

Creating Community Food Security through Neighbourhood Houses

NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES TASMANIA REPORT — MARCH 2021

Background

Neighbourhood Houses across Tasmania have provided strong leadership supporting local community food security for many years, through both advocacy and direct delivery of programs. Currently many Houses are faced with 'reinventing' successful place-based food security programs to gain grant funding to continue to deliver these very necessary programs.

Last year the State Government released the Interim [PESRAC Report](#) which included Recommendation #62 - *to transition from emergency food relief to community and school based food security models to support Tasmanian communities to be more food secure*. This resulted in the Department of Communities establishing the *Community Food Security Reference Group*, of which Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania is a member. Consequently, NHT initiated a rapid process to engage with the sector and conduct research to capture the extent of activity in Neighbourhood Houses, beyond emergency food relief.

In March 2021, while the data collection was underway via an online survey, the [final report for PESRAC](#) was released providing further guidance to the Department of Communities for addressing community level food security in Tasmania.

The final report contains 2 new recommendations which are relevant to the future delivery of food security programs within Neighbourhood Houses. This report captures the results of a recent survey of Houses, outlines how and why Neighbourhood Houses are critical and experienced leaders in their 35 communities, and 65% of local government areas, across Tasmania. It also includes a set of recommendations and a funding request which acknowledges the scale of action required.

Recommendation #31 — Food Security states:

The State Government should ensure that the Food Security Strategy currently being prepared:

- » expands on recent trials of **school lunch provision to include greater school and community provision**.
- » adopts a **place-based approach to community food security** models and not a '**one-size-fits-all**' approach.
- » includes **strong links to local agricultural and hospitality businesses including training opportunities** for program participants; and
- » is **scaleable in design** so that any potential increase in demand for emergency food relief can be managed in a rapid and effective manner.

Recommendation #35 — Place Based Recovery states:

The State Government and its agencies should actively seek out and fund community-led, place-based recovery activities. Priority should be given to activities with the following objectives:

- » increased **community connection including collaboration across existing community organisations.**
- » primary prevention of, and early intervention in, areas such as family or community violence and drug and alcohol misuse; and
- » models which promote **new and innovative strategies to engage volunteers.**

NHT continues to advocate for funding for a strong emergency relief sector, because Houses know firsthand that Tasmanians require a safety net for supporting community members in need. Looking to how we build community food security and resilience is timely. COVID-19 has seen Houses adapt their services quickly and build on their considerable experience and networks to support their communities.

Why did we do the survey?

- 1 To support the advocacy of NHT, which is a member of the Department of Communities' *Food Security Community Reference Group*, representing Houses, advising how the PESRAC recommendations should be delivered,

- 2 To get a comprehensive picture of place-based programs supporting community food security beyond emergency relief in Houses across Tasmania,
- 3 To capture and create a comprehensive overview of the sectors program types and current levels and sources of funding,
- 4 Have a complete picture of Houses' expertise and place-based networks.

The Survey

A draft of the 17-question survey was developed by the NHT consultant¹ and tested with knowledge experts², NHT and selected membership of NHT, inviting feedback. The survey was subsequently refined. The online survey, using survey monkey, was disseminated to House managers via email. They were given two reminders and the survey was also promoted on the NHT Facebook page. Houses which have shown strong leadership in the community food security space were also targeted directly to encourage them to participate. The survey was open for 11 days in March 2021. A single prize of \$100 voucher was offered as an incentive.

Survey Results — Highlights

- » 66% (23 of 35) of Houses participated in the survey, from all regions across Tasmania, representing the distribution of Houses.
- » The community food programs support a diverse range of Tasmanian community members — families, children, young people, older people, single people, migrants, people with a disability and Aboriginal Tasmanians.

1 NHT engaged Leah Galvin, a consultant with over 20 years' experience working on community food security, food resilience and food systems projects and research to design, conduct, analyse and deliver this report on the survey for NHT.

2 From within the State Public Health Community Nutrition Team and the University of Tasmania.

What sort of community food security programs do Houses deliver currently versus in the last 3 years?

Houses deliver a **wide variety of community food security programs**, beyond emergency food relief (free food parcels), responding to their communities' needs. These are included in the table below.

Activities that increase access to affordable healthy food	Current	In the last 3 years
Providing low-cost meals to community members	70%	82%
Selling low-cost vegetable or produce boxes	70%	60%
Provide outreach services delivering meals or vegetable boxes	57%	61%
Hold pop-up markets selling low-cost food in community	13%	26%
Work with local growers to supply affordable food to community members	30%	47%
Grow food in a community or market garden to sell in their community	65%	56%
Work with local retailers to promote low-cost meals and fresh food	27%	21%
Provide transport to assist community members to do their shopping	17%	17%
Run a breakfast program for children	17%	30%
Run an after-school program that includes healthy food	26%	43%
Activities that build skills in community members	Current	In the last 3 years
Have a community garden in which community members can volunteer and build skills about food growing	95%	86%
Run peer education courses to build skills in community members so they can share their knowledge in the community about healthy eating	35%	52%
Run community events about eating/cooking/growing healthy food	70%	87%
Conduct cooking, nutrition and/or budgeting education classes	70%	100%
Conduct training to build skills for working in the hospitality sector (food safety, food handling and preparation)	48%	60%

Some Houses respond to community needs through other innovations such as:

- » the *Grow a Row* project — gardeners are provided with seedlings and seeds and grow food for distribution through the House; and,
- » *Harvest Helpers* program — harvest fruit from and care for community members' fruit trees — 30% goes to tree owner, 30% donated to the house for the community pantry and 30% goes to volunteers.

Networks and partnerships

Houses commonly participate in community organisations/networks/partnerships to represent their community's food security issues — 65%. In the delivery of programs, they commonly partner with a range of organisations.

