ANGLICARE AUSTRALIA
in every Community

WHEN THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TO EAT

A national study of food insecurity among Emergency Relief clients

State of the Family report Volume 1

Essays

October 2012

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 16 OCTOBER

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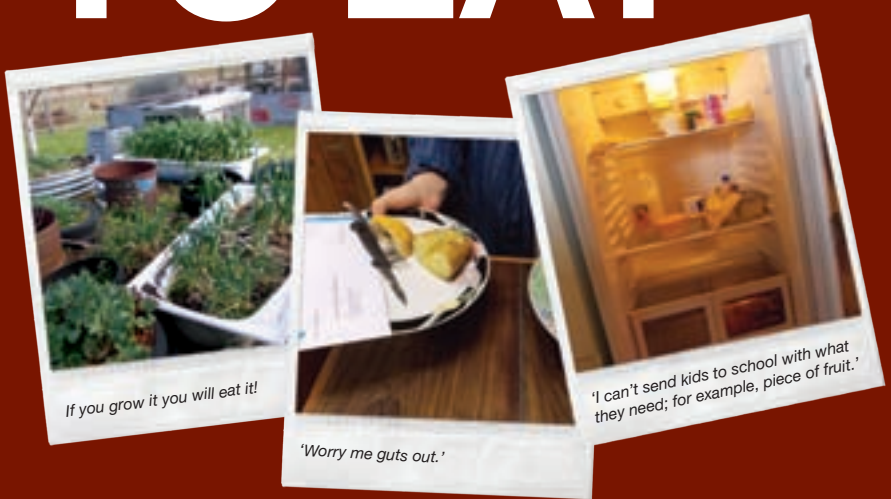

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When there's not enough to eat is Anglicare Australia's 12th *State of the Family* report, and its first two volume edition, first published October 2012.

Previous reports are available along with volume 2 of this publication—the research report—on the Anglicare Australia website www.anglicare.asn.au

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Anglicare Australia is a national network of locally grown, governed and managed, faith-based social service agencies. We are in it for the long term: committed to advocacy based on experience and to working in partnership with local communities and individuals, parishes and other agencies.

The 45 Anglicare Australia member agencies have a combined annual expenditure of over a billion dollars. They provide assistance to families, young people, the aged, the unemployed, and to vulnerable and homeless Australians. They also work with Indigenous Australians to overcome disadvantage.

Anglicare Australia: local presence; national togetherness

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FOREWORD

'I was hungry and you gave me no food' comes from Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:42, but is echoed by too many Australians today.

Food is not just about material wellbeing. It is also about how we connect as families, as individuals, and with our wider communities.

It is fundamental to the way that we care for each other. It is a part of our culture and identity.

When you can't be sure of enough good food you find yourself on a different plane to others. From the evident impact on health, wellbeing and schooling, to the disconnection that comes from not being able to join in, the consequences of such food insecurity are profound.

One of the most basic services the Anglicare network and parishes provide is emergency relief. Meals, food parcels, clothes and phone cards. This is about helping others in a very immediate sense. Our work tells us that people find themselves in these circumstances for all sorts of reasons.

This year—as a national network—we've taken a closer look at that experience, its impact and its causes. We undertook a national study into the extent and experience of food insecurity for clients accessing our emergency relief services.

That work is this two volume State of the Family Report—'When there's not enough to eat.'

The key findings of this research are discussed in Sue King's lead essay. Other essays in volume 1 take up the findings and reflect on culture, geography and our wider understanding as a society.

The second volume is the full research report. It puts numbers, voices and analysis to the social exclusion that comes when people live without good regular food. And it looks at the way people struggle to overcome it.

There are policy implications. Crippling poverty is not acceptable in such a well-resourced society as ours, and for too many people right across Australia, housing and income support are inadequate. The report also finds that action at a local level—on housing, food programs, community development and local economic planning—is an equally important part of the solution.

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The heart of the issue is how we live together. If people are excluded by virtue of not having enough to eat, we are failing them in the most fundamental way.

There are things we can do and this report shows where to begin. Indeed Jesus teaches that we need to take action. We hope for His welcome and blessing; that when we do act, we will hear 'for I was hungry and you gave me food' (Matthew 25:35).

Chris Jones

Chair
Anglicare Australia Council

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PREFACE

When there's not enough to eat, this year's State of the Family report, is Anglicare Australia's first national research project. It is a study of food insecurity among Emergency Relief clients and the brainchild of Sue King, Director of Advocacy and Partnerships at ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney.

Sue and her team designed the survey, which was delivered in March 2012 by 14 different Anglicare member organisations at 63 sites in all states and territories in March this year. They also developed training modules for interviewers, compiled and analysed the results and prepared the research report—published as the second volume of State of the Family 2012. We are all deeply indebted to them for their valuable work.

Sue King, as lead researcher, is also the author of the key essay in the first volume. It presents and analyses the findings of the research, and puts them into a broader social context. The other essays take it further. Hollie Pezet and Jeremy Halcrow each look at what we can learn from particular regional circumstances. Sez Wilks goes more deeply into the meaning of food and family while Leah Galvin puts food insecurity into a wider community and economic context. Finally Joanna Harper and Tessa Phipps reflect on the lessons for us as service deliverers. All the writers have given generously of their time and ideas.

The power of this project relied on many Anglicare staff and volunteers delivering the survey in all its complexity, above and beyond their other work. It also depended most particularly on the preparedness of people right across Australia to share in some detail their personal experiences of living with food insecurity. We've presented their responses in these pages as they came to us: without editing, except to add an occasional clarification in square brackets where it seemed necessary. In order to preserve their confidentiality, the names of survey respondents and interviewers have been changed. Their voices however are strong and authentic.

The editing team, particularly John Bellamy in Sydney, and Clare McHugh and Penny O'Hara for volume 1 have worked with good faith and unexpected hours to deliver these books, as have designer Lora Miloloza, Janine Jones in Sydney and the Anglicare Australia team. Thanks also to Community Sector Banking for their important ongoing support for this publication.

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The three photographers featured in *When there's not enough to eat* (volume 1), who were contacted through emergency relief services, picked up the camera in answer to my questions: what does food, and being without it, mean to you?

Roland Manderson

Deputy Director
Anglicare Australia

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'You don't want people dropping by when you don't have biscuits to put out. You don't invite them.'

'I can't send kids to school with what they need; for example, piece of fruit.'

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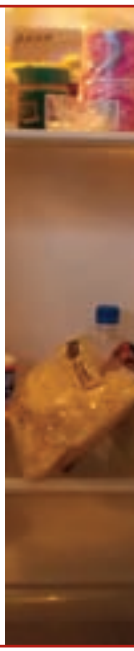
1

When the cupboard is bare: food, poverty and social exclusion



A number of recent studies have looked at food and food supply in Australia, including Anglicare Australia's 2012 national survey of food insecurity among its most marginal clients. In this essay the leader of that project, *SUE KING*, with colleagues *ALISON MOFFITT* and *SALLY CARTER*, goes beyond overviews and statistics to explain the findings. While considering food insecurity within a framework of social exclusion, this essay also gives a glimpse of empty cupboards and the many ways that not having access to regular healthy food shapes and limits the lives of those who experience it.

> *It is altogether curious, your first contact with poverty ... You thought it would be quite simple; it is extraordinarily complicated* (Orwell, 1933, p. 15).

So observes George Orwell of his early days in Paris in the 1920s and his first experience of poverty. Over the last 50 years researchers and community workers have come to the same conclusion—poverty is

indeed 'extraordinarily complicated'. Yet this isn't Paris or a Europe gutted by World War One and heading for Depression and another world war. This is Australia today, where employment, health and virtually any other measure of prosperity are among the best in the world for the average person. One of the most baffling, contradictory and complicated aspects of poverty is how the lack of food is not simply about going hungry. The lack of access to healthy, safe food, experienced by up to a million Australians, grinds away at the fabric of their life. It affects adult and child health, parent relationships with children and, for children, not only their physical and cognitive development but also their capacity to do the simplest childhood activities: invite a friend over, go to a social event where it's 'bring a plate', or celebrate a birthday.

This essay shares some of the findings from Anglicare Australia's national food insecurity study conducted between February and March 2012 (King et al., 2012) and examines them within the framework of social exclusion theory. The full report is volume 2 of this *State of the Family report,* available at www.anglicare.asn.au. Our research went behind the numbers to examine not just who and how often, but what food insecurity meant to people experiencing it and how they responded. The shame, parents' coping strategies and the impact of food insecurity are just some of the striking features this essay examines.

In social policy research, knowledge has many sources. Sometimes the slow accretion of practical wisdom at the coalface does not find a voice in research or in the development of theory. However this study on food insecurity is an exception—born of workers' perceptions of the dynamic of interacting and interrelated factors of poverty that often impede resilience, capacity and opportunity. These observations had been made directly to the research team in Sydney over a number of years via workshops, focus groups and interactions with the professional practice teams, to the point where they were accepted as part of the general knowledge base of emergency relief.

Emergency relief services support families and individuals who are experiencing acute or chronic hardship and marginalisation. Depending upon the service, people receive different kinds of assistance including help with paying for food and electricity bills, no interest loans, financial counselling, case management for individual advocacy to government departments and support with affordable housing. In particular it was the experience that Anglicare Sydney emergency relief workers had of seeing the same families return for help but without expectation of change or improvement in their circumstances that made us want to look more closely at what was happening for these families.

What does social exclusion have to do with food and poverty?

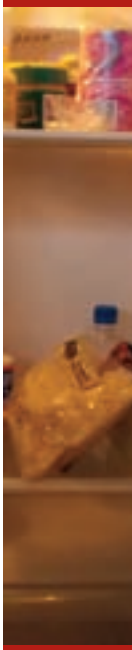
The dynamic of poverty observed by Anglicare emergency relief workers over many years is perhaps best understood in terms of social exclusion theory. The theory gained ground because of dissatisfaction with simple income poverty studies, where lines are drawn in relation to median or mean income levels; you are defined as poor if you are under the line, and not poor if you are over the line. The new approach, as Saunders and others have noted, views exclusion as not just about material deprivation but as also about participation:

> *One of the distinctions between material deprivation and social exclusion is that, whereas the former focuses on what people* can or cannot afford, *the exclusion approach focuses on what people* do or do not do (Skattebol, Saunders et al., 2012, p. 7).

The social exclusion framework encompasses factors that we already know are associated with poverty: homelessness, income and food poverty, poor educational opportunities, disability, and physical and mental health. For a while, the social exclusion framework had some ascendancy in the Australian national social policy setting, but now appears to be on the wane. But in our view, it remains a helpful framework to capture the dynamic between marginalisation, low social capital and non-participation, compared with traditional and static measures of poverty.

Social exclusion refers to the unavailability of, or inability to secure, resources, rights, goods and services, and/or the inability to participate in economic and social relationships and activities available to the majority of people in society. It can have devastating impacts for individuals as well as for the wider equity and cohesion of society. Researchers and policy framers use social exclusion theory to consider how current living standards affect future life chances—particularly important in the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

Informed by the practice wisdom of workers providing emergency relief over many years, we are in no doubt that food insecurity is best understood within the broader social exclusion framework. Our research sought to understand the nature of the experience, not just the numbers. Many ordinary Australians will be shocked at the extent of food insecurity and the way it intrudes into people's daily lives and futures. Based on our research, this essay will argue that food insecurity is both a devastating aspect of poverty and integrally connected with social exclusion.



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What is food insecurity?

The term *food security* refers to access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. At a minimum, food security includes:

- the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and
- an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, for example, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies (Life Sciences Research Office, 1990, p. 6).

Conversely, *food insecurity* refers to the 'limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways' (Life Sciences Research Office, 1990, p. 6).

This definition was adopted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (Nord et al., 2002) which periodically conducts one of the most comprehensive studies on food security, and by a number of other studies and agencies (American Dietetic Association; the New Zealand Ministry of Health; the New South Wales Centre for Public Health Nutrition; and Statistics Canada). The definition of food insecurity, which we adopted for Anglicare Australia's research study, refers to both the availability of food and one's ability to access that food.

Like social exclusion, food insecurity has multiple indicators, is dynamic, can change over time and seriously impacts on wellbeing, social capital and the social inclusion of people who are affected by it. Food insecurity is an important part of the wider social exclusion experience.

Is food insecurity a problem in Australia?

In developed countries the prevalence of food insecurity ranges from between 4 and 14 per cent (Ramsey et al., 2011). Food security is measured annually in the United States using the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) on a representative population sample. In 2010 14.5 per cent of households were food insecure, with either low or very low food security (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2011).

In Australia, national studies of the prevalence of food insecurity have been largely confined to the use of a single question in the National Health Survey (NHS): 'In the past 12 months were there any times when you ran out of food and couldn't afford to buy any more?'

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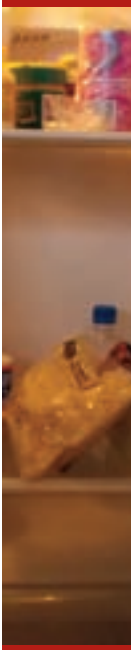
This question indicates food insufficiency and not necessarily food insecurity but provides some indicator of food issues for a small segment of the population. Further to this, Temple (2008) used the dataset of the 2004–2005 Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey to determine different levels of food insufficiency. Temple's different stages of what he defined as 'food insecurity' were based on two questions in the National Health Survey, the first addressing food depletion ('In the past 12 months were there any times when you ran out of food and couldn't afford to buy any more?') and the second addressing adequate food intake ('When this happened did you go without food?').

Temple established that 5 per cent or about a million Australians were 'food insecure' in 2004–2005, and that 40 per cent of this group was 'severely food insecure', that is they ran out of food due to a lack of financial resources *and* therefore went without food. His study also explores the different characteristics of people who are 'food secure', 'moderately food insecure' and 'severely food insecure'.



Other recent studies addressing the prevalence of food insecurity have been conducted in Australia. In 2009 the Victorian Population Health Survey found over 5 per cent of Victorians experienced food insecurity and that its incidence was much higher in particular regions, for example in Gippsland, and higher among women than men (Department of Health, 2011). A 2009 study found that 7 per cent of South Australians were experiencing food insecurity (Foley et al., 2009, p. 221) while in Perth, 71 per cent of refugees reported running out of food. This is 14 times greater than the figure recorded across all social and economic groups in the 1995 National Nutrition Survey (Gallegos, Ellies & Wright, 2008).

Although it is difficult to determine the exact extent of the prevalence of food insecurity across Australia there are signs in the community sector that the issue is escalating. A recently released Foodbank study (2012) indicated that some agencies have reported an increase in the demand for food relief and has contended that demand for such relief, in 2011, had outstripped supply.

Unlike these other studies, the Anglicare food insecurity research was not designed to be a prevalence study. The purpose was to examine the levels and depths of existing food insecurity among those already accessing emergency relief services. In other words, ours was a targeted sample of people experiencing acute or chronic hardship where it was already suspected significant food insecurity existed.

When examining food insecurity for this purpose, we decided to use the robust, United States–based HFSSM tool (Bickel et al., 2000)—a series

of questions on whether households have enough money for sufficient quantity and quality of food or meals, and whether the respondents are worried about not having enough food. Specifically, the questions target:

- anxiety or perception that the household food budget or food supply is inadequate
- perceptions that the food eaten by adults or children is inadequate in quality
- reported instances of reduced food intake, or consequences of reduced intake, for adults
- reported instances of reduced food intake or its consequences for children.

Respondents answered for their household in a one-on-one, half-hour interview, at Anglicare emergency relief centres across the country. Children's and adults' experiences were measured in separate scales, with nine questions pertaining to adults' experience and seven to that of children in the household over the previous three months. Due to the sensitive nature of children going hungry in the household, these questions were completed solely by the participant at the end of the interview and sealed in an envelope. The NHS question was also included to provide a base comparison to national prevalence studies, that is: 'In the past 12 months were there any times when you ran out of food and couldn't afford to buy any more?'. A series of other food-related and demographic questions were also posed.

Why study food insecurity?

> *You discover what it is like to be hungry … You discover that a man who has gone even a week on bread and margarine is not a man any longer, only a belly with a few accessory organs* (Orwell, 1933, p. 16).

Anglicare workers have ongoing concerns regarding what seems a never-ending cycle: families return again and again to seek material and financial support, with little hope that there is a way out of the vicious cycle of disadvantage. With a view to providing better interventions for these people, innovations and changes to emergency relief practice have included more comprehensive assessment practices, case conferencing, 'warm referrals' to other agencies, case management and capacity-

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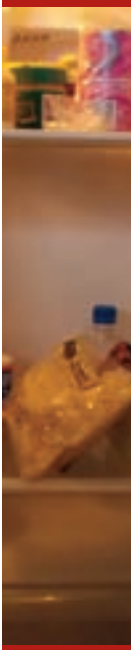
building programs at a number of Anglicare emergency relief centres. However, emergency relief workers believed more was needed and in 2010 it was decided among the Anglicare network of agencies to conduct a national research study. This study would be conducted across all states and territories to explore more fully the experience, impact and causality of food insecurity among people accessing emergency relief services with the objective of establishing policy and community-based interventions which would mitigate the problem of food insecurity for households and, particularly, for households with children.

After more than a year of preparation, the national network of Anglicare agencies participated in this joint research study. Over a six-week period from February to March 2012, a total of 590 people accessing emergency relief services were surveyed at 63 community service sites in all states and territories.

A full description of the study methodology and findings can be found in volume 2 of this report. This essay now explores the findings in relation to each of the research questions posed in the study, using both the quantitative and qualitative data that the survey richly provided. It represents the voices of those most marginalised—voices which were both honest and courageous, and just as often stoic and resigned—in detailing the depth and 'lowness' of the food-insecure and poverty experience. As George Orwell observed:

> *It is the peculiar LOWNESS of poverty that you discover first; the shifts that it puts you to, the complicated meanness, the crust wiping* (Orwell, 1933, p. 16).



How severe is food insecurity for households accessing emergency relief services?

