

## THE STORY OF THE FUNDING GRANT (\$1500) TO THE OLIVE WAY FOR SOCIAL SUPPORT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC - FROM THE INNER NORTH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

### **This report was sent to the Moreland City Council (Communications)**

Here's a bit of the info you requested. I appreciate this might be a bit wordy so feel free to pick out the relevant parts. I'll give you a bit of the background, the aims, and a few stories of how we managed to implement this for some of our guests.

#### Background:

Olive Way is a drop in centre located at Brunswick Uniting Church (opposite Moreland City Council offices). In a normal (pre-COVID world) week we would operate three days, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday providing fresh fruit and veggies, toasted sandwiches, and a hot lunch on Wednesdays. We see around 30-40 on average each day that we are open. Many of our guests are elderly, disabled, or homeless. We do not typically take down contact details of our guests, nor do we offer case work as we are not equipped to do this. Where possible we refer our guests to support services that they may be eligible for assistance from. Olive Way is staffed by the Pastor (Peter Blair) and the Kitchen Co-ordinator (Peter Murphy) as well as volunteers.

#### Aims:

There were two main aims in our initiative. Firstly, in our conversations with the homeless folks that would attend prior to restrictions, we noticed that many do not have any means of contact. Some would ask to use our phone or borrow other people's phones whilst at the centre. Although a good portion of homeless people had mobile phones, there were a number, who for various reasons, had no means of contacting services, or for services to get in touch with them. This meant that when support services needed to get in touch, and as help became available, there was no means of contacting them, meaning that they would often fall through the cracks. As the virus worsened and as restrictions began to impact on the delivery of services such as ours we became conscious of the fact that those cracks would only widen, and that vulnerable people would become more at risk.

Secondly, it gave us a means of maintaining a supportive pastoral presence for the guests that were known to us. As many of those who come to Olive Way were vulnerable we wanted to maintain a means of contacting and supporting them through a potentially long and difficult time. This meant that we were able to keep a kind of 'virtual' drop in centre happening, to keep up with people, see what was happening, but also to understand how the shut downs and restriction were impacting on them.

#### Goals:

Our goals were to collect and distribute mobile phones for the homeless and vulnerable folk that were known to us through our interactions with them in Olive Way. We began by putting our feelers out to the church community and beyond to gather old disused (but working) mobile phones that people may have had at home. We collected about a dozen phones this way. Through the grant money we purchased other basic handsets and credit vouchers for those who had phones but no means of calling out. Where possible, if our guests were able to cover their own costs we encouraged this. Through [Better Life Mobile](#) we were able to connect people to a low cost network that understood the problems associated with homelessness. For those experiencing financial hardship due to the pressures associated with COVID 19 we were able to cover the costs of connecting that would cover the period that the virus would cause difficulties.

#### Stories:

A few instances stand out to me. One was a single mother of four children living in Brunswick. A significant portion of her Centrelink income goes on her rent leaving a small amount to cover groceries, medicine, utilities and other needs. She had spoken to her landlord about the government moratorium on evictions, but the landlord said that he would not be honouring it and there would be no change to her rental

situation. She had a very old phone and was paying premium prepaid prices to connect. Consequently she rarely had any credit on her phone and would instead use other people's phones to make appointments or contact whomever she needed. She said she was constantly embarrassed to have to ask and to make private calls when there were people listening to her conversations. We were able to offer her a year's worth of unlimited text and phone time, with a small amount of data (we keep our wifi on and available at the church door as 'spill-over' wifi, which she also uses). She was also able to take a new(er) phone to replace her old one.

A second story was an elderly woman who would come to Olive Way on occasion. Since the shut downs and the restrictions she was feeling increasingly isolated. She would normally keep herself busy during the week by attending places such as the Neighbourhood House, the Multicultural Women's Sewing Group at Brunswick Baptist, Olive Way, and Brunswick Salvos. Due to the restrictions none of these options were available to her. I would meet her at the lunch distribution at Salvos and she would tell me what was happening for her. She told me she really missed the sewing group in particular, and that it was her lifeline. She had an ancient phone that would constantly drain of charge, meaning it would not last more than a few minutes without being plugged in. We were eventually able to provision her with a newer phone that kept it's charge and was also able to have Zoom installed on it. The next week I saw her again and her face was completely different. She was smiling and very excited to have been able to connect to the sewing group over Zoom.

A final anecdote is of an elderly homeless man who frequented Olive Way regularly. He had no income, no Centrelink, and a series of chronic health conditions. He was ineligible for any phone service as he had no ID or any way of verifying his identity to the phone companies. Eventually he was provisioned with a basic phone through another Uniting Church Pastor (signed up in her name), but he was concerned about contracting the virus due to his many health complications. He asked us if we had a phone that could take the COVIDsafe app. We were eventually able to provision him with one that could have the app installed onto and downloaded it onto the phone. He was relieved, and whilst the effectiveness of the app is debatable, it meant that he felt safer to go about his daily business with some kind of protection.

Going forward:

We anticipate that demand for this service will increase as our doors open again. As other homeless folk have dropped off for various reasons, having a point of contact in Olive Way will mean that others may also be coming for assistance. This will need to be carefully managed as it impact on the delivery of Olive Way, but it looks like we will have plenty of time to figure this out.

Regards,

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