Partner organisation type for delivering community food security programs	Percentage of Houses
Local Government	44%
Schools	48%
Community Service providers	52%
Local businesses	57%
Community organisations and groups	74%
Charities	27%
Other Neighbourhood Houses	44%

Funding of current food security programs

Just over 50% of programs rely on short term grant funding — funding for more than half of these programs is ending in 2021 and 48% of Houses say their programs will cease to run or be scaled back when the funding period ends. The lack of an ongoing funding stream for community food security programs creates an ongoing impost on the core funding of Houses, with 74% using their own funding to support their current programs.

Direct funding for delivering community food security programs has been modest in recent years given the ongoing scale of the issue. Through grants, 50% of Houses have received less than \$10,000 each for community food security programs in the last 3 years, 32% between \$10,000 and \$50,000 and 20% have received \$150,000 or more. This current lack of funding means Houses cannot strategically consider programs that transition away from a reliance on emergency food relief approaches.

External funding sources for Community Food Security Programs in Houses	Percentage of Grants
Healthy Tasmania Grant (State Government, Public Health)	22%
Local Government	17%
Philanthropic sources	26%
Federal Government	17%
Tasmanian Community Fund	4%

Other time limited programs and intermittent community sources such as donations/ sponsorship plus mutual obligation programs provide sporadic funding.

Houses would like secure ongoing funding to:

- » **plan for longer term solutions (87%)**
- » reduce stress and anxiety of workers within programs (83%)
- » save time and energy applying for funding for a long-term issue (83%).

Seventy percent of Houses want ongoing funding for community food security programs for 3 years or more and 83% seek an opportunity to provide ongoing input into how the state government plans to address community food security issues.

Houses (87%) are **concerned there will be and increase in demand for EFR** because of the continued low rate of Jobseeker payments,

Conclusions and recommendations

This 2021 survey clearly demonstrates the key role and leadership Neighbourhood Houses have in the community food security space in Tasmania. The Houses deliver a wide variety of inclusive programs and have diverse partnerships to respond to community needs, well beyond providing emergency food relief.

Houses deliver programs which increase access to low-cost healthy food and build skills within the community. They have partnerships and networks with a wide range of organisations/service providers, business, volunteers, and local government. The network of Houses across Tasmania is delivering place-based programs and responding to local needs.

However, currently funding for House program activity is unreliable. **Many existing community food security programs are at risk in the short-term and meeting community demand for these types of programs is also a significant impost on Houses' modest core funding.**

Houses are frustrated by the lack of long-term funding for addressing community food security, which causes anxiety about delivering programs over the longer term and prevents a more strategic planning and program delivery approach. Additionally, programs which are already delivering and successful should not have to be continually 'reinvented' to gain new funding so they can continue to support their communities.

Recommendations to deliver against PESRAC Recommendation #31:

1 The Department of Communities should actively engage with NHT and its member Houses to create the future Food Security Strategy (FSS) and a framework for program investments that financially secure the delivery of place-based programs with strong community partnerships and support volunteering.

We are requesting an initial \$100,000 for NHT to build on this survey and undertake a detailed consultation process with the Houses and their communities to deepen our understanding of the barriers and enablers to inform future program design.

2 The FSS and place-based program investments should support Houses to plan and deliver solutions that improve access to low-cost healthy foods in local communities to assist in the transition away from a reliance on EFR and build greater community resilience. Social protections that are proven effective are those that relatively reduce the price of healthy food – either by increasing income or subsidising the cost of food in communities where people are food insecure³. Other community food security programs success is impacted by the low number of people they reach compared with the real number of people who may need support.

3 **In the move from a reliance on EFR to community food resilience, approaches that improve affordability should be a key resourcing focus and at the scale required such as in the 35 communities serviced by Neighbourhood Houses.** (please see our estimate of the future investment required)

4 The FSS and program investments should also support Houses to plan and deliver opportunities to actively build skills in for example, healthy food growing, cooking and good nutrition.

5 The FSS and program investments should support Houses to plan and deliver through partnerships and networks which expand their reach and encourage innovation with new partners and volunteers.

6 The FSS and program investments should allow the NHT membership network to have access to overarching expertise and support they need to facilitate longer term planning and program design to transition away from reliance on EFR. This overarching support should include creating opportunities to share with other Houses and the broader community on a regional and state level.

7 The State Government and its enterprises should be encouraged to engage with Neighbourhood Houses and their local communities as per the [Tasmanian Government Neighbourhood Houses Protocol](#) around building solutions.

3 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-nutrition-society/article/interventions-to-address-household-food-insecurity-in-highincome-countries/F2D7DOB429C175D9098237B8F7CDDCDF>

Future Funding Estimates

To deliver against the recommendations made in this report, Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania estimates that the following funding will be required. More details on this estimate request can be provided upon request.

Activity	Investment	Total (3 years required)
1 Extensive NHT Food Security consultation with membership and their communities to deepen our understanding of barriers and enablers	Initial investment of \$100,000	\$100,000
2 Estimate for ongoing and increased Food Security Programs in Neighbourhood Houses » Resourcing staffing, operational funds	\$80,000 up to \$150,000 per house per year. The upper range reflects funding required for delivering social enterprises focused on increasing access to affordable healthy food within communities	\$4,200,000 per year \$12,600,000 over 3 years Assumes 70% will run social enterprises
3 Estimate for Neighbourhood House Tasmania » To support Houses to deliver Activity 2 – state-wide networking, program facilitation, workshops/training, research/evaluation, creating tools and resources as required. » To actively partner with Government Business Enterprises (GBEs) and government departments	\$200,000	\$600,000 over 3 years
Total investment for the next 3 years		\$13,300,000 over 3 years