Of the 590 responses to the survey, an overwhelming majority of adult respondents—96 per cent— experienced some form of food insecurity. Three out of four of all respondents were severely food insecure.

The survey tool also made it possible to inquire not only about the presence of food insecurity in a three-month period, but also about how often food insecurity occurs. Between one-third and a half of respondents experienced food insecurity almost every week or even more frequently during the previous three months. The most intense levels of food insecurity were experienced by nearly a third of the sample; they were considered severely food insecure almost every week.

This is perhaps not an unexpected finding given the research was targeting households that were assumed to be experiencing food insecurity. However, the findings did illustrate in greater detail what it means to be food insecure on a day-to-day basis. Many of the 590 participants expressed anxiety about running out of food and three out of four adults *had* run out of food in the last three months and could not afford to buy more. The responses to this dire predicament were dramatic. We found that over the last three-month period, nearly three-quarters of adults had cut the size of their meals and nearly two-thirds had skipped meals. More than half the adults had experienced hunger and more than one in three adults did not eat for a whole day.

These responses were not a 'one off' or occasional experience; one-third of people participating in the survey indicated they experience severe food insecurity every week or almost every week. For many people who access food relief services, the experience of food insecurity is both severe and chronic.

What is it like for children?

While children were not directly interviewed, their experience was explored through the adult interview questions. For workers in the field, the experience of children living in households where safe, healthy food is not reliably available remains a particular concern and focus. Anecdotal evidence already led workers to believe that children living in such households were vulnerable but the findings from our survey were compelling. Almost 80 per cent of children living in food-insecure households experienced some form of food insecurity themselves—even though adults went to significant lengths to protect their children from the worst effects of hunger and food deprivation. More than one in three children were severely food insecure and for some—8 per cent—this was a once a week occurrence. Adults spoke of relying on low-cost food to feed their children and the majority were concerned that children did not get sufficient variety of foods. In some households the size of children's meals were being cut; a quarter of children in the survey were forced to skip meals or, in the worst cases, did not eat for a whole day. For 7 per cent of households this was a regular occurrence—weekly or some weeks.

The literature is clear concerning the adverse impact on children when growing up in food-insecure households and going hungry. Numerous studies point to such consequences, which include both psychological and behavioural impacts expressed through higher levels of aggression,

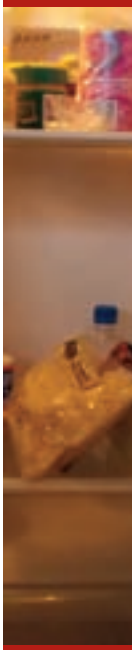
hyperactivity and anxiety as well as passivity (Center on Hunger and Poverty, 2002). Such children often have difficulties getting along with their peers and show an increased need to access mental health services. However the consequences of food insecurity for such children are not limited to these areas alone. They have a lifelong impact on learning and education as witnessed by impaired cognitive functioning and diminished capacity to learn, lower school test scores and poorer overall academic achievement, repeating grades in school, truancy, tardiness and school suspension.

Adults in the Anglicare study were asked to consider the impacts on their children. From the 58 comments made, children were seen as variously being 'grumpy', 'upset', 'embarrassed' and exhibiting behavioural problems. Some comments included:

> *… kids embarrassed, different to other kids.*

> *… the kids would drive me up the wall 'cos they're starving!*

> *… kids get cranky and irritable.*



It was distressing to find that parents were concerned that their children could not invite friends over to the house because there was no food. Other parents had to limit their children's recreational activities. It appears that food insecurity limits the opportunities for children to make friends and be involved in recreational activities.

> *Sometimes my daughter will come home from school and want to have her friends over but I can't feed them snacks.*

> *Anything* [I do] *with the kids has to be free and within walking distance of the home.*

Others commented that school lunches were often minimal, and that lack of food affected school attendance and performance in the classroom. In some cases schools appeared not to understand the situation, creating embarrassment for the parents and leading some to keep their children home from school as a consequence.

> *Difficult to study at school. Stop you from going to school—can't afford to get to school.*

I can't send kids to school with what they need; for example, piece of fruit for morning tea.

It affects everything. The school wants to know why the kids are hungry. You try and avoid as you can't afford to feed them. It's embarrassing. My kids have no shoes. He's come home with black eyes 'cos he's the poor kid.

… had to keep children from school because no food snacks.

… if there is no food to put in the lunchbox [our] *children are likelier to skip the school every now and then.*

Several parents commented that it affected their children's view of the world—how they see others and themselves.

I don't know … it makes them look differently at people who have more.

… embarrassing … kids see others have more and judge home.

… it affects them when they see other kids that have so much. It makes them feel worthless. Because we have medical issues are the children supposed to suffer as well?

One parent expressed frustration that her children had 'raided the pantry' when food supplies were low. One grandparent said her grandchildren wouldn't come to visit her because she didn't have food to give them 'like their other grandparents'.

I get angry with the kids when they just go and help themselves when we are running low on milk, bread and school foods.

Some grandchildren won't come to her house because they can't accept that these grandparents won't give them what they want whereas the other grandparents will.

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Adult protective behaviour

Our findings show that in most food-insecure households, adults will sacrifice their food intake so that their children can have more food. This coping or protective mechanism used by adults towards children was evident in both the quantitative and qualitative data. Of the 272 adults who completed the child questions for their household, only four respondents revealed that children in their household were experiencing more severe food insecurity than adults. These households are highlighted dark grey in Table 1. By contrast, Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents living with children were in households where children fell into a less severe food-insecurity category than the adults; these categories are highlighted light grey in the table, which together account for 55 per cent of respondents. The remaining 43 per cent of respondents were in households where children and adults fell into the same food-insecurity severity category—highlighted mid-grey in the table.

TABLE 1 | Severity of Adult and Child Food Insecurity, Households with Children

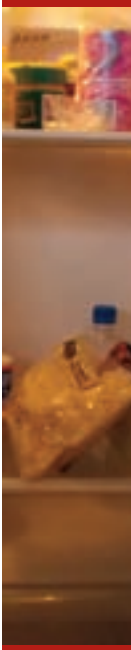
	Adults: Food Insecurity Severity			
Children: Food Insecurity Severity	**Food Secure**	**Food Insecure**	**Severely Food Insecure**	**Total**
Food Secure	1.5%	6.6%	13.6%	
Food Insecure	0.0%	9.6%	34.9%	
Severely Food Insecure	0.0%	1.5%	32.4%	
Total				**100%**

Key

- Households where child food insecurity is less severe than adult food insecurity
- Households where child food insecurity and adult food insecurity are equally severe
- Households where child food insecurity is more severe than adult food insecurity

This protective mechanism was also evident in responses to open-ended questions. Some respondents admitted that even if they had to go without food, they did their best to make sure that their children could eat:

> *I've gone without so that* [my son] *can have proper meals.*



If your kids have got food, you're OK.

Not to be able to feed your kids is unforgivable.

I've tried to cut down on food portions to let children have enough and not go to bed hungry. I try to give them meat with five veg and go without myself.

I buy a little bit of food every day so I know the baby has something to eat that day.

It doesn't really affect me. I don't worry if I don't eat—I just worry if the kids don't eat.

The conclusion to be reached from this section of the study was that in the most marginalised and socially excluded households in Australia there are children going hungry—some on a fairly regular basis. The qualitative data also indicates that for children this can be embarrassing, generating anger and frustration. Parents see this as impacting children's learning and leading to lower school attendance and performance. Adults appear to strive to protect their children from food insecurity but sometimes there is just not enough food and children are forced to go hungry.

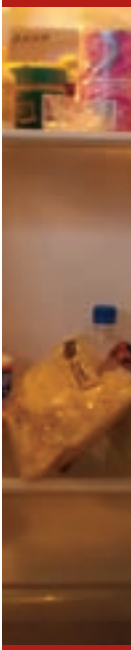
What characterises a food-insecure household?

If you asked an emergency relief worker 'who are the people most likely to access your services seeking food support?' they would tell you: single mothers, single people, those on Newstart and disability pensions and Indigenous Australians. The theorists also indicate particular population groups who are vulnerable and at increasing risk of food insecurity: low income and/or in receipt of government benefits (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2010); renting as opposed to home ownership (Bartfield et al., 2006); being homeless and/or unemployed (Jacobs et al., 2012); single mothers (Ramsey et al., 2011); and Indigenous people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009). Both worker observations and findings from the literature are supported in the current Anglicare study.

Of all socio-demographic characteristics of food-insecure people, **lack of income predominates**. This is especially true for people relying on government benefits. In the Anglicare Australia study about one in four

food-insecure households were endeavouring to survive on incomes of less than $600 per fortnight and two out of three households were on incomes of less than $1 000 per fortnight. When source of income is determined, 41 per cent of all households had someone in receipt of a Disability Support Pension, while about a third had someone in receipt of a Single Parenting Payment with the same proportion receiving the Newstart Allowance. More than three-quarters of households did not have anyone in paid work—full time, part time or casually.

In this study **three out of four food-insecure households were renters** while of the rest, one in ten were home owners and 12 per cent were in insecure accommodation or living on the streets. Among renters, just under half were living in government housing and a slightly smaller proportion was renting in the private market. The remaining 10 per cent were paying rent to community or cooperative housing, to a caravan park owner or manager or to others. This compares very differently with the national profile where the 2011 Census reveals that renters only make up just over a quarter of the population whereas home buyers and people who own their own homes constitute two-thirds of all households (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The proportion of people nationally who reside in public housing is just 4 per cent.



Low-income households are also vulnerable to **rental stress**—leaving them with little discretionary income for food and payment of utility bills. More than two-thirds of households with food-insecure adults spent over 30 per cent of their income on rent. Just over two in every five households were in the severe rental stress category, spending over 45 per cent of their income on rent. Rental stress rates were particularly high among privately renting households, with 94 per cent of these spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, the majority being categorised as in severe rental stress.

Single parent households are also at risk of food insecurity. In Anglicare's study single parents with children were the largest household type, constituting almost one in three households compared with about 7 per cent in the general population (Wilkins & Warren, 2012).

Being Indigenous was also a risk factor. Around 17 per cent of adults in this study identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander yet Indigenous people generally make up about 2 per cent of the population. The **link between being Indigenous and being food insecure** is not a surprising finding. In a national study in 2004–2005 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009), five times more Indigenous Australians

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reported they had run out of food in the last 12 months compared with the general population (24 per cent of Indigenous compared with 5 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians), including four times as many who went without food when they couldn't afford more. This food insufficiency (as measured by the NHS question) was most prevalent in the Northern Territory (where 45 per cent reported running out of food), followed by South Australia (29 per cent) and Western Australia (26 per cent). Figures for the remaining states and territories hovered around 20 per cent. Remote areas had a higher prevalence than non-remote areas (36 per cent compared to 20 per cent). Aboriginality as a risk factor for food insecurity is echoed in other studies (Foley et al., 2009).

What limits people's access to food?

The literature demonstrates a strong causal link between food insecurity and low income (Foley et al., 2009). In fact, of all the socio-demographic characteristics of food-insecure people, lack of income predominates. This is especially true for people relying on government benefits. The 1995 Australian Bureau of Statistics National Nutrition Survey (NNS) found people on government pensions or benefits were more likely to experience food insecurity than those receiving other forms of income (Rutishauser et al., 2001). Later work (Nolan et al., 2006) found a strong correlation between food insecurity and low income. Households with no capacity to save money (for example households on government benefits) were five times more likely to be food insecure than households that could save. Furthermore, households reporting that the price of food was a problem were more likely to be food insecure.

Other cost of living factors can drain the food budget. Food is often the only discretionary item in the budget of low-income households and is therefore prone to erosion by more pressing expenses. This situation can occur despite careful planning.

Our study also found a lack of income to be a predominant barrier to accessing food. In fact 91 per cent of all food-insecure adults indicated that they did not have enough money to buy the food they needed and, for just over half, this was a problem because there was no one in the household with whom they could share costs.

In our study, respondents were asked to consider the reason for their household food insecurity and more than 200 comments were recorded. Almost half of these said the issue of major concern was the price of food and the lack of income. Household food insecurity was compromised

by costs for rent, electricity and bills in general and the lack of money to make ends meet.

> *Because rent is too high, every bit of money I get gets spent on bills and rent. This is a major issue.*

> *Food or toilet paper—which is more important? There is no money to pay for food.*

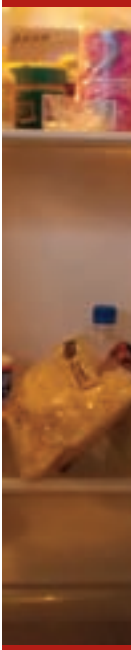
The impact of unexpected expenses

What workers have regularly observed in the field is the precarious existence of many low-income households. They live so close to the margins that any unexpected household expense or event can pitch them into crisis. This observation was confirmed for nine out of ten respondents in the three months prior to participating in the survey. The most significant issue concerned bills, which was raised by 119 respondents in open-ended comments in the survey. Sometimes there are an unexpectedly high number of bills or bills all coming in close together. More than one-third of these respondents cited electricity and/or gas bills as a significant issue but others included bills for phone, water, rent, storage and legal fees. Several mentioned that having someone stay had pushed up their bills to a point where they had to seek assistance.

> *… bills keep on piling up, I can't put off bills all the time, I have to get food vouchers eventually.*

However other issues also led to crisis and the need to seek assistance. For 112 respondents health issues had been a significant factor. These ranged from unexpected hospitalisation of either themselves or a family member (often a child), an accident requiring medical treatment which was unaffordable, an unforeseen medical bill, the lack of bulk-billing for a particular specialist, inability to pay for medications and the need to either travel interstate for hospital treatment or to catch taxis or public transport to a medical appointment.

> *I spend a lot of money on medication and have a lot of health problems. I keep going to see the doctor and they keep giving me things I have to buy and take.*



> *My son has to get to the specialist in Orange* [one hour away] *and that is expensive. I usually ask someone to give me a lift and pay them petrol.*

For 98 respondents, the household car also ranked highly in unexpected expenses—these included maintenance, registration, expenses relating to accidents, and rising petrol costs. School-related expenses for children also caused problems for some families—including the cost of covering uniforms and shoes, school books, excursions, school photos and camps. Several respondents mentioned that they were providing support for their grandchildren or that their grandchildren had recently moved in with them, a cause of additional expense. For others there were sporting fees so their children could participate in activities such as netball, football and dance.

> *… school expenses I had to buy books and uniforms. My son's shoes broke. He wouldn't go to school he was embarrassed.*

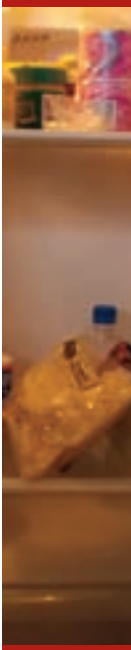
For 44 respondents the unexpected expense was generated by a death in the family and funeral. Expenses related to covering the costs of the funeral, family coming to stay, buying new clothes for the funeral and travel costs incurred, particularly when funerals take place some distance from the home and sometimes interstate. Supporting extended family members—often in crisis—was also rated as causing additional and sometimes unexpected expenses. This ranged from children returning home, to periodic visits, or care required for an ageing parent.

> *… when my son comes to visit … I can't afford him to stay but we want to be together. If he stays a week it takes me a couple of months to catch up. I stock up for him, but that's OK, so I can go without.*

Lack of access to transport and cooking facilities

Physical access to food, and transport issues, were also raised as significant barriers for some in accessing food. One in five used public transport to get to the shops while 40 per cent walked at least part of the way. The former was often seen as expensive or unreliable by respondents. For others, about a third, health and mobility problems created difficulties in getting to the shops.

The literature is divided regarding the impact distance to shops and transport availability will have on a household's food security. An important mitigating factor here is social capital: the potential to be able to call on family, neighbours or others for transport, or even to borrow or share food in the event of food shortage. Undoubtedly, however, location and reduced access to services and shops can play a part in exacerbating food insecurity. The location of supermarkets supplying a lower-cost, diverse range of foods compared with small convenience stores can be problematic for people living in under-resourced areas. Supermarkets are not required to operate in a particular area, and as such there can be a concentration of supermarkets in middle- to high-income areas, and fewer supermarkets spaced further apart in low-income areas. This is a particular problem for car-less, low-income households in areas with poor local public transport. For instance, while a food supply outlet may be within reasonable driving distance, there is only so much that a single mother with small children and without a car can carry home on the bus. This complication can also prevent people without cars from buying food in bulk, as the volume can make the shopping bag too heavy to carry a distance. Furthermore although buying food in bulk can be cheaper per unit, the overall price can be significant and other things may have to be foregone.



Other issues of physical access included appropriate cooking and food preparation facilities. Some low-cost accommodation, especially hostels and boarding houses, may not provide all the facilities necessary for cooking or may have limited secure storage for food. Limited fridge and freezer space can also restrict the amount of cheaper bulk items that can be bought. Furthermore, when a fridge breaks down, food is not only lost but—for low-income earners—there may not be immediate cash to replace this essential item. Eating low-cost, healthy meals is the most difficult for homeless people without any space in which to cook or store food. Housing overcrowding and inadequate cooking facilities have also been cited as factors contributing to food insecurity in some Indigenous communities (Browne, Laurence & Thorpe, 2009).

Most of these aspects were evident in our study: one in ten food-insecure clients did not have a fridge, 13 per cent did not have a working stove, oven or microwave and some did not have power connected. For nearly one in five respondents, health and mobility problems reduced their capacity to cook for themselves.

Access is not just about sourcing an adequate supply of food for the household but also sourcing food that is nutritious and of reasonable quality. In the Anglicare Australia study three-quarters of respondents

indicated that in the last 12 months at times they had not been able to eat the kinds of food they wanted. For more than half of the respondents this occurred at least once a week, and for a further 22 per cent this occurred at least once a fortnight.

Responses show people found it difficult to access food of the right quality (34 per cent of respondents) and 44 per cent could not access a variety of foods such as meat, vegetables, fruit, dairy products and bread. Almost three-quarters of respondents agreed that they should eat more fresh foods but found these too expensive. A little over a fifth acknowledged they needed to know more about making healthier meals.

