig Mangan, Susan Givanola, Jenny Foott, Dennis Sutton, Lyn Hewson and Jenni Gibson.

The Food Link program has spent \$32,000 and supplied more than 3000 ready-cooked meals to hundreds of locals doing it tough throughout the past 12 weeks of the pandemic.

And thanks to a wave of ongoing support from the community, the program will continue to run for another month, allowing it to reach its initial 16-week goal.

Food Link's aim is simple — raise funds to pay struggling catering businesses to make meals for people doing it tough.

The Fairley Leadership Program 2020 cohort has since stepped up to keep the program running, raising more than \$3700 through a recent fundraiser.

Homelessness support program SmartMeals has also partnered with Food Link to supply 100 meals a week for four weeks, with a \$4800 funding injection.

The meals have been supplied to struggling families, locals sleeping rough and people with disabilities who are isolated due to COVID-19 restrictions.

People who have travelled to Greater Shepparton and are unable to return home due to closed borders have also benefited.

“Because of the type of visas they have, they are not eligible for government assistance,” Greater Shepparton Foundation (GSF) chief executive Cheryl Hammer said.

“Many of these people are from overseas.”

Founder Amy De Paola created the program in partnership with GSF, which donated \$5000 to launch Food Link, along with a matching grant from The Fairley Foundation.

Food Link supplies three agencies, four primary schools and a kindergarten who in turn distribute meals to those suffering food insecurity.

Fairley Leadership fellow Jenny Foott encouraged this year’s cohort to raise funds for the cause after their plans for the year were destroyed by COVID-19.

“I didn’t want the year to go by without us achieving something,” she said.

“I looked into Food Link and it was just such a great idea, I thought we could contribute.

“The team immediately jumped on board and through our donations, we’ve been able to supply another week of food to struggling locals.

“We’ve been learning about leadership, and this just shows that if you gather a good group around you, it’s amazing how a small seed of an idea can grow.”

Three members of the cohort ensured their businesses jumped on board, with Foott Waste Solutions and Fortitude Frames donating, and the Shepparton Club offering to match contributions.

“We are so grateful for the support from our local community – from the business sector, individuals and groups like the

Fairley Leadership Program 2020, who have given life to Food Link for more than three months now,” Ms Hammer said.

“Food Link is now more than a meals program, it is a way to keep people connected and supported via welfare and well-being workers in agencies and schools.

“The meals are of great benefit, but the visit from someone who cares and can foster connection to community is even more important in these uncertain times.”

Ms Hammer said future needs for Food Link would be constantly reviewed to ensure it was making an impact where it was needed most.

“We now understand this will be a difficult and uncertain time in its own right due to more recent outbreaks, the impact of people losing their jobs and the uncertain future of many local businesses if restrictions aren’t lifted soon.”

FOOD LINK IS NOW MORE THAN A MEALS PROGRAM, IT IS A WAY TO KEEP PEOPLE CONNECTED AND SUPPORTED VIA WELFARE AND WELL-BEING WORKERS IN AGENCIES AND SCHOOLS. — CHERYL HAMMER