Among the responses we found concern expressed about the price of meat and fresh fruit and vegetables and the need to substitute with cheap, filling food, often not nutritious, and high in carbohydrates.

> *I'll try to buy some fresh fruit and vegetables but they are too expensive and I run out of money fast.*

> *… just can't afford it—eat a lot of frozen vegies. Always buy home brand, budget mince, cheap pastas.*

Our study showed that economic access centred on the inadequacy of income and, alongside this, the perceived costs of food. Physical access was also limited, due to transport, storage and cooking facilities, as well as location, while another difficulty was obtaining food, particularly fresh food, that was appropriate and of sufficient quality.

How do food-insecure households cope?

Adults coped in different ways in trying to access sufficient food for their household. When offered the opportunity to provide personal reflections on how they cope with food insecurity, respondents in this study reported using multiple strategies in order to manage their food issues. For many it meant going hungry or even 'recycling' scraps of food.

> *You just ration everything.*

> *If the kids have scraps, I'll pop that onto a slice of bread and that'll be my dinner.*

Desperation was also reflected in a number of comments:

> *I hide food in a bag so family don't eat it but they still find it.*

> *Family asks me for a feed … I tell them lies that I haven't got any food … I need that food for me.*

Stealing food was declared by only four participants, but is an important indicator of the depths to which some food-insecure individuals are driven by their situation.

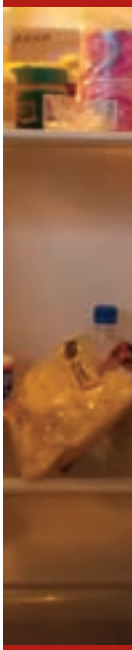
Recipes with less expensive ingredients were used, or recipes were 'bulked up' with carbohydrates such as rice and pasta to extend the available amount of food. Every bit of food not consumed immediately was stored for future occasions. Family and friends were turned to, either for provision of meals or for financial assistance.

Resilience and resourcefulness was evident in many of the open-ended responses but so too was embarrassment and frustration—and in some cases a form of resigned acceptance:

> *Feed the kids and I go without. I feed them and go without myself.*

> *I would just go without food but I will always make sure my kids eat.*

> *I tend to go without on a regular basis.*



What are the impacts of food insecurity?

We were interested in gaining respondents' impressions of the effect food insecurity has both on themselves and their households. More than one-third of respondents indicated the presence of stress and anxiety and, for some, this was overwhelming, sometimes leading to a sense of frustration. Anger was a recurring theme with people using terms such as 'angry', 'aggro', 'cranky', 'grumpy', 'pissed off', 'violent' and 'feral', along with references to fighting and arguments in the household as a result of being hungry.

… I just start growling at people.

… violent. Feral. Become unaware of other people around you.

… gets me cranky, I can really spit the dummy, I'm not used to it.

… we get angry and argue if we don't eat.

Some equated this stress with low energy and lethargy, others with family conflict, lack of capacity to think and function, and feelings of inadequacy. Several mentioned a sense of isolation and disconnection and others that the constant worry about food and how to access it was causing mental health issues.

I reckon it does mentally and physically get you down. It gets to the stage where you can't think.

… worry me guts out.

… you stress over things 'cause you don't know where the next feed's coming from.

More than one-quarter of respondents in the survey also made comments in relation to depression, sadness, anger, loss of self-worth, feelings of inadequacy and uselessness. Some referred to the food-insecure experience as degrading, demoralising, devastating and disempowering. Others referred again to a sense of isolation and disconnection which appeared to be a self-reinforcing cycle. For those who still had friends there was guilt that their friends had to help them out. For others the sight of the empty pantry or fridge was a constant reminder of their situation.

… it makes me want to burst into tears. It's very hard.

… it's quite depressing and humiliating and makes you feel like you fail at the most basic of needs it's sad … you see some people eating and you think I want that too but I can't afford it.

… it affects you very badly you think of yourself as a failure sometimes you just want to go to sleep and never wake up.

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You're just living to survive. Social life doesn't happen.

… when I am depressed people don't want to know me so they stay way and that makes me even more isolated.

… to see an empty fridge or pantry is depressing. It is a constant reminder of the situation.

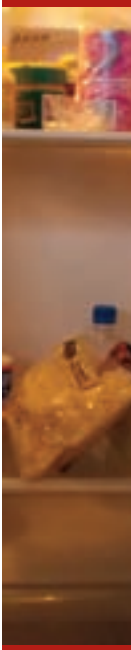
A small number of respondents specifically indicated feelings of shame and embarrassment as a result of food insecurity. For some this related to other people feeling sorry for them, shame at not being able to pay their way when they went out with friends or not being able to offer visitors a cup of coffee or biscuits. This in turn led to reduced social interactions and connections.

… gives you bad name … makes people not want to hang out with you because they have to pay for you … or they hang out with you because they feel sorry for you … [have seen all friends] *ditch me.*

… you don't want people dropping by when you don't have biscuits to put out. You don't invite them.

… it makes me feel degraded as a human being and we don't entertain anymore. We feel extremely embarrassed and try not to let our son know.

… can't go out for tea or have people over. Sucks.



More than one-third of respondents indicated that food insecurity had compromised their health. Specific health issues related to being diabetic and losing weight. A number spoke of being hungry and several described the feeling in some detail:

You can't see straight. I've become suicidal over food. You don't have energy—you start getting stomach pains and you get to a point where you don't feel like eating anymore because you become nauseous and stressed. Sometimes you can go two to three days without eating.

… you feel completely helpless. Your stomach becomes painful.

… I can get moody and tired. Sick in the stomach. Light-headed.

… Feel sick … just drinking tea and water … vomiting … get weak.

Some maintained they needed to sleep more and others that hunger generated sleeplessness and disrupted sleeping patterns.

… feel I have no energy in my body and want to sleep 'cos there's a pain.

… not much energy to do things next morning.

… we get really tired sometimes and there's not enough energy to do things, and feel a bit down.

… feel weak and sit around all day, we drink water when hungry.

Makes me feel horrible. Wish I didn't need to do it.

Some respondents also talked about the anxiety, pain and shame of not being able to feed their children, despite trying to provide for their families. Many of these respondents felt that they were 'bad parents' or felt a sense of shame connected to not being able to support their family.

Well, it's stressful because, as a parent, you want to provide for your children. When you can't provide the basics it's very depressing.

I worry and stress out that I will not have enough food to feed the kids.

As long as I am awake I worry about what the children will eat when they come home.

I feel a lot that, especially with the kids, you feel like you're not

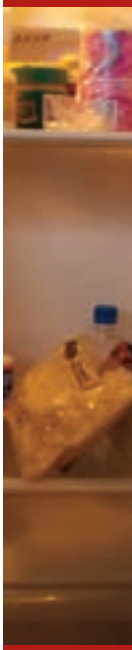
bringing them up properly. Not being a good parent, being able to feed them. Other people might think you waste your money on other stuff.

There's nothing more depressing than not being able to feed your kids. You feel worthless as a parent.

You think, 'Shit. What kind of parent gives their kids cereal [for dinner]*?'*

It makes me feel bad as a mother.

What predicts increasing food insecurity?



Up to this point we have largely confined the discussion to those factors strongly associated with people who are food insecure. However it is also important to establish, once people are classified as food insecure, what the key predictors of increasing food insecurity along the food insecurity continuum are. In other words, once you experience food insecurity what are the factors that may make your situation worse? It is possible from the data to identify those factors associated with increasing levels of food insecurity, within a sample that is largely comprised of people who have been experiencing and are continually moving through various degrees of food insecurity.

Increasing food insecurity is correlated in our study with a number of factors. In decreasing order the main correlates are:

- the perception that there is not enough money in the budget to buy food and that there is not enough money for the household to live on
- the household has run out of money in the previous three months due to an unexpected expense or event
- the perception that fresh foods are too expensive to buy
- inability to pay for transport and being unable to afford a car
- not having a refrigerator and lack of a workable stove, oven or microwave oven
- walking to the shops for more than five minutes

- a lack of variety in food and being unable to get food of the right quality
- living in insecure housing such as boarding houses, caravans, or staying with friends
- a lack of knowledge about the preparation of healthy meals
- being on the Newstart Allowance.

The perception that there is not enough money in the budget was the most strongly correlated of these variables; it is not surprising that a growing sense of income inadequacy might accompany increasing severity of food insecurity. However perception was more strongly correlated with increasing food insecurity than actual measured aspects of a household's income—represented here by having run out of money due to an unexpected expense in the last three months or being on the Newstart allowance.

The list of correlates also highlights that increasing food insecurity is not just explained in terms of having insufficient money to buy food. For people already struggling on low incomes, the experience of food insecurity is more severe where people are unable to afford transport or cooking and storage facilities. The experience can be worse with greater distance from the shops or living in insecure housing. This suggests that strategies such as providing fresh food, information about nutrition, and financial assistance to pay for cooking and storage appliances, could be useful complements to small cash payments or food handouts in mitigating against the most severe forms of food insecurity.

What can be done?

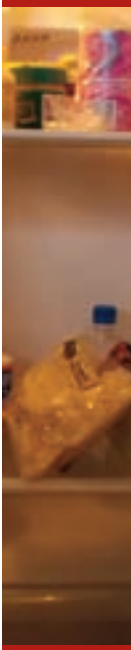
Food insecurity, regarded in this essay as an aspect of social exclusion, is a dynamic and multifaceted problem. Food-specific policies require a national approach to monitoring levels of food insecurity in the general population, one that incorporates randomised surveys using a tool such as HFSSM. The Australian government's National Food Plan (www.daff.gov.au/nationalfoodplan), must recognise the importance of the inadequacy of income and its role in food insecurity. Food policies need to be implemented for disadvantaged communities across all government jurisdictions—within a coordinated and integrated framework.

The respondents to Anglicare Australia's study of food insecurity are among the most marginal of the clients it serves. Given the crucial role emergency

relief plays in the temporary alleviation of food shortages and hunger in households and the increased demand reported by services, this essay shows there should be an expansion of funding for emergency services nationally. This is needed not simply to meet the immediate and growing food needs of households coming to emergency relief services but to provide the intensive case management needed in developing sustainable pathways for families out of multiple disadvantage. Parents' concern about the long-term effects on their children's wellbeing, such as their ability to take part in recreational and social activities, cannot be overlooked or simply addressed with vouchers. It has been the absence of sustainable pathways out of disadvantage that has prompted Anglicare to study food insecurity more closely and to consider what policies are needed to better address this issue.

Local community interventions can play a role and need to be further developed. Establishing local growers' markets, community kitchens and community gardens along with education and resilience-building programs are among the successful strategies we came across through the study and in the literature. The depth, diversity and complexity of need that accompanies food insecurity also require investment into innovative models of service delivery, which aim to enhance resilience, wellbeing and inclusion.

In the end what is required is a recognition of the extent and depth of food insecurity, the impacts it has on families and, in particular, children, and an integrated and multilayered policy approach to a problem that is entrenched for the most marginalised households in the country.



Not beggars, not choosers

More work now needs to be done. The Anglicare study on food insecurity has thrown light on a dark problem, one that many Australians may not see or comprehend: that going without food is a daily or weekly occurrence behind many closed doors, and that its impact reaches far into the future. Our study highlights the depth and severity of food insecurity for households accessing emergency relief across the country. Sadly it shows how children in such households are not only vulnerable and at risk of food insecurity, but are so exposed to it that their current wellbeing and future life chances are compromised.

Adults cope the best way they can. In this study, they have demonstrated creative coping strategies even when faced with the challenge of unexpected expenses, poor cooking facilities or living in places poorly

served by transport or fresh food outlets. As much as they are able, parents try to protect their children from the experience of food insecurity. But it is also true that in some cases children cannot be protected from the worst effects of hunger and food deprivation.

The data in the Anglicare Australia study, summarised in this essay, provides a compelling picture of hardship at its most extreme in Australian society, where adults and children are going hungry and current interventions are inadequate. It remains for all of us to understand the dimensions of the challenge and move beyond a focus on today's empty cupboard; the unremitting and endemic nature of food insecurity demands an immediate policy response at all levels. Without it, so many Australians will be left behind with the opportunities for growth and social inclusion that are essential for long-term resilience, sustainability and wellbeing. 'That,' as George Orwell said, 'is a beginning' (Orwell 1933, p. 216).

AUTHORS

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Alison Moffitt is a research officer with Anglicare Sydney's Social Policy & Research Unit. Alison has worked in social research for four years and has expertise in data analysis, data presentation and mapping.

Sally Carter was the lead author of Anglicare Sydney's 2005 food insecurity pilot study, *When there isn't enough to eat*, a forerunner to Anglicare Australia's national study. Sally is currently undertaking tertiary studies and is employed casually in Anglicare's research unit.

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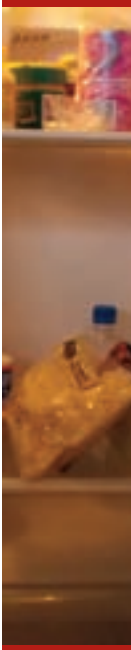

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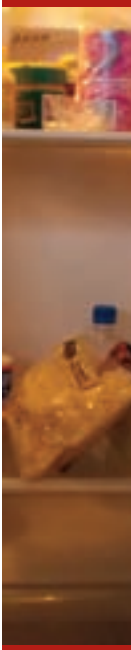

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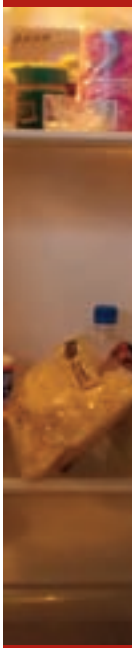

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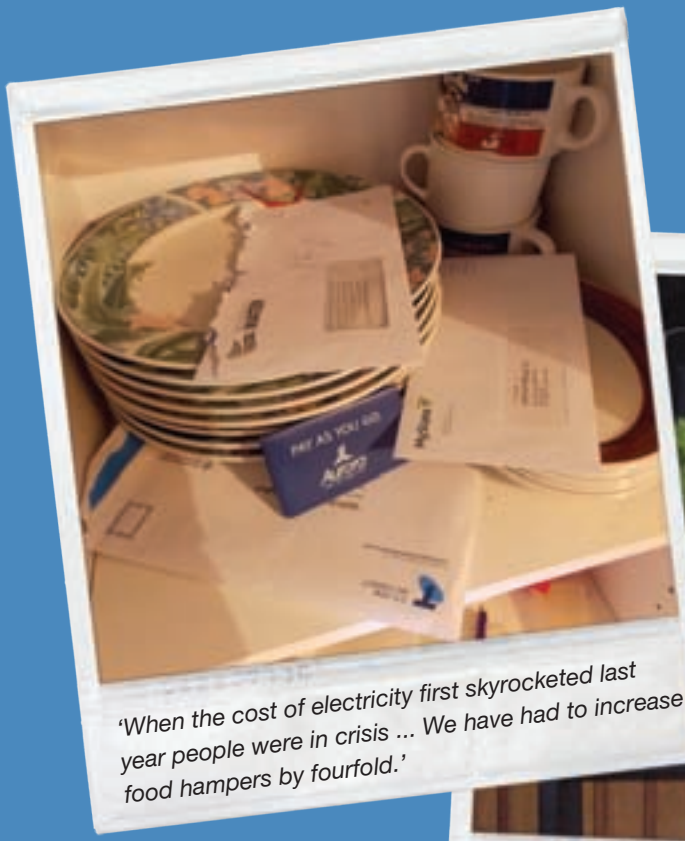

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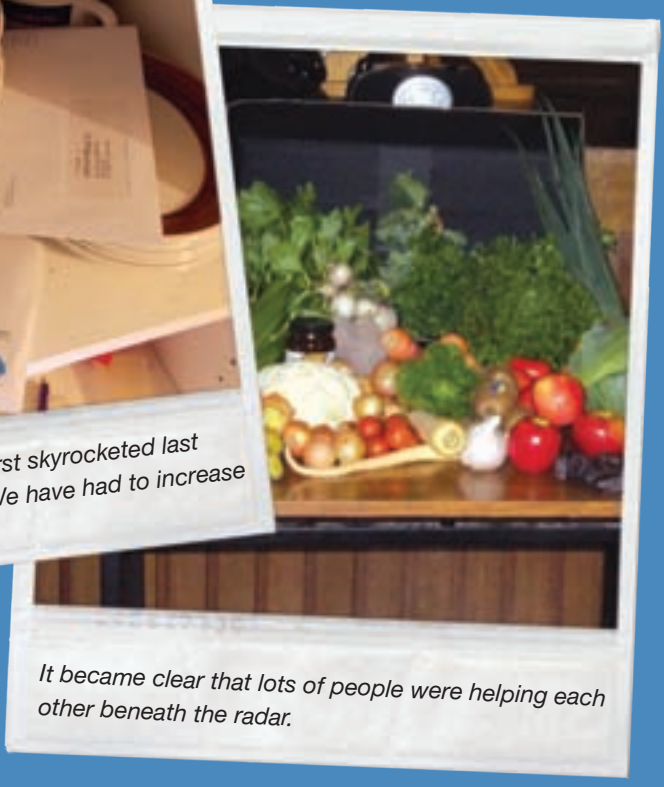

It became clear that lots of people were helping each other beneath the radar.

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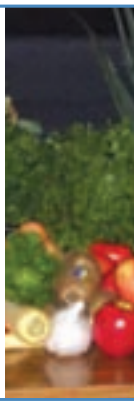
2

The great divide

It seems perverse that people who live in one of the world's great food bowls could go hungry. So what does food insecurity look like in rural New South Wales? And what are the right policy responses for the bush? *JEREMY HALCROW* heads west to uncover the answers. Additional research by *CLAIRE LLOYD-JONES*.



It's April. The Lachlan is spilling out through the feet of giant gums, pooling in paddocks that glow like molten glass in the daylight glare. In places the swollen river laps the lip of the Newell Highway as I travel up to Forbes. It is a month since floods split the town in two. Some outlying farms will be under water for weeks yet.

'The floods had a major impact on our food supplies,' says Julie Virtue, who runs Havannah House, a ministry that partners with Anglicare Western New South Wales. Havannah House not only can provide emergency accommodation for up to 50 people drawn from across the New South Wales Central West, but emergency food relief, financial counselling and a host of post-crisis support services.

'Half the town was cut off from the supermarkets. Unless you had a car and could drive to Parkes there was no way to get shopping,' Julie says.

The local area was declared a natural disaster zone with 16 families experiencing flooding through their houses. The Forbes business district was closed for two days.

Julie put an emergency call through to the charity SydneyCare who sent through hundreds of food hampers. 'The hampers were well stocked and so we targeted homes without cars. But if we hadn't got those hampers I don't know what we would have done.'

Given the dramatic inundation experienced in the Riverina city of Wagga Wagga, it is not surprising that the Lachlan's peak 250 kilometres away in Forbes barely rated a mention in the metropolitan media. Forbes was far from unique that month. Over 60 local government areas were declared disaster areas in New South Wales alone. Parts of Victoria also experienced major floods. Compared to the competition for national news exposure, Forbes' experience simply was not that bad.

And yet the floods caused a shortage of food for some local households. It is unthinkable that flooding in a metropolitan area would cause food insecurity. If it did, it would be headline news. But that sums up life in the bush.

While there are indications that food insecurity is worse in Australia's remote outback areas, previous surveys found that rates of food insecurity in rural towns and capital cities are comparable (Carter & Taylor, 2007). Anglicare's food insecurity survey data produced a similar picture. The most intense levels of child food insecurity were experienced in 8 per cent of households with children, where children were severely food insecure almost every week. The survey found that a slightly higher proportion of children in the bush are experiencing hunger, but it also found that more adults living in cities experience chronic food insecurity.

This essay does not claim that food insecurity is either worse or better in rural areas. Rather I will argue that the experience of food insecurity in the country is different from the city and therefore solutions need to be differently targeted. Furthermore, given that a 'small government, big society' approach is increasingly likely to frame Australian policy I will explore the shape programs will need to take to thrive in the new policy environment.

Beyond the great divide

The Forbes we see today sprang from the glory of the gold rush. The evidence is built into the superbly preserved facades and

historic streetscapes. Gold was discovered in what is now the town's King George V Park in 1861 and the population quickly jumped to 40 000. Today 13 000 souls live in the district. The oldest historic buildings still standing date from the 1870s.

Havannah House itself is a nineteenth-century pile. Roses creep over wrought iron as I enter the gate. A turret of bay windows points the way to the Anglicare office. Inside there is comfort and generosity: immaculately clean carpets, reading nooks, generous lounges. A corridor opens up into a large wood-floored dining room that has the familiar smells of an earlier era. Although to the right you can glimpse an industrial kitchen that could easily feed 100 in a sitting, this is a home not a typical welfare office. Upstairs is ready to house an assortment of people who for various reasons need a roof over their head for a season. It is currently home to a young family who struggle to get their brood and a pram up the narrow stair, an older couple and a number of single women. It is home too for manager Julie Virtue and her husband David, former Salvation Army officers.

Havannah House is the only service of its kind in the Central West of New South Wales. Along with emergency accommodation, it provides financial counselling, microcredit, food and financial relief and a number of social enterprises, which help people out of work to gain much-needed job readiness.

'It's a one stop shop,' says Anglicare's *No Interest Loan Scheme* coordinator, Bernadette Gregson, who works out of the building. As many towns in the region are without welfare offices, people travel for up to 300 kilometres to find help here.

For struggling households the lack of public transport and the distance that must be travelled to access services is a constant problem. One mum tells me of the ongoing costs of taking a chronically sick child 120 kilometres to Orange for health treatment.

In New South Wales it is said that services fade away once you cross the Great Dividing Range. Nearly 400 kilometres due west of Sydney, Forbes is a very interesting town to use as a case study to explore food insecurity in a rural context. We also interviewed people in Canberra as well as Eden on the far south coast of New South Wales, but Forbes sits on the fringe of a service vacuum. It is one of a north to south string of regional hubs, along with Parkes and Dubbo, that for many service providers represents the end of the line. Condobolin is 100 kilometres west, Lake Cargelligo another hour, and then there is not much until you hit the South Australian border.

The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia scores localities from 0 (major cities) to 12 (remote communities in the Northern Territory). Forbes is deemed 'accessible' with a score of 2.64. Condobolin just one hour away is classified 'moderately accessible' with a score of 5.18 (Department of Health and Aged Care, 2001).

It is well known that rural and remote areas have higher food costs, but a study in Victoria (Palermo et al., 2008) showed that a bigger determinant of price was whether the town's supermarket was independent or one of Australia's two major chains, Coles and Woolworths. While there is a Woolworths supermarket in Forbes as well two IGAs, the towns further west that Havannah House services such as Condobolin rely on independent grocers.

Julie is very concerned that people further west in Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo may be going hungry merely because of the costs of contacting services like hers. 'The food crisis will not just be here in Forbes,' she says. 'It is because of the trend here in Forbes that I am concerned that we are just not reaching those people. I believe there is a need out further west that is not being addressed by anyone … Because we cover such a wide area in assessing for emergency relief, people can fax through income statements to receive help. But that can cost $4 a sheet and that is a cost some people struggle to find. I worry that this is preventing people from approaching us for the food they need.'

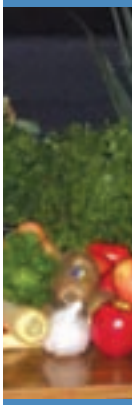
This problem, peculiar to a remoter area of Australia, deserves an out-of-the-box solution from government. This is a rather modest cost in order to process a form that might prevent a family from experiencing hunger.

For her part, Julie is working on contacts in IGAs in all the towns further west of Forbes to set up a voucher system 'so they can buy food at the local IGAs that may be a little dearer'.

An Indigenous perspective is critical to an analysis of rural food insecurity at every stage. In Anglicare's food insecurity survey in volume 2 of this report, 16.6 per cent of respondents were Indigenous (King et al., 2012). This gels with the experience of Anglicare NSW West, NSW South and ACT that Indigenous people are over represented as emergency relief clients. In Canberra about one-third of people accessing Anglicare's partner relief agency, St John's Care, are Indigenous, in a city where the Indigenous population accounts for 1.5 per cent of the population. In Forbes the vast majority of people I interviewed who were seeking food assistance from Havannah House were Indigenous.

Further west of Forbes, Archdeacon Karen Kime, Anglicare's general manager for Indigenous services and education, has been assessing service provision to remote Indigenous communities around Brewarrina, Bourke, and Menindee. 'The huge cost of fresh food causes a lot of struggles within families,' Karen says. 'Obesity is a real problem because the cheaper processed foods are high in fat and high in sugar … One of the more distressing developments I discovered was that the community-based food co-op in Menindee is now closed. Previously, food was bought in bulk and supplied more cheaply.'

One solution, argues Archdeacon Kime, is for governments to provide more generous utility rebates for food co-ops that supply fresh food to remote communities to ensure they do not go broke.



Electricity shocks

Asked the most common reason people run out of food, Julie Virtue has a simple but surprising answer: electricity bills.

'The underlying issue is rising electricity costs,' she says. 'People will pay their power bills but then they won't have money for anything else.'

The rising cost of energy is a major issue in Sydney. But it's worse in the bush. Rural consumers have been particularly hard hit by the increase in New South Wales electricity prices recommended by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) which came into effect in July. Most Sydneysiders face a 10 per cent increase. In the bush it is over 17 per cent caused in part by the impact on their supplier Country Energy of higher energy transport costs.

Earlier this year, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) expressed particular concern about the impact of rising electricity charges on rural people, who are paying approximately $600 per year more than the average Sydney household.

Country Energy is the electricity supplier to the entirety of rural New South Wales outside Sydney, the Illawarra and the Hunter Valley. PIAC lists being in Country Energy's supply area alone as a risk factor for energy-induced poverty. It cites the troubling fact that the percentage of people in the Country Energy supply area paying 10 per cent or more of their disposable income on electricity is projected to rise from 8 per cent to 11 per cent over the next financial year (Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, 2012).

Julie can document the impact of rising electricity costs on vulnerable households in the Central West of New South Wales firsthand. Just a few years ago, the Anglicare-funded emergency relief service would give out food hampers 'once or twice a year' to most families seeking assistance and sometimes help them with a phone bill. Problems with electricity bills were very rare. 'Now we are finding people are always coming to us with electricity bills they can't pay,' says Julie. 'It has gone through the roof. When the cost of electricity first skyrocketed last year people were in crisis … We have had to increase food hampers by fourfold.'

Another new trend in Forbes is that more aged pensioners are looking for help with food. Again this is directly related to the dramatic increase in electricity charges.

'We see one older lady who would rather pay her electricity bill than buy food,' Julie says. 'That attitude is not uncommon with the older generation.'

PIAC has been urging the New South Wales Government to not only ensure relief schemes keep pace with rising electricity costs, but also provide 'smart assistance' targeting rebates to the most vulnerable consumers in rural areas.

The evidence from Anglicare's food insecurity research suggests that government may be wise to take preventative action through targeted electricity rebates in the first place rather than pay for emergency relief later.

The main factors that make households vulnerable to electricity price rises cluster around factors that impact rural households disproportionately. For example, the high use of energy by many rural households cannot easily be reduced because they live in older-style detached housing and in areas where temperatures head towards both extremes.

For Indigenous communities in rural New South Wales the lack of access to basic services can be quite severe. Some communities do not have access to water or electricity infrastructure. Lack of access to mains electricity also adds significantly to the cost of living. Use of generators is estimated to cost twice as much as access to the New South Wales grid (NCOSS, 2007). Looking for a better understanding of the issues, I contacted Anglicare Sydney's research unit for an additional breakdown of the data from its national food insecurity study (King et al., 2012). This showed that the use of generators in rural Indigenous communities may also be a reason why so few Indigenous respondents to the survey said they used 'putting off paying an electricity bill' as a strategy to cope with food insecurity (email, A Moffitt, 6 August 2012).

Significantly, Anglicare's research shows that single parents are the most likely household group to employ one of the most risky coping strategies: putting off paying bills rather than extending them formally. As a result they are more likely to be at risk of late fees and disconnection, and so their financial woes worsen. This problem compounds the risk of food insecurity. Perhaps single parents are more likely than those in two-parent households to lack the support structures that deliver the necessary confidence and cultural capital to engage with the system and negotiate better outcomes. American sociologist Robert Putnam observes that 'when people lack connections to others' they find it more difficult to undertake formal negotiations (Putnam, 2000).

Nurturing volunteers

Social capital is certainly a critical part of the equation. Indeed, one United States study has shown that a culture of reciprocity among neighbours had a huge impact on decreasing the risk of hunger (Martin et al., 2004).

The costs of electricity, transport, food and other services may be higher in the country but anecdotally it appears informal community networks are stronger. It seems like a no-brainer. The big smoke is anonymous. Rural towns are not, and so the social connectedness of the country is likely to affect reciprocal behaviour for the better.

This was certainly the impression I gained from the survey interviews I conducted in the two rural New South Wales locations we selected: Eden and Forbes. No one I spoke to was socially isolated. Nearly all were strongly connected to a wider community network. The sample is small but around half of the non-Indigenous people and around two-thirds of the Indigenous respondents I surveyed were relying on family, friends and neighbours to cope with food insecurity.

Harder evidence of this observation is not well captured in Anglicare's survey of food insecurity (King et al., 2012). However when you look beneath the surface a fairly complex picture does start to crystallise.

Rural people are less likely than their city cousins to employ the coping strategies proposed by Anglicare's survey, apart from accessing family for help. It is tempting to conclude that this reflects the relative strength of informal support networks in the bush given the lack of access to a range of social services. There is certainly a significant discrepancy between city and country in the number of respondents who accessed formal support options. For example, according to a breakdown of research data (email,

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Moffitt, 30 July 2012), 8 per cent of city people had accessed free meals—such as food kitchens—whereas 20 per cent of country people had done so. However, looking more deeply at the city and country respondents through the prism of Aboriginality this breakdown of data also reveals that the most significant variable is actually the strong family and community support networks available to rural Indigenous people. Elsewhere in this report, Hollie Pezet discusses in depth the culture of reciprocal food giving or *ngapartji ngapartji* among the Indigenous communities of Alice Springs. It is likely there is a similar dynamic at work in rural Indigenous communities in New South Wales.

Significantly, there is a very notable difference between the level of food insecurity experienced by Indigenous people surveyed by Anglicare in the city and those surveyed in the country. According to an additional analysis of the data more than 70 per cent of Indigenous people in urban areas said they 'had gone without food' compared to 48 per cent in rural areas. The fact that Indigenous people in the city had higher levels of food insecurity may be related to a greater dislocation from the traditional support networks provided by family and community in rural areas. The data certainly shows that they were also less likely to rely on family or friends and neighbours as a coping strategy compared to Indigenous people living in the country (email, Moffitt, 6 August 2012).

Nevertheless, it may well be the case that all rural people have access to a range of informal options that the Anglicare survey has found hard to categorise and define. It is telling that despite fewer formal support services being available, 69 per cent of city people cope by going without food while only 57 per cent of country people are forced to take that option (email, Moffitt, 30 July 2012).

As I spoke to people about food insecurity in Forbes, and at Eden on the New South Wales far south coast, it became clear that lots of people were helping each other beneath the radar. A number of food-insecure households were accessing produce grown by other people in the town, while others had been given seeds to grow food. One man specifically told me he started growing vegetables—tomatoes, beans, corn—in order to give them out to those whose circumstances meant they weren't eating healthily. A single mum I spoke to in Forbes said her landlord, a farmer, would sometimes kill a lamb for her and the kids to ward off hunger.

In Forbes, social isolation is being tackled by the very culture of Havannah House itself. The most striking aspect of Havannah House is the palpable sense of community. Every day volunteers and 'clients'—though there is far from a clear distinction between the two—gather around a giant oak table

for morning tea and a time for spiritual and moral reflection led by Julie. It is obvious as I listen to the banter and belly laughs that people around the table have strong friendships. The program has over 100 volunteers. Many are former clients who stay connected because Havannah House has in a real sense become their family.

Volunteering at Havannah House provides a number of people on pensions with a social outlet that is healthier and more financially sustainable than many of the alternatives in the town. 'I no longer go out and spend money on drink,' said one volunteer–client I spoke to. 'I keep myself occupied with gardening, hobbies and with volunteering.'

Another of these former clients is Bernadette Gregson, a single mum who is now employed by Anglicare to administer the No Interest Loan Scheme from Havannah House. While Bernadette is paid to work for two days she actually works there full time, assisting Julie Virtue with financial counselling, emergency relief and case management.

'We are all volunteers here at Havannah House,' says Bernadette. 'We are here as a service to the community in God's name.' She is not merely reflecting on the long hours that she and Julie put in, but the fact that there is an expectation that people who stay at Havannah House will help and support others in need. 'Where I have been in my life, I have been on struggle street,' she said. 'I love being able to give back by helping people ... this job gives me great satisfaction and sense of purpose.'

It is the volunteerism itself that is building a culture of reciprocity, which helps reduce food insecurity. So what lessons can be drawn from the volunteer model at Havannah House?

I would argue that some social networks promote values that ensure caring for strangers becomes the cultural norm. Caring for others can become a group habit. This appears to be the case at Havannah House. Rosters for the cooking and serving of meals provide opportunities for imparting the value of serving and trusting others.

American sociologist Eric Uslaner claims some social networks are better than others at delivering the social capital that builds a culture of reciprocal care (Uslaner, 2001). A wide body of research has shown a link between volunteerism and churchgoing. However, according to Uslaner, the link is complicated because both religious fundamentalists and the unchurched are less likely to trust those they don't know. This leads him to make a distinction between 'strategic' trust—which leads to cooperation between people we know and are part of our group—and 'moralistic' trust, which leads to tolerance of difference and community volunteering.

According to Uslaner, trusting those outside our tribe is a 'moral value' that is 'learned' (Uslaner, 2008b).

While we must be cautious about directly applying American research, findings by local researchers mirror Uslaner's results. The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) shows that Australian church attenders are more likely to volunteer than the general community (57 per cent versus 35 per cent). However 'Mainstream Protestants' have much higher rates of involvement in community groups beyond the church, while people who belong to fundamentalist churches volunteer more hours within their own congregations (Powell, 2010).

Uslaner's work should also make us sceptical of efforts that try to manufacture 'moralistic' trust. There is no prescription here that can be given to government. He has found that formal civic engagement projects do not generate the degree of trust that would lead people to care for strangers. Rather he concludes that it is the very act of giving our time to people who are not like us that generates us to put more trust in other human beings and therefore become more generous still (Uslaner, 2008a).

This is the genius of Havannah House. A volunteer culture—or more specifically a culture of loving service—frames the entire enterprise.

More than surviving

If informal support networks and volunteerism play such a significant role in reducing the impact of food insecurity, then a further conclusion will be drawn by some on the political right: the role of government is to create conditions that will help these informal networks of support to flourish. Then, government should get out of the way.

In November 2009 British Prime Minister David Cameron delivered what would become the key speech defining his vision of the 'Big Society', asserting that: 'State control [has become] a substitute for moral choice and personal responsibility … What is seen as an act of solidarity, has in practice led to the greatest atomisation of our society' (Cameron, 2009).

What is significant is that Cameron directly linked the growth of the welfare state to the fragmentation of community and growth of hyperindividualism. In other words, the well-documented decline in volunteer community participation was linked to the growth of Big Government.

Anglican theologian Phillip Blond is a key thinker behind the Big Society. For Blond the chief force that shaped the riots we saw last year in England

is 'radical individualism'. Rare for a Tory, he acknowledges that this is a process in which Thatcherism and economic liberalism played a key role. But he pins equal blame on the welfare state. Instead of providing a safety net, he claims it became a ceiling, trapping the working class in a benefits culture.

What is the connection between Big Society and Australia?

Firstly this philosophy is gaining attention in a number of quarters and is likely to influence the policy agenda of the next government regardless of its political colours. Phillip Blond visited Australia in 2011 to speak at a conference convened by the Menzies Research Centre, the Liberal Party's in-house think tank. Opposition leader Tony Abbott introduced Blond as a 'friend of Australia', and drew parallels between Liberal Party support for smaller government and 'Big Society'. Blond returned to Australia again in August 2012 and this time engaged in a range of media interviews. His boldest claim was that Australia would make a far better test case for implementing the 'Big Society' because it would not be distorted by the austerity measures currently being imposed in Britain.

In the United Kingdom, the Big Society is being developed at the same time as major budget cuts are being applied. Under David Cameron there has been an £81 billion cut in United Kingdom public spending including, for example, a 60 per cent cut to the budget for new public housing. Cameron's budgets have dealt a £5 billion cut to the United Kingdom's community sector with the number of people employed in the sector falling by 70 000 (Whelan, 2012).

These developments are sure to distress many on the ground, including Julie Virtue, who have already watched Blond's line of argument produce the current government's welfare-to-work policies for single parents.

It is a shock to hear the person sitting in front of you explain what hunger has done to their body. Jason is thin, wiry and has recently been going without food for three or four days in a row.

'When I eat now I spew it up,' he says.

Cut off from family payments, he tells me he has to wait six weeks to get Newstart Allowance. He has absolutely no income.

Other single parents tell a similar story. When the youngest child turns eight, they lose $200 off their family payments as they move over to Newstart.

'That is a major crisis point for single parents,' says Julie Virtue.

Many highly vulnerable people, such as those in food crisis, are dependent on support systems provided or funded by the state. The withdrawal of such funding effectively means the general public through local schools and churches is being expected to support people in very difficult circumstances well beyond these services' capacity.

In Australia, Dr James Whelan from independent research think tank the Centre for Policy Development makes a similar point: 'A strong state does not preclude strong private and community sectors. Volunteerism and philanthropy should be valued, but it is a mistake to expect them to "fill the gap"'.

This is a particularly important point to make when thinking about food insecurity in rural communities impacted by rural decline.

A major problem for the Big Society approach is that it sees the social landscape as both flat and small. And yet it is obvious that some communities are inherently better resourced to cope with times of crisis. A Big Society has no room for the outback.

Furthermore not all individuals are treated equally within their own local community networks. Factors such as racism can prove insurmountable. For example Archdeacon Karen Kime, herself a Birripa woman, observes that for some Indigenous people 'especially in small country towns … there is discrimination that makes it difficult to access the mainstream services that are in place to help with food insecurity'.

With the best will in the world an individual will be unable improve their circumstances if their local community will not or cannot support them. There must be a role for government to invest in programs that prevent local communities from failing.

While next year's federal election is far from a foregone conclusion, it is important Anglicare considers how to engage with the Big Society paradigm that could shape life under future governments. These ideas are likely to influence policy developments across the political spectrum.

Noel Pearson's personal story of discovery in Cape York (Pearson, 2010) may allow a way forward for Anglicare as we increasingly operate in a political environment framed by a vision which prioritises 'choice' and 'personal responsibility'. His focus on developing individual capability supported by targeted social investment by government is speaking a similar language:

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> *... each and every rung on the stairs of progress must be climbed by real, individual human beings … The reasons they climbed was that they made choices and they could see incentives further up the stairs. There was no mass elevator for entire communities or groups to ascend all at once … Yes, governments can and should make social investments so that people develop their capabilities, but that investment must be about enabling people to pursue their own self interests, not to assume that government can be a substitute actor in the development story.*

Havannah House invests a lot of time in building the capacities of individuals. People have the opportunity to work in social enterprises that teach skills such as graphic design and screenprinting that can help in gaining future employment.

Yet training and mentoring individuals is also an important response to tackling food insecurity. For example, much of the volunteer effort at Havannah House goes into working alongside people in providing meals, not merely feeding them.

'A lot of people simply don't know how to cook,' says Bernadette Gregson. 'That is one of the things we look at here: helping them learn the basic cooking skills that people don't have … People will buy a barbeque chicken and expensive made-up vegetables and Chicken Tonight sauces. Or they will buy expensive shredded cheese packets that are $10 each. We give people very simple skills and advice such as to buy the block of cheese and shred it themselves.'

The aim is simple, says Bernadette: 'People need to learn to live as if they weren't living here, so they are empowered to live independently'.

Julie Virtue is even more succinct: 'We don't like bandaids'.

Julie also provides people with financial counselling—the hope is to gain funding from government—in order to tackle the underlying causes of food insecurity. 'One of the things we try to teach people is to budget. It's not helpful to have things handed on a platter.'

Reflecting on the closure of the much-needed community food co-op at Menindee, Archdeacon Karen Kime agrees that investment in training was a key, missing ingredient.

'It can be hard to sustain management. You need to have a lot of confidence and skill to know how to contact and negotiate with suppliers,' she says. 'It could make a huge difference to food insecurity and health

outcomes if government funded training in communities in how to run fresh food co-ops.'

Survive to thrive

The 'survive to thrive' model sees a person's journey out of hunger and food insecurity as a four-stage process: crisis, post-crisis, prevention of recurrence, and systemic transformation.

A version of the survive–thrive matrix was first devised by the *Foyer* housing model in the United Kingdom. Foyer housing developments stress that in order to move beyond day-to-day survival people need to be given tools while in a supportive and safe environment in order to work towards long-term independence.

This matrix was adapted by Anglicare WA for broader service delivery, and in our local Anglicare agency we are attempting to further refine it. This model helps us think about a person's pathway from reliance on crisis support, through to post-crisis support, to finally being part of a strong community network that provides them with resilience—helping them to better cope with periods of change or instability.

Drawing on the experience of pioneering programs such as Havannah House as well as a pilot scheme run by Anglicare Sydney in the Illawarra, we are planning to use this model to shape a network of 'sustainable living hubs' across much of rural and remote New South Wales. These hubs will not merely tackle an individual's 'food crisis' through the provision of emergency food relief but they aim to work alongside people providing them with the skills and resources they need to prevent them falling back into crisis.

One advantage of the model for agencies like Anglicare is that it helps us weigh up whether we are putting enough resources into prevention and advocacy, which underpin the final two stages of the journey.

The fact is that there will always be a need for us to provide crisis services to address food insecurity. So the main aim is not to try to change how any individual program operates but to identify gaps in service delivery that will hamper our ability to provide people with a pathway towards a flourishing life.

We are not ultimately doing the best we can, by those people we serve, if there are not secondary services available—financial counselling,

microcredit loan schemes, skills and job training. Nor, more crucially, if we fail to confront and address the issues that are causing people to fall into food crisis in the first place.

AUTHOR

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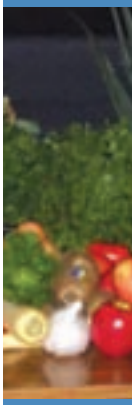

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'Just spend little bit on food … try to buy healthy foods first.'

'We hide tinned meats and noodles in a tucker box so we know our kids can eat.'

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3

Give and take, cause and cure

Relationships and reciprocity have been at the heart of Indigenous culture in Central Australia for aeons. *HOLLIE PEZET* explores what happens to giving and receiving—*ngapartji ngapartji*—when food, family ties and reciprocity place stress on families already on the edge. She talks to people working with communities and those experiencing food insecurity to learn about their resourceful coping strategies and responses.

Marg Reilly has lived and worked in Central Australia for more than 27 years as a community development officer. Her work can involve many different things in a town like Alice, but food security is the issue on her mind right now. 'In my opinion Alice Springs is one of the most food-vulnerable places in Australia because we depend almost entirely upon imported food,' she says. Natural disasters, price rises and global fuel hikes all have an extra sting for Alice Springs and the many vulnerable families that live here or come from remote communities for health, for family and for support.

Our town services some 205 remote Indigenous communities and 37.1 per cent of Aboriginal public housing residents are visitors from these remote communities. Permanent visitors often associate the problems of alcohol, noise, mess and financial hardship with visitors

(Centre for Remote Health, 2011). It is common knowledge that wide gaps exist between Aboriginal and other Australians when measured against key indicators (Productivity Commission, 2011). These gaps are starkly evident on the streets of Alice Springs. It's people like Marg Reilly who shoulder the planning and thinking about how best to bridge these gaps and respond to the impact of people movement and food shortages on vulnerable families. Her work developing solutions is an important part of the response by a network of agencies in Alice Springs. For me, taking part in Anglicare's national food insecurity study and writing this essay are ways that a local service, such as Anglicare NT, can listen, learn and press anecdotal evidence and years of community experience onto the page.

In the study, 15 food situation surveys were conducted in the Alice Springs region. Fourteen of the 15 respondents were Aboriginal people, the majority residing in Alice Springs. Four people lived in remote communities outside of Alice Springs. It became clear that relationships were both the cause and cure for food insecurity amongst the 14 Aboriginal respondents. Managing visiting family, upholding obligations to family and attending funerals for family appeared to be the primary causes of food insecurity. Yet these same relationships are also people's primary means of coping in times of hardship. The coping mechanisms people shared with me were diverse and reflected the resourcefulness and resilience of our clients. People spoke highly of the emergency relief services in Alice Springs, yet simultaneously expressed that they often find its systems inflexible, insufficient and paternalistic.

The laws of return

As relationships were so significant in the discussions I had with people about their food situation, I felt it was important to understand the nature of relationships in an Aboriginal cultural context. I drew on my own relationship with colleague and friend Rhonda Inkamala. Rhonda is a respected Aboriginal member of our community and speaks a number of languages including Pitjantjatjara, Central Arrernte, Eastern Arrernte, Western Arrernte and Luritja as well as English.

'Aboriginal culture and white culture are very different and it is hard to marry the two,' Rhonda says. Yet Aboriginal people must of necessity engage in Anglo-European culture, certainly on an economic level. The days of relying upon hunting and gathering food have gone, replaced by the white man's world of jobs and welfare. Foulks (1991) suggests that 'traditional indigenous culture (based on mythology) and global industrialism (based on science) are incompatible'. He also goes on to say

that despite these cultural divides, 'Aborigines are, to varying degrees, an integral part of Australia's industrialised society'.

Relationships are the basis of Aboriginal culture: relationships to people, land, animals, histories and stories. The individual is not separate from their relationships, or merely an adjunct to a family group (as is the case in cultures founded on nuclear and individualistic families); the individual is defined by their relationships. Any wealth or belongings an Aboriginal person acquires do not belong to the individual but to the relationships that define them and make up who they are. Family members are seen to have the right to the funds or possessions of other family members.

The traditional concept of sharing with the whole, according to Rhonda, is 'not simply about taking, but also about giving in equal proportion'. The traditional equitable give and take between individuals within a family group enabled the whole to survive and the vulnerable to remain healthy and protected. In Luritja this practice is known as *ngapartji ngapartji* and according to the Luritja dictionary means 'in return; in exchange' and is used of 'giving something in return for a previous gift' (Hansen, 1992).

The law of return not only applies to relationships but also to Country: to the area where a person was born and where their family group is from. Traditionally there is an expectation that people return to their Country if they have travelled elsewhere. They must return to tend to the land and renew their relationship with their Country as well as with their family. The return journey to Country is known as *ngaparri ngaparri*, defined as 'return, return journey; time of decision to return' (Hansen, 1992) and is as much an expectation, or a law of return, as *ngapartji ngapartji* is an expectation that one returns gifts received.

Family and food

Colonialism, disenfranchisement and economic and social desperation have led to a muting and distorting of this equal give and take between family members, with take often outweighing give. According to Rhonda, *ngapartji ngapartji* traditionally operated from a position of giving to others from a place of having enough, rather than from a place of cajoling and desperation as is often the case in present times. This relentless taking with little—or certainly disproportionate—giving, from a place of poverty and desperation, is known as 'humbug' amongst the local Aboriginal population.

Humbug featured strongly throughout the survey responses. Fourteen of the 15 respondents indicated that in the last 12 months they had run out

of food and couldn't afford to buy more. Eight respondents noted that this was happening once a week or more, 3 once a month, 2 once every fortnight and 1 less than once a month. 'Not having enough money in my budget' was the primary reason for not having enough to eat. When I asked people why they did not have enough money in their budget, 12 of the 14 people attributed their lack of food to this phenomenon with comments such as 'humbug', 'I have to give to family' and 'family asks me for a feed'. Some people chose to reflect on this aspect in the open-ended question about other reasons for not having enough food to eat or the kinds of food they would like to eat. Humbug was a common response, usually associated with unwanted visitors. For example, one respondent commented that 'drunks come and humbug for food'.

Most respondents spoke about handling their household food situation in the context of managing their family relationships, thereby minimising the level of humbug they experience. Setting clear boundaries with visiting family members was a common strategy. Rebecca commented on her practice of telling extended family members and visitors what they can and cannot eat, enlisting the help of her children to safeguard their food against unwanted humbug. 'I tell my kids I brought a box of icy poles and you can share them with your friends, but everything else is only for us,' she said.

Barbara shared the challenge of family members visiting from remote communities on the weekends. In the past they would arrive on a Friday night and by the end of the weekend the food set aside for herself and her children would be eaten by the visitors. The strategy she now applies to prevent this is to 'shop just before the school week on Sunday'. She observed that 'the visitors are less likely to eat our food because they only stay on the weekends' and, she added, have usually departed by Sunday afternoon. This approach also means that there is little food in the fridge when the visitors arrive on Friday, and visiting family are more likely to buy food to share with Barbara and her children.

Another approach mentioned frequently is to purchase a small amount of food daily so that there is simply not enough food to be shared with humbugging family or visitors. A small amount of food is also easily stored on one's person and concealed from view if necessary. Raelene, for example, buys a 'little bit of food every day so I know the baby has something to eat that day'. Some people noted that they eat their daily food all at once outside the grocery store so there is no opportunity for family or visitors to humbug them for the food.

Conversely, one respondent spends all her cash every payday on fresh food in one shopping trip. Daphne does this to ensure that there is simply no cash for visitors or family to take. I asked whether this also meant that people could take her food and she would be left with nothing to eat until the next payday. She agreed that humbugging visitors and family members were likely to take some (if not most) of the fresh food, but she didn't mind this as at least she knew that her money was being spent on fresh healthy food rather than on 'grog and cards'. Card playing is a popular form of gambling especially in remote communities. Although Daphne could not stop the humbugging, she could at least determine that her money was being spent in a positive way and was of some benefit to her family and community.

Many people also spoke of cooking stews or 'fry-ups' when extended family are visiting or asking for food. By making these large and economic meals the host family is able to give food in a controlled way whilst still assisting family in need. Paul noted that he 'makes a big stew and give that to family, that way I am still in control'. Similarly, a mother of three explained: 'I fry up leftovers, make stews so we are using everything … I ask my sister for help too'.

Several respondents shared that they resort to concealing food as a strategy when visitors are staying, as they cannot trust or control who is in their house and has access to their food at any given time. Sadie commented:

> *I put meat and veggies in the fridge to share with other adults … I put aside food I don't want to share so I know I have some to give my child. I hide tinned stuff and noodles if I don't think I will have any more to buy food if other people in my house eat everything.*

Another family noted that:

> *When food gets home everyone eats it, we hide tinned meats and noodles in a tucker box so we know our kids can eat … sometimes kids go without … we can only handle so many family staying.*

Concealing cash is also a frequent strategy: 'I hide my pocket money, don't keep silvers, just notes so no one knows that I have money in my pocket'. Telling lies about the availability of food is also used to stem the humbug: 'family asks me for a feed, I tell them lies that I haven't got any food … I need that food for me'.

As part of managing their household food situation, people frequently discussed doing what they could to make their money for food stretch as far as possible. Even though most respondents may not have had the financial terminology to describe their spending, it became clear that budgeting and sourcing low prices are common practices. One family reflected that upon arriving at the supermarket they:

> *go for cheaper things … look at prices … look at specials for meat … we buy home brand … I travel to Coles which is further away but the bread at Coles costs one dollar.*

Another family spoke about trying to 'just spend little bit on food … try to buy healthy foods first then buy bad foods with what we have left'.

The cycle of support

Many people noted that having a trusted family member to provide them with assistance and help protect the food from humbugging visitors is a significant part of managing their household food situation. Shirleen enlists the help of her cousin, who helps 'look after my food, I can trust her'.

While a person's relationships often determine the level of food insecurity (caused by humbug) they experience, struggling families ironically rely on these same family relationships to overcome their own food insecurity. Whilst humbug causes food insecurity, it seems reverse humbug is also a significant coping mechanism. The cause becomes the cure in a cycle of support. Families assist others and draw upon the support of those they have helped in their time of need. Mary, for example, borrows 'money from family … we make sure we have enough to buy bread, then ask family for a little bit extra: five dollars from them, five dollars from them'.

Funerals and the BasicsCard

Four respondents listed helping family as an unexpected event that meant there was no money to buy food. Anita, for instance, was unable to buy food because quite unexpectedly 'people were staying at our house and using power, us having to pay the power bill'. Robert also noted unexpected family visits as causing a lack of money to buy food: 'Family asked me for money, they ran out of money … they spend money on gambling, playing cards'.

Returning to country and upholding *ngaparri ngaparri* for ceremonies and family business, whether that be for funerals, celebrations or other cultural ceremonies, is generally expected of an individual. Because relationships are at the core of an Aboriginal person's identity, it is imperative that they take part in significant family gatherings. There is little assistance available to people travelling to and from their Country in Alice Springs. Many service providers view travel as a discretionary expense, much as we view travelling to see family in our holiday time. Most Aboriginal people have little choice when it comes to returning to Country and it is, in their eyes, absolutely essential. Returning to country is usually very expensive (often into the thousands of dollars) especially when the destination is in a remote location hundreds of kilometres from Alice Springs.

A third of respondents noted that the cost of travel to attend funerals accounted for the unexpected event that led to not having enough money for food. Assisting family members with the cost of travel to funerals was another significant unexpected cost that meant people had little or no money to purchase food, with 'family asking for money to travel to funerals, and help with food and fuel for the trip'. Many funerals require travel across the Northern Territory border, which affects people's ability to pay with the BasicsCard. Income management has been compulsory in the Territory since 2007 and many people rely upon these quarantined funds to pay for unexpected events as well as meet their essential expenses. This budgeting strategy may be viable within the Northern Territory, but travel to other states (where income management is not in place) for funerals can become problematic.

Challenges relating to the Centrelink system were also significant 'unexpected events' that led to food insecurity, with three out of 15 respondents noting that alterations of policy or the unpredictability of Centrelink payments led to insufficient funds to purchase food. Whilst income management and the BasicsCard are considered helpful tools by many, a lack of understanding of Centrelink processes, expectations and policies can create and intensify hardship. Joe noted that sometimes his payments alter unexpectedly, leading to a lack of money for food:

> *Some paydays the money on the BasicsCard is less and I don't know about it … I asked Centrelink and they said it was to help pay back for damage to my house to fix the windows … they didn't tell me and I had no money for food.*

Mary also found that Centrelink stopped her payments unexpectedly:

'A job was arranged that I couldn't attend. I provided a doctor's certificate but the payment was still cancelled'.

Out bush and in town

It is clear that cultural obligations to family and Country, according to the results of this particular survey, are significant reasons for people not having enough to eat. The responses varied, however, between urban clients residing in Alice Springs and those living in remote locations throughout Central Australia. The responses suggest that for those living in town the experience of food insecurity is significantly different from those residing 'out bush'.

For households in town, the average number of permanent occupants was 5.5, with an average of 8.45 people staying at the house for less than half the time. These temporary guests are likely to be visiting family members from remote communities. Whilst those living in remote communities had more people living at their address permanently (an average of 8.5) no remote respondents noted any individuals living with them less than half the time. This would suggest that remote respondents have a more stable, manageable and predictable household situation than people living in Alice Springs. It appears they do not have to manage humbugging visitors to the same extent, if at all.

Remote respondents also appeared to have a broader range of coping mechanisms, despite having higher living costs (heavily inflated prices at community stores) and travel expenses. I asked Rhonda what her thoughts were on the difference between food insecurity remote and in town. She thought that generally people living remotely fare better than those in town. 'They don't get the visitors like the town mob do,' Rhonda explained, 'and they can always go hunting for tucker.' Rhonda also noted how cattle stations often have their own store or sell food in some capacity. If the community store is closed then people can visit the station at any time of the day or night and ask either to buy food or, if they are desperate, to be given food on credit.

Rhonda's perspective certainly mirrored the comments by respondents from remote communities. Joe, a remote community resident, explained that he uses his BasicsCard to buy food and added: 'If I run out of money on my BasicsCard me and my partner we go hunting … get some kangaroo and other meats, bush tucker, then we don't go hungry and have food to share with families'.

Going 'crook in the head'

When asked about the effects of not having enough food, to my surprise most respondents spoke more about the mental and emotional aspects of hunger than they did about obvious physical or other effects. Stress, anxiety and being 'crook in the head' were common responses. Paul described his experience of going without food and how that affected his mental state: 'I am thinking hard and get stressed … worried … trying to think how I can get more food'. Many people noted how they feel angry and very emotional when hungry, especially when visiting family members eat the food set aside or concealed for their own children. Dulcie, for example, commented that it makes her really angry when she doesn't have enough food: 'when family takes food makes me angry … no food for the little one'. Peter gets 'grumpy when I run out of food … I tell family "don't you come back to my flat, gotta help me with food!". I tell them to go outside … sometimes we fight'.

Others felt shame and humiliation during times of food insecurity:

> *… have to watch kids go hungry … makes me feel bad as a parent … they shouldn't have to go through that … my kids see other people with food and I feel really bad … it doesn't affect me, but it does affect my kids … it is a long way to get help from someone. I don't want to make them walk all that way to get help because they will only get hungrier and more upset.*

Respondents often then noted the effects on children, like lack of sleep and children becoming irritable due to hunger pangs. Respondents usually mentioned the mental affects of hunger, and the impact on children of going without food, before mentioning the physical effects, such as feeling weak and tired. Many told of the strategy of relying on water or cups of tea to control hunger pangs. The relationship between hunger and crime was also mentioned. One mother noted: 'My boys got into trouble with the law because they had no food … people might turn to crime … depression'. Another commented that hunger 'stresses people … get anxious … tempts them to steal and shoplift'.

Connection and kindness

What people liked about emergency relief services in Alice Springs were the positive relationships they forged with emergency relief staff

through the kindness and goodwill shown to them. Nancy appreciated that staff at the emergency relief services 'talk to me, are kind to me, and give me a yarn'. For some, approaching such a service is one of their only opportunities to be heard and spoken to with patience, respect and kindness: 'They gave me a food voucher when I was in hospital … they came to see me … it was good'. The human connection people find at emergency relief services is considered by many users to be an important and highly valued aspect of engaging with a service.

Several organisations offer emergency relief in Alice Springs through the provision of food vouchers and free meals. Local organisations are, it seems, limited in their ability to respond to the extent of the need, or to lobby for greater assistance. This is largely because of the geographical distance from urban centres where allocation decisions are made. There are strict requirements around the delivery of emergency relief services. People cannot usually visit a service twice within a six week period and opening hours are limited and irregular. Many people go hungry over the weekends, especially on long weekends. The transient nature of Alice Springs means staff come and go frequently. Services are often closed temporarily until staff can be recruited to deliver the program.

Inflexible and infantilising

Several people emphasised the inflexibility of current emergency relief services and the fact that in some ways they do not address the needs of local people in the local context. Electricity and power supply are a good example. In Alice Springs and in remote communities power card meters are more commonly used in public housing, in contrast to the electrical power meters used elsewhere in the country. The power card meters operate in a similar way to prepaid credit purchased for a mobile phone. People can purchase these prepaid power cards from supermarkets without receiving an electricity bill from the utility company. This also helps people manage power consumption when family visit.

Despite the widespread use of these prepaid power cards in Alice Springs, emergency relief services are unable to provide assistance with purchasing these power cards to keep the lights on at night and the hot water running. The purchase of power cards is currently outside the parameters of emergency relief protocols and frameworks, perhaps because these power cards are only used in isolated communities in the Northern Territory by a minority of the population. Robert, for instance, pointed out that emergency relief 'won't help with power cards but will help to pay a

bill. Food vouchers can't be used to buy power cards, only food'. While emergency relief can help to pay an electricity bill (which few people receive in Central Australia) it cannot assist with the purchase of a $20 power card, which most people rely upon heavily. This is one example of how emergency relief services are not designed to cater for local needs. The power bill and food vouchers received by local agencies from parent organisations interstate are designed to assist urban communities and have little capacity to adapt to the local context.

People also noted how the protocols of emergency relief services made them feel ashamed, especially when their children are present:

> *I have to give explanations and tell them all my information. I don't like how I have to tell them everything about my money and why I need food so badly, it makes me feel desperate and I don't like my kids seeing that—us having to ask food—but I have to take my kids because they do a head count and the more people the more help we get.*

Some food vouchers, respondents commented, can only be used at the 'expensive, small shops … vouchers should be for the big, cheaper shops like Coles or Woolworths and we should be allowed to buy whatever we choose, not treated like children'. People noted how food vouchers often state that they cannot be used for certain items (alcohol and cigarettes, for example) and that this can take away any sense of dignity. Joe expressed this sentiment well when he noted that 'the vouchers say "no party foods"—makes me feel like a naughty kid who can't spend their money on sweets. I don't like that'. The feeling of being treated like a child through prescriptive and one-size-fits-all service delivery was a common theme across the responses.

Local and participatory

When asked how emergency relief could be improved in Alice Springs, respondents noted a need for more community-oriented and participatory measures to address food insecurity. It is not surprising that the people surveyed emphasised the need for more give and take, in light of the value of *ngapartji ngapartji* in traditional Aboriginal culture. Comments emphasised the need for more recipient involvement in emergency relief initiatives. 'A soup kitchen would be good', one respondent commented. Another said:

> *friendly and good people … only cold meat on sandwiches though … it would be good if they had a barbeque and we had sausage on bread or steak sandwich too … we could help with the barbeque and sit outside.*

A desire to be a part of things and create a sense of community and sharing when receiving emergency relief became apparent.

I spoke to leaders in the community development field about how they interpreted these comments from emergency relief recipients. It seems that the Alice Springs community more broadly has also identified the need for more participatory approaches in regards to our capacity to assist food-insecure families. Emergency relief in Alice Springs could expand into more community-oriented avenues, in the recognition that, as Froggett (2002) puts it, 'the construction of the Other through the discourses of care and dependency effaces the particularity of Otherness'. Froggett argues:

> *There is a need for disabled people and other help recipients to establish themselves as subjects, each with a voice and rights which are rich enough to respect their individuality while recognising them as a member of the community.*

Alex McClean is Program Manager of desertSMART COOLmob, an Arid Lands Environment Centre program which supports 500 Alice Springs households committed to desert-smart living. The program also promotes and supports community sustainability initiatives. As Alex explained, the perspective of the Arid Lands Environment Centre in regards to the local food supply is that 'ensuring a quality and predictable food supply must be a whole of community response, involving not only large commercial enterprises, but also governments, NGOs, small businesses and community members'.

Rather than continuing to rely almost solely on imported food, said Alex, Central Australia needs to 'reinvigorate and grow its own capacity to produce affordable food for the local community'. One example of the recognition and creation of our local food system is the development of a community garden. People have begun gathering to plant and nurture a wide variety of food. The community garden is becoming a lifeline for Alice Springs as a whole, not simply to grow plants but to plant and nurture our other community capital: our ideas, stories, community spirit and a sense of sharing. The community garden hosts picnics, 'Sponsor a Tree' initiatives, 'Make your Own Pizza Oven' classes and 'Recycled Rubbish Seat-Making' workshops, to name a few.

Alex noted that emergency relief with a community focus is likely to be more sustainable and effective:

> *When we think of food insecurity, we tend to think of vulnerable groups and developing responses to assist those vulnerable groups. But what we sometimes forget is that this is not a holistic approach, it only helps a particular section of the community at a particular point in time. A whole of community response means the community can respond to changing needs and changing demographics.*

The COOLmob team are currently organising a community food summit to begin the conversation about developing and strengthening the Alice Springs food system. The food summit aims to bring together the different stakeholders in the local food system, including the large supermarket chains, local producers, community groups, NGOs, advocacy groups and government.

Community and capacity

Marg Reilly also emphasises the need for community-centred responses to food insecurity. Marg has worked with a number of domestic and international agencies and her views are backed by more than 27 years experience as a community development worker, most of it spent in the field in Central Australia. She is currently exploring initiatives to address food insecurity in flexible, creative and resourceful ways.

Noting Alice Springs' high reliance on food imported from elsewhere, Marg believes the town is among the most food vulnerable in Australia and needs longer term strategies:

> *It is important that we begin to build our inner resilience as a community, not only to better support vulnerable families but also to ensure we can provide for ourselves in the event of natural disasters or prices rises.*

Marg is investigating the sustainability of a food-share system. It involves the creation of a community space where people can gather, share, learn and acquire food relief in a dignifying and strengths-based way. She would like to see in the community 'a recognition that although people may have no money in their pocket, they still have a great deal to give and to share'.

'All people are of value to our community,' Marg insists. By coming up with 'local solutions to local problems,' she says, 'we can help restore a sense of pride and hope for food-insecure families. We hope that a food-share system in our community would help achieve this.'

The food-share system would involve growing and sourcing local produce in Alice Springs, enabling food-insecure families to purchase food through a bartering system. In this community space, Marg explains, the unit of exchange for food 'wouldn't have to be money … it could be things such as the telling of a traditional story, turning the compost for a period of time, or simply donating a bag of tin cans'.

The community space could also incorporate food education classes such as the Red Cross FOODcents program. Over half of the survey respondents indicated that they felt they needed to know more about making healthy meals, a comment also borne out in the wider study (King et al., 2012). Marg explains that 'there is a need for emergency relief and education initiatives to match the needs of our community'. At the conclusion of the food workshops and cooking classes, she says, she would like to:

> *give people such things as a flour drum cooker they can use outside to cook. Aboriginal people like to cook outside with their family. We also plan to run wicking garden bed workshops using old refrigerators as these are self sustaining. When people travel to remote communities for funerals and family business the plants will continue to thrive.*

Other ideas in discussion include an 'adopt a garden' project where gardens can be used by the local community to grow food. Marg observes:

> *Ideas such as these get people out of their homes meeting and interacting with one another, reducing social isolation and breaking down racial and cultural barriers. These types of projects would help to build our inner resilience as a community, foster human kindness and help to reduce some of the stressors in people's lives.*

While the ideals of community emergency relief services are commendable, it is important to remember that although the desire for community is, as Young (1990) points out, an 'understandable dream' it is 'politically problematic' and no less complex than the multi-layered

impoverishment it seeks to address. How the ideals of community can translate into real change for mothers like Dulcie who must conceal food for the baby every day, or for Paul, who feels deep shame watching his children go hungry, is yet to be seen. Community responses are vitally important, but not necessarily of greater importance than the humble $20 food voucher, a smile and 'a yarn'.

It is also important to acknowledge the significance of inner resilience and resourcefulness so clearly demonstrated by respondents. While emergency relief programs may help to address immediate need, it is the internal resources of individuals and the community that will truly ameliorate that need. People like Dulcie and Paul do, nonetheless, need our help to question the system, advocate for improvements, and wholeheartedly support attempts to test alternatives.

The national data highlights that the themes around food insecurity featuring so prominently in the Central Australian Aboriginal experience also extend to the wider Australian community. While Central Australia may be unique in some respects, the need for increased income support payments alongside a more diverse and local range of strategies to address food insecurity is clearly felt by families across the country. Perhaps the Aboriginal concept of *ngapartji ngapartji* can in turn be extended to the national context. Through collaboration and creating an environment where we can all—stakeholders, clients, and communities—contribute something, we can begin to approach emergency relief in the spirit of *ngapartji ngapartji*. That, in Rhonda's words, is 'not simply about taking, but also about giving in equal proportion'.

AUTHOR

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4

Something old, something new: building food-resilient communities

A new narrative about Australia's food system is emerging, argues *LEAH GALVIN*. It's a story with implications all along the food chain, from paddock to plate. Drawing on her experience in a rural Victorian service, as well as global trends, this essay examines some of the forces shaping our future ability to make, move and manage food.

Let's name it!

Let's dive straight in, get to the tough stuff. In my world, using the *strengths-based approach,* naming the problem is an important component of my work. When we know what the challenges are we can get busy with solutions. Several big issues are converging to create a new narrative about our food system in Australia with impacts all along our food chain, from the paddock (which is increasingly overseas) to the kitchen table. The data demonstrating how many people are food insecure in our communities is already compelling and certainly a call to action for all levels of government. The companion story is the impact that climate change, particularly extreme weather events and drought or chronic water scarcity, has

on our capacity to provide food for our communities and nation over the longer term. The extra chapter in this narrative concerns increasing oil prices. As this resource becomes depleted over the next ten to 15 years, in a country with a fuel-dependent food system, the potential impacts call for a serious look at how we can build resilience in local communities, neighbourhoods and households to respond to these challenges.

But first the personal. Over ten years ago, a research project as an honours student led me to look at possible causes of food insecurity among single parents, mostly women. Their stories showed the struggle to manage care for their children, including eating well, on a low income. Anglicare Australia's 2012 national food insecurity research shows that for this group in our communities unfortunately the struggle continues. What I heard all those years ago was also the incredible coping skills and techniques parents used to juggle tight budgets and still eat well. For many years my professional work around food security, grounded by their stories, focused on trying to influence the demand side of food security: to positively influence what people were eating and the choices they were making in a way that strengthened connection within community. Food is a great way to bring people together; we all need to eat and also our right to food is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet while this work was rewarding, I kept coming up against the reality that food security—at a household and individual level—is as much determined by what is available in the local shops and how easily people can get there as it is by people's choices, skills, knowledge and confidence. Not surprisingly this is exactly what we found in Anglicare's national research. Transport, distance to the shops and lack of variety and quality of food in local neighbourhoods are still key determinants of individual and household food security. It is good to have long-held anecdotal experience affirmed through the findings of national research. But it is not enough. Perhaps now we can acknowledge a new paradigm is required—that the best skills can't change what people eat if they can't get to where healthy food is available, or can't afford to buy it. As it is the wider system that influences these factors, this is where new thinking is needed.

The story behind food insecurity

Over the years I have had literally hundreds of conversations with people who are of course curious about how it can be that in a land of apparent food abundance so many are still struggling to access healthy food regularly. Several years ago this theme of access began emerging through

research that looked closely at the supply (what is available) and access (physical and economic) factors in our food system. In this essay I am sharing some of this research, the things that really got me thinking, plus some of the other important risks to our food system that should now set the scene for policy makers to look beyond 'demand' to consider the bigger food system and how it will provide for the entire community into the future.

A recent survey by ANUpoll of 5 000 households found that 13 per cent of households were unable to afford to eat the healthy food they know they should eat (Lockie & Pietsch, 2012). Using the widely acknowledged Food and Agriculture Organization definition for food security—'when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2002)—the ANUpoll finding means these households are food insecure and that food insecurity is occurring at much higher rates than governments are conceding (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2012c). Another piece of research conducted in emergency relief agencies across Australia found that they are experiencing an overall increasing demand for support (one in eight agencies report an increase of 30 per cent in the last 12 months and 85 per cent report having insufficient food to meet demand). For the first time, low-income, working households are the fastest growing group of people needing support; historically, emergency relief clients have been from welfare-dependent, not employed, households (Foodbank, 2012).

Large adult population surveys often use a more narrow definition and not surprisingly find rates of food insecurity vary widely; it is higher in areas of lower income, higher in rural versus metropolitan areas, and women are more vulnerable than men (Department of Health, 2011b). There is a knock-on effect right across our communities when people go without healthy food: they tend to experience higher levels of poor health, both physical and mental; have higher rates of chronic diseases (Burns, 2004) and, disturbingly, children who are food insecure experience long-term effects on their physical development and behavioural outcomes (Ramsey et al., 2011). The rate of food insecurity among children and the focus on their experience is a significant finding of the Anglicare research (King et al., 2012). On top of these health outcomes are the social impacts. People who are struggling to access sufficient healthy food are frequently also socially excluded (Babbington & Donato-Hunt, 2007). Consider for a moment the child who can't invite school friends home after school for a play, because there is nothing to offer and mum and dad need to make

the food last as long as possible. Or think of the very normal invitation you might receive to a social event where 'bring a plate' is suggested; in the food insecure household the invitation is declined. For these socially-excluded households there is great shame and anxiety around food, again uncovered in Anglicare's 2012 national food insecurity research (King et al., 2012). Sadly the children being raised by the parents who participated in our study knew they were missing out because of the lack of food available to them.

The context in which households and individuals are going without food across Australia is a food system that itself may be vulnerable. In Australia we think of ourselves as a farming nation and relatively self sufficient when it comes to food, with perhaps imports of gourmet international cultural foods the exception. Some recent evidence challenges this paradigm. For two of the first ten years of this century we were net importers of grain due to greatly reduced yields (Butler, 2009). If you are like me, and think of vast plains of grain as a typical agricultural landscape here in Australia, this is challenging. In the last five years we have also gone from being exporters to net importers of vegetables (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2012a), with much of the manufacturing and processing of foods now occurring offshore. This trend is expanding, resulting in lost jobs both on farms and in the manufacturing sector, hitting rural and regional communities hardest. So we are already seeing challenges to our ability to grow food for ourselves.

Climate change and how it manifests will greatly impact our ability as a nation to produce sufficient food in the future. The Climate Commission (2011) and the CSIRO (cited in the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering & Innovation Council Independent Working Group, 2007) predict greater water scarcity in dry to arid areas including southern Australia, which is responsible for producing a large proportion of Australia's fresh food in the spring and summer. In tropical and subtropical regions of Australia, more frequent extreme weather events such as cyclones and floods will also seriously affect the availability of food. An interrupted supply of bananas in recent years, caused by a cyclone, is a good example of the impact of extreme weather that we can unfortunately expect to see more frequently. Often national reports, including the recent National Food Plan green paper, state that Australia's food supply is currently secure, though other data sources suggest this not the case for our future. The new Global Food Security Index 2012 (www.foodsecurityindex.eiu.com) shows that Australia's capacity to grow food has a volatility of around 20 per cent, up or down in any given year depending on growing conditions. This aligns closely with the findings from modelling cited in a report for the Prime

Minister which project declines in food production in Australia of 15 per cent or more (Prime Minister's Science, Engineering & Innovation Council, 2010). This significant fluctuation in the amount of food grown in Australia is more evidence of the nation's food supply vulnerability.

So what does this look like in rural and regional Victoria? I can share the story of what I see and hear in my region. I live very close to the Harcourt Valley, an apple and stone-fruit growing area in Central Victoria and unfortunately a good example of our nation's food supply vulnerability. In the last ten years the number of growers in the region has halved. During the drought years, farmers received only 30 per cent of their normal water allocation and production dropped by 50 per cent. Imagine losing half of your family's income and still having to get by: it's really tough. For each farmer who left over the last decade there were individual tipping points—the plague of lorikeets who normally feast on flowering gums but came in their hundreds of thousands to destroy the forming fruit, and extreme weather events such as hailstorms that ruined crops over the course of two years are some examples. For many, farming became too hard. Farmers encouraged their children to undertake other training, pursue other livelihoods, rather than be farmers. Generational farmers (many third, fourth or fifth generation) walked off the land, the place where they had been raised as children and had always earned their living. When the drought finally broke farmers were again coping with extreme weather, this time excessive rainfall bringing a new set of pests and fungal diseases. Some managed a good season only to find prices had bottomed out and did not cover the costs of production. The financial pressures took their toll. More farmers left. But from the gloom and struggle came preparations for the next period of water scarcity with the local water catchment authorities planning investment in a closed pipe system for transporting water and reducing evaporation losses. This investment in water security offers improved long-term prospects for farmers and also opportunities to diversify their horticultural activities. With good soils and improved water security the local farming sector is building its resilience. Likewise connections with local farmers' markets have offered some growers the chance to increase their margins and reconnect with local communities where they have uncovered an increasing interest in their food and lives. In the words of the United States food activist Mark Winne (2008), 'If chefs are the new rockstars farmers are the lead guitarist'. Everyone wants to know one.

Just as the Harcourt Valley example shows that weather impacts on food production, the supply chain is also vulnerable to weather events. Consider for a moment the loss of infrastructure in communities affected

by cyclones and bushfires in recent years. Our highly centralised food system is dominated by the large supermarkets (75 cents in every grocery dollar is spent in supermarkets) and relies on a small number of distribution centres in each state. It comprises a long supply chain with food travelling vast distances to reach markets or retail outlets. The supply chain itself carries a couple of days' food on it at any one time (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2012c). With only a few days' supply of fresh food stock kept in each supermarket, and increasing occurrences of extreme weather events and disruptions to transport routes, many communities are in a potentially vulnerable situation. The food insecurity research found that personal transport issues were also a strong determinant of food security. People who had to walk for longer than five minutes to get to the shops, did not have their own car, or were not able to afford the costs of public transport, have a higher risk of food insecurity. So an overreliance on the supermarkets as providers of our food is already problematic for many.

The other potentially weak link in our food system is its reliance on fossil fuels—oil—all along the food production and supply chain: an uncomfortable fact, frequently glossed over in policy discussion. Often described as 'inputs pressure', increasing oil prices are a threat to our food security. In 2010 the International Energy Agency predicted an increasing gap between supply and demand of oil in the future (International Energy Agency, 2010); this means prices go up. For some policy makers biofuels (fuel produced from grains and other crops normally grown for eating) seem like the answer to the fossil fuel dilemma, but this is not a long-term solution, as the United States experience shows. In 2007, extreme international grain shortages, shortages of staples such as potatoes and corn in the United States and massive food price spikes resulted from the diversion of large tracts of American farmland from food production to biofuels (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2008). Imagine how many hectares of food would have to be diverted from the food supply just to fuel our cars; this not a workable solution. Likewise, modelling undertaken by Melbourne and Deakin Universities in partnership with the CSIRO shows diverting land to *fuel-growing* instead of food-growing, coupled with the predicted impacts of climate change, may result in large food deficits in local production, particularly of fruit and vegetables (Donovan, Larsen & McWhinnie, 2011). Considering how we can use less fuel to both produce and transport our food (including all the household trips to the supermarket), merits serious and urgent effort from policy makers at all levels of government. Transport of food and transporting people to get to food will potentially be constrained by these increasing costs. The true challenge presented by all of this is that the status quo

food system is unlikely to be a successful model for achieving food security even in the medium term, so considering ways in which we can build more food-resilient communities and neighbourhoods is an important undertaking.

What it means to build resilience in communities

In the past, resilience building has focused on the capacity of communities to absorb shocks and still function. This assessment is no longer sufficient. What is required in the face of great change predicted through shifts in climate patterns is a focus on the capacity for renewal, reorganisation and development that adapts to new conditions. Resilience is not just about how we bounce back but rather how we respond to future challenges predicted to occur with greater frequency. For social-ecological systems the disturbances have the potential to create opportunities for new innovation and this response is critical because in vulnerable systems small disturbances can cause dramatic social consequences. Here in Victoria we of course saw this firsthand with communities and farms devastated by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. The refencing and replanting of agricultural land so that affected farmers could restart their businesses took months. In resilience building the assumption is that people who are vulnerable now will be more vulnerable in the future without good planning and innovation (Folke, 2006).

Assessing the resilience of communities, households and individuals should identify the strengths, resources and capacity to overcome difficult challenges and endeavour to build a local system that relies less on external intervention because there is sufficient community capacity. Importantly communities must understand that returning to the status quo after a crisis is not progress and leaves them vulnerable. Following a crisis, ideally communities would respond to change adaptively, that is, prepare for their future, rather than return to and continue with pre-existing conditions (Maguire & Cartwright, 2008). Often restoring normal function is seen as a sign of resilience but we need to expect more.

Resilience and food

The high numbers of people already experiencing food insecurity coupled with an already vulnerable food system paints a somewhat gloomy story, however the last ten years has taught us much about food within regions, cities, townships and neighbourhoods. As a result we are starting to have a better understanding of possible responses to these challenges: responses

that build resilience into local food systems. While farming, agribusiness and supermarkets will continue to be part of our larger food system, communities should have the resources, skills and confidence to respond locally to the challenges and also understand why this is important. The market system already fails many in our communities—despite the assurances of economists and commentators that the market is best left to solve every economic and social dilemma. Relying solely on the market to respond to food security challenges may also result in adjustments that are not truly inclusive and which do not consider all. When we plan communities in a 'food-sensitive manner', that is, by considering ongoing access, we should take the time to consider other important objectives for the food system: health and fairness, sustainability and environmental impacts, securing livelihoods and opportunities (including training pathways) and the capacity to bolster community and amenity (Donovan, Larsen & McWhinnie, 2011).

Healthy eating and individual and household food-security resilience

Research (Hume et al., 2007) clearly demonstrates the factors that offer resilience for households to continue to eat well despite low income. This research challenges the myth that all low-income households eat poorly and that they actually prefer unhealthy foods. Households that still eat well despite their low income have several factors present to make them more resilient. They include:

- individual factors. Resilient women report having a high level of confidence to stick with healthy choices, and a preference for eating fruit and vegetables. This confidence comes in part from good preparation and cooking skills, meal-planning strategies and—despite commonly held misperceptions—a good knowledge of healthy food. People participating in the food insecurity study cited skills and knowledge as strong determinants of their food security
- social factors. Resilient women have a high level of support from family and friends in relationship to healthy eating, thereby normalising consumption of healthier foods
- physical environment factors. Resilient households have good food storage capacity and access to affordable healthy food in their neighbourhoods, notably within walking distance, and the match between their expectations and food quality was high. Accessibility, that is, having fresh food such as fruit and vegetables available in neighbourhoods, and affordability have direct relationships with

eating well (Kamphuis et al., 2006). People participating in our food research confirmed this finding by stating that the quality, variety and easy physical access to affordable food impacted their ability to be food secure.

While this research is limited to women only, they are still the predominant gatekeepers of family eating so the research has much wider implications. Single parent households, most often headed by women, were identified in the Anglicare food insecurity study as a very vulnerable group, so findings on resilient women are useful to consider in policy development. Significantly, the resilience findings show poor diet is not an inevitable outcome of being in a low-income household and also identify potential modifiers on which community level action can be focused. So if we know skills, knowledge, supportive social environments and easy physical access to healthy affordable food ensure more people eat well, despite their household income, we can apply the resilience lens to these factors to find long-term ways to increase food security in local communities.

Four pillars of resilience: lessons for building food-resilient communities

The Australian Social Inclusion Board (2009) offers a useful framework for resilience building that we can apply to our food system. Coupled with the theory of community resilience it is possible to envisage what a food-resilient community may look like. Broadly there are four pillars that we could use to frame building food-resilient communities: economic development, social capital, information and communications, and community competence.

In food-resilient communities **economic development** is aimed at ensuring diverse and sustainable sources of prosperity all along the food chain, from the farm to the plate. This means securing livelihoods through training pathways and employment opportunities and sustainable, high quality economic infrastructure that provides transport and storage options for food as well as options for communities to reach food.

Strong communities are founded on strong **social capital**—meaning good networks, community skills and respected community leadership. Social and economic networks within the communities and regions create an environment for collaboration and help to indentify the strengths of the communities to respond to challenges. Strong social capital also helps to prioritise action and reduce the potential for duplication. The Local

Food Policy Coalition model of North America is worthy of replication. The role of the coalitions is to research, build understanding and prioritise action in local communities (Winne, 2008) and to provide leadership and drive change. Using truly inclusive processes and high levels of citizen engagement in building solutions will create a legacy and longevity in solutions. One of the key considerations for local policy coalitions is to create value in local farming and community-grown food, by building community pride and optimism about being able to self determine and being more resilient. The pride in local food shown by people living in Tasmania is a great example of how communities can better value locally grown food.

During any transformational change **information and communications** are critical to explaining *how and why* change is necessary and to allow the community to actively participate. Well-established channels of communication also serve communities in times of crisis, such as extreme weather events. Rather than creating a whole new layer to increase awareness of why supporting a local food system will be important in the future, initiatives can build on how people usually spread the word, and how they connect with each other.

For change to blossom in communities a tradition of self-reliance combined with capacity to secure resources is necessary and often referred to as **community competence (**Norris et al., 2008). Anything that encourages effective collaboration, coming together and forming a shared vision for the local food future increases the number of households and communities engaged in change. A diversity of well-resourced, well-linked community organisations can help ensure the reach into the community and a good cross-section of community members and sectors to achieve the desired change. The decision making and systems which enable and facilitate rapid and flexible responses—sometimes referred to as governance—increase accountability and trust. These are important attributes to keep community engaged and contributing. Competence is of course founded on strong education and innovation; these will foster the necessary workforce and community skills, knowledge and confidence to build local food resilience.

Local food economies: bringing people and food-growing together

Using the framework of the Australian Social Inclusion Board discussed above, social and economic networks that build collaboration, identify community strengths and emphasise citizen engagement are among the

high priorities for creating a legacy of food security. In the next part of this essay I'd like to turn to the strategies and real-life examples for creating such a legacy: how community resilience building can also grow food resilience. Not all are new ideas; we know of, and have used, some strategies before and a number of communities practise them around Australia.

Currently our food system is characterised by a concentration and reliance on food from supermarkets (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2012c) and a decreasing number of fruit and vegetable and other fresh food retailers in strip shops or neighbourhoods. This change to food availability means a lot of people live in 'food deserts'—more than 500 metres from shops or transport to shops—making them more vulnerable to food insecurity. New food system options should make a priority of moving food into neighbourhoods or getting people to where healthy affordable food sources are available.

What can communities and individuals do for themselves?

Incorporating more food-growing where people live is a strategy likely to improve access to affordable food and research tells us that it means people eat more healthily (Alaimo et al., 2008), a common sense finding. If you grow it you will eat it! Australia has a long history of food-growing during times of crisis and there has always been a core group of the community who have continued to grow their own food even while trends have come and gone. The Victory Gardens of the Second World War, encouraged by the federal government and supported by other levels of government (Gaynor, 2006), resulted in great volumes of fruit and vegetables being grown in times of shortages. It encouraged neighbours and those with skills to share them and build the capacity of all. Beyond the production of more healthy food it built strong unity and encouraged a culture of sharing and reducing waste in the community.

Research conducted across Australia recently (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, 2012) shows that this is not a historical quirk: 53 per cent of households are growing or raising some of their own food, mostly fruit and vegetables, as a way to cope with increasing food prices. The majority, 59 per cent, have started growing food in the last five years and 19 per cent in the last 12 months. This research demonstrates people's level of interest in producing their own food and the community's increasing inclination to do so: surely a clear resilience strategy.

To expand the opportunities of *urban agriculture* we could consider all community open spaces and schools as community resources and places to grow food together, but this requires legislative support. Likewise larger spaces within towns and cities provide opportunities to grow food for commercial purposes. These approaches are not new and have been a successful part of building food resilience elsewhere around the world, including in Vancouver (Vancouver Urban Agriculture Network, 2012) and even on the rooftops of buildings in large cities such as New York and Paris (Carrot City, 2012). Getting food into neighbourhoods that are *food deserts* requires all options to be explored. The Geelong example of Food Skil, a community fruit and vegetable shop in a public housing area, which had poor physical access to healthy food, and which is now growing its own produce and creating training opportunities, is a great model for replication (Food Skil, 2012). There are a multitude of successful approaches that, if prioritised and resourced, are available to communities to assess for their suitability: think home delivery box programs through buying co-ops, community-supported agriculture such as the Food Connect model in Brisbane and even community transport for areas where food insecurity rates are high and public transport provision is inadequate.

Bringing producers and food hubs together

To address the food system upstream requires consideration of the infrastructure and distribution methods that can support a more regional approach. Again we look to the northern hemisphere where regional food hubs support small and medium-sized farmers by creating new markets through an *upscaled* cooperative model, which aggregates the yields from small and medium farmers. Over 170 food hubs in the United States close the gap between the aspirations of farmers looking for new local markets and people looking to eat locally produced food. In Australia the trend is similar with the number of farmers' markets doubling between 2004 and 2011 to more than 150, according to the Australian Farmers' Markets Association (2012), with 8 per cent of fresh produce now being bought through these markets (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2012a).

Farmers' markets or hubs strengthen local food economies and livelihoods and over time decrease reliance on food grown long distances from where it is eaten. In some areas of Australia—for example, Central Victoria, Northern New South Wales and Tasmania—soil and microclimate are sufficient to create opportunities for the food needed to fuel an active healthy life to be produced regionally. The food hub model challenges the

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current food system paradigm in several ways including increasing farm incomes and improving access to locally produced food (Schmidt et al., 2011).

Research on the food hub model (Western Rural Development Center, 2012) shows producers are valued business partners instead of just interchangeable suppliers, as may normally be the case. Hubs are about a commitment to small and medium producers where possible, serving to coordinate, aggregate, distribute, and market to local retailers, food that is locally and regionally grown by many producers. The produce can also be sold through farmers' markets, home delivery box programs and to institutional buyers such as hospitals.

The model supports small-scale farmers to meet produce requirements and matches them with technical partners. Because each hub is formed in response to local needs and frequently offers a range of services to producers, buyers and the wider community, they help support the unique characteristics of the communities they spring from: securing local jobs for the local economy, creating pride in local food and increased connection between farmers and 'eaters', as well as producing positive social and environmental impacts. All of these help build awareness of how food is grown and promote sustainable practices (Western Rural Development Center, 2012).

I am not suggesting that food hubs will replace the existing larger system, but if economic diversity is the key to resilient food systems, other successful international models should be actively supported and pursued. Early feasibility work being undertaken in the peri-urban fringe of Melbourne, funded by a VicHealth Innovation Grant, looks promising. Support for establishing hubs could be undertaken by all levels of government and included in the regional strategies of the National Food Plan currently being formulated.

Using social capital and community competence for food security

The food hub model discussed above confirms links between food, social capital and community competence. Recent research in South Australia has verified the importance of using local knowledge and evidence in developing policy responses—especially to improve food security at a community level (Bastian & Coveney, 2011). Where communities are involved in building solutions to overcome local food security barriers and develop food resilience, the research suggests that greater participation,

better understanding of the context, and acknowledgment of those who are already contributing is a natural consequence. This engagement and resultant collaboration is a potent driver of change, in households, neighbourhoods and communities. I have seen this in action in the Bendigo community where I work. Here a network of 23 community gardens links with a group of volunteers running the local accredited farmers' market, and a group of regional traders, retailers and producers (with over 110 members) and students from Latrobe University, to form a sophisticated network of people advocating for a stronger local food economy, more community food-growing and for the community to value what is locally grown.

Building resilient food systems starts with understanding what is available and who is doing what, and ascertaining who might be good to include in planning for change; often this process is referred to as 'mapping'. When the local situation is better understood local food coalitions can provide leadership, conduct feasibility studies, build understanding and establish partnerships to respond to local findings about why people are food insecure and how the local food economy can be strengthened. Examples of key documents that acknowledge this *systems* need for detailed mapping are *Australian food and nutrition 2012* (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012), *Food for all Tasmanians* (Tasmanian Food Security Council, 2012) and the *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2011–2015* (Department of Health, 2011a). The Tasmanian food security strategy shows an understanding that community plays an important role in responding to future challenges alongside industry. Likewise the *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan* has a large investment, through the Prevention Community Initiative, in 14 local governments to prioritise action at a local level. It emphasises the important interconnection between skills, knowledge and capacity along with physical and economic access to food (Department of Health, 2011a & 2012).

Listen to the grapevine: using local information and communication channels

Earlier in this essay I looked at how important communication is during moments of crisis and while the community adapts to the change required. Some simple messages can help support regional and local food systems including emphasis on the value of locally produced food and farming. Effective communication and the provision of reliable information needs to take into account both how people might access information and varying literacy levels. Getting the word out about where healthy

food is available and about opportunities to build skills and confidence will support transformative action for communities. A starting point for building communication is research to uncover how people in different communities get their information and how to exploit these methods for building food resilience. Peer educators and community champions can also raise awareness and build citizen engagement through their networks and leadership.

Where does the food chain take us?

While our current food system does provide for most in the community, we know it does not provide for all. And the number of people who need support to address their individual and household food insecurity is growing every year. The food system itself may also be quite vulnerable in the face of climate change and its dependence on oil. Addressing these risks to our food security requires approaches that grow resilience in the food system at the neighbourhood, community and regional levels and build capacity to respond to the challenges in the longer term. What we also know is that good processes, which engage the community and respond to community needs and preferences, will uncover strong local solutions and get people involved. In addition many strategies and responses are tried and tested, and are likely to be successful, though continuing innovation will also be important. What is not necessarily evident in the strategic policies and programs of all levels of government across Australia is the consistent prioritisation of support for these regional and local responses. Funding is ad hoc or often short term—pilot funding being common—and is provided only in one area or region rather than across all regions. For lasting solutions we need a policy environment that will support and drive long-term investment, because responding at a community level is as important as acting at the national and state level.

In the immediate future we have an opportunity to give greater consideration to the role of communities in building food resilience. Community is not present in the National Food Plan green paper (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2012b). While support for industry should always be part of such a policy, it is time that food policy gave priority to community responses, accompanied by long-term investment to allow the transformation that will be required. In the current version of the green paper this is minimised and no actions beyond financial management are included to address individual and household involvement (Food Alliance, 2012). In the green paper the view that Australia is food secure is overly simplistic as it assesses only the supply of

food, fails to acknowledge the real levels of food insecurity in households across Australia and does not sufficiently acknowledge the vulnerabilities to our food supply that are likely to result from climate change and other risks. I have proposed some approaches in this essay that I believe merit policy support. While not exhaustive they should inspire the writers of the proposed National Food Plan white paper to address omissions particularly a lack of inclusion of communities as part of responding to future challenges.

AUTHOR

Leah Galvin has a background in public health nutrition and has been involved in food security and food resilience projects for 11 years. Working with state and local governments, community health and now as Manager of Social Policy and Advocacy at St Luke's Anglicare, Leah's interest is in distilling the evidence and community learning about food resilience to find how local governments and local partnerships can facilitate action. Her work is grounded in the 'kitchen table' issues for vulnerable households and the impact of climate change on wider food supply issues. In 2011 she won a VicHealth Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Promotion. Leah lives in Central Victoria with her family, is a keen baker and novice food grower. You can follow her on twitter @leah_galvin

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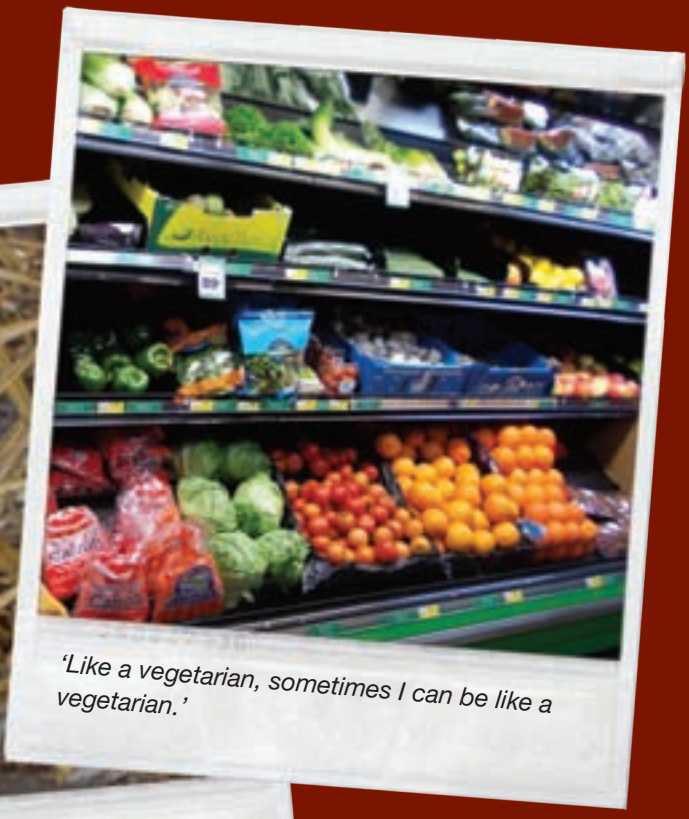
'I miss out sometimes. So that they can have a bit more.'



'Like a vegetarian, sometimes I can be like a vegetarian.'

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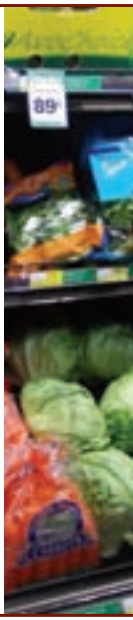
5

How parents seeking emergency relief make and maintain food meanings

After the statistics and the deprivation revealed by Anglicare's food insecurity study *SEZ WILKS* pauses for a close-up look at three mothers' lives. Each has had reason to use Anglicare Victoria's emergency relief services yet all manage, for the most part, to get by. The women's commitment is strong but their capacity, precarious. They talk of the struggles and strategies to ensure food is on the table or in the lunch box and the small moments in parenting—school holidays, celebrations, food refusal and social obligations—that can unravel their best efforts.



Background to food and meaning

More than just sustenance, food creates and upholds social bonds and cultural differences and defines the roles and routines of everyday life. Food influences attitudes and traditions at individual, family and community levels and impacts across all ages, living conditions and locations. Food meanings emerge through the way we shop, cook,

store, serve and share food within our immediate and extended families and in our broader community.

Food insecurity occurs whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain (Radimer, 2002). For families experiencing food insecurity, hard choices become part of daily routine as parents decide what food is consumed, how it is acquired and prepared, who shares it, and importantly, who eats first—or at all. Food choices can alter or uphold desired food meanings, and are made all the more significant when options are limited by income and other factors.

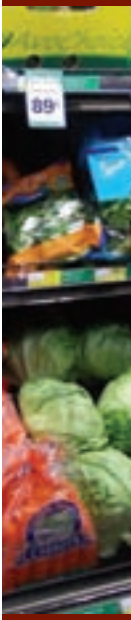
Through mothers' reports (provided to the author in interview), this essay discusses the meaning of food in three families who have attended Anglicare Victoria's metropolitan emergency relief centre in Fitzroy. It highlights the strategies mothers employ to ensure children are adequately fed and to safeguard the important role of food in their family's daily life. The essay describes mothers' patterns of accessing emergency food relief, their feelings about food as well as their food shopping, storage, preparation and cooking practices. The factors that shape mothers' food routines such as income, special occasions and children's food preferences are also examined.

Recent research by Anglicare Victoria (Wise & Wilks, 2012) and Anglicare Australia (King et al., 2012) provides the context for mothers' stories. Anglicare Victoria's *Hardship survey* 2012 involved 187 people accessing emergency food relief. The *Hardship survey* asks about essential items that no one in Australia should go without. Clients generally, but particularly single parents, were found to make trade-offs between food and other essential items, prioritising food in their choices. Significantly fewer clients go without a substantial meal at least once a day than miss out on non-food items such as: $500 in savings for an emergency; an annual week-long holiday; home contents or comprehensive car insurance; essential dental treatment and prescription medicine (Wise & Wilks, 2012, p. 4). This is especially so for single parents: fewer single parents went without a substantial meal each day because they could not afford it compared to Newstart Allowance and Disability Support Pension recipients (Wise & Wilks, 2012, p. 6).

The Anglicare study of food insecurity (King et al., 2012) develops this picture further, revealing differences between parents' and children's food situations. The study suggests that parents not only make food a priority, but make personal sacrifices so that their children can eat. The study of 590 adults found that the typical emergency relief client is female, heads a single parent household and strives to protect her children from the most

severe experience of food insecurity (King et al., 2012, p. 27). It describes patterns whereby parents skip meals more frequently than children, cut meal sizes and go hungry in order for their children to eat (King et al., 2012).

The personal stories presented in this essay echo the findings from research. Tien, aged 36, Andrea, 48, and Julie, 49, are all mothers living with their children in Melbourne's inner north. Through the women's stories, we come to understand the different meanings food holds for parents seeking emergency relief—as an essential expense, as nourishment, as a signifier of culture and special occasions and as an indicator of freedom of choice. We try not to present the 'most desperate' or the most food deprived; many of the other essays bring glimpses of extreme hardship and the strategies that go with it. Rather, this essay is a close-up of food provision. It shows how the capacity to provide and choose is quintessentially human and how, even in strained circumstances, it brings joy, satisfaction and dignity. It also illustrates the fragility of these profound but simple benefits, which, without emergency relief and other support, can be easily lost.



Accessing emergency relief

Tien, Andrea and Julie have all accessed Anglicare Victoria's emergency relief centre for food on more than one occasion, typically when they ran out of money for food. Julie is a long-term emergency relief client who has been 'coming for years'. Julie visits roughly once a month. In the past Julie had also utilised soup kitchens, but found them too violent. Tien and her husband heard about emergency relief when volunteering for their local church and use the service on an as-needed basis:

> *Sometimes, if not enough money, I come by emergency* [relief]. *If they come bill,* [all at] *one time. You need to pay the money now on the food,* [so I] *come to ask* [for] *food.*

Andrea had only accessed emergency relief from Anglicare Victoria on two occasions, although she has accessed similar services run by other organisations.

Who's in your food family?

Tien, Andrea and Julie each have a unique 'food family'. In some cases, who shares their food extends beyond their immediate family members.

Andrea, a single parent, lives and shares food strictly with her two teenage daughters. Tien and Julie share their food with people beyond their immediate family members. Tien shares food with her husband and four children under 12 years, but occasionally also cooks for families and friends in her Vietnamese community. Julie lives with her 22-year-old daughter, but also cares for her elderly mother and these two take it in turns to buy food, which they share together watching daytime television:

> *I buy the rolls for me mum. When it comes to me mum, she has a turn to buy them herself. We have turns.*

Julie also provides food for her neighbours and their two children, aged seven and nine. Julie views her neighbours and their two young boys as her extended family—her neighbours call her 'Mum' and she considers their kids her grandchildren:

> *Two kids: one is nine and one is seven. When they're cheeky I say, 'No food'. They call me Nanna. I look after them. I love them.*

Feelings about food

Despite needing to access food relief on a semi-regular basis, food had a positive meaning for these women. All three mothers associated cooking and sharing food with happy feelings. Julie is an enthusiastic cook who likes to share her cooking knowledge with others. A few years ago, she undertook cooking classes offered by a local community organisation:

> *At the Brotherhood of St Laurence we used to have cooking lessons. Half of the time I used to bring a cheesecake home for the kids. The French cheesecake, I used to put bananas on it ... Cakes with strawberry and cream underneath and then you try to talk to people about it and try to teach them.*

Julie developed her food skills from a young age. She reflected on how her mother taught her how to make a thick tomato sauce. Julie's family is of Italian-Maltese heritage and her mother's tomato sauce served as a main accompaniment to most of the dishes she cooked. When visiting her father, Julie would add this sauce to help make his rudimentary cooking more palatable, describing how her father would 'go off the handle' when she did.

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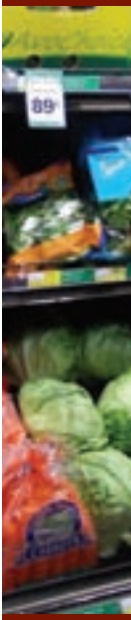
Julie's desire to impart her cooking skills was frequently a point of conflict between Julie and her father. Julie says the food situation when she was growing up was insecure, 'the same way' as it is for her now. Her father lacked the knowledge and skills to make appropriate food choices:

> *Once my dad started putting snails, oysters and then mussels into a cake. The* [marinara] *mix. And he goes, 'I might just put some salmon', and I said, 'Bull! You gonna put the cream on top too, Dad?'. He goes, 'Yeah'. I said, 'I'll show you how to make a cake',* [but] *he didn't trust me with the eggs or the water—he turned the water off.*

In spite of these early struggles around food, Julie has persisted in developing her cooking skills and the act of preparing and serving food for her family brings her much joy. 'If I'm home early I will [cook] straight off. Food is wonderful!' she exclaims.



Growing up in Vietnam, Tien also learned how to cook from a young age. She migrated to Australia from Vietnam when she was 22 years old, where she met and married her Vietnamese husband. Tien 'enjoys cooking' and her food routines are strongly influenced by her childhood food experiences: she cooks a mix of Australian and Vietnamese food.

> *When I'm six years old, I already learned* [to cook]. *In Vietnam I always go to school and my family only two, me and my brother. And if my brother cook at lunchtime and I can cook the dinner, because my parents has got work. We can share. If you go to school in morning, you cook dinner. If you go afternoon, you cook lunch.*

Andrea was also born overseas, migrating from Germany with her parents at age four. Andrea is passionate about cooking—'I love cooking, I just love experimenting and I really enjoy it'—and her repertoire is also influenced by her childhood food experiences. In particular, Andrea enjoys cooking the German dishes she grew up with. For Andrea, memories of food are positively connected with a coming together of family:

> *I loved watching Mum cook and I cook a lot of stuff she cooks, too. It was always the time where the family sat together ... the telly went off and we talked and, yeah, it was good. It's always good memories on food, the smells and all of that. It reminds me of when I was younger.*

Andrea tries to replicate this mealtime routine with her own family:

> *I've tried really hard for us to all sit together. Most of the time it's all right. Just us being together for that time. I mean, because they're teenagers, there's so much time on the internet. I've just always had a really good feeling with meals. It's always been a nice sort of time of day. I just sort of try* [to] *carry on a bit of my mother's traditions.*

For all three women, having the skills to cook food for their family was a source of pride. Tien and Andrea have tried to engage their children in cooking, as has Julie with her neighbour's' children, although each of these mothers has experienced differing levels of success and has different expectations and ideas about age-appropriate cooking skills. Tien is frustrated by her kids' unwillingness to learn about cooking and feels the difference between her childhood skill level and her children's most acutely:

> *I tell my daughter—when I was six years old, I can cook! They do nothing. They not help anything. They say, 'When I grow up, I'm better than you. I don't want to cook because* [I've] *got you already. When not got you, I can do that'.*

Andrea's teenage daughters are more receptive. While Andrea still does all the planning, shopping, preparation and cooking of food in her family, she receives occasional help in the kitchen from them:

> *I do it all,* [but] *my daughters help me occasionally, especially* [if] *I'm baking sweets or something, they'll help. They try and help.*

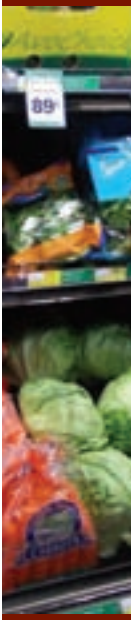
Growing and shopping for food

The mothers mainly shopped for food at large chain supermarkets and fresh produce markets, travelling to and from the shops on foot or by tram. Although the women include different items in their 'standard' food shop, some common factors influence their shopping choices. All strive to ensure some meat and a variety of fresh vegetables are purchased. All try to obtain food at the lowest price and on special and all generally shop to a meal plan.

Tien brings a list with her to make food shopping easier and visits the Queen Victoria Market and specialist Vietnamese grocers in Richmond to supplement her supermarket shopping. Typically, Tien buys meat (chicken or beef) and fresh vegetables and incorporates both Vietnamese foods and local Australian foods into her shop. Tien also frequently buys noodles and pasta because they are simple to cook, but finds that the cheaper noodles look dry and are often broken.

Andrea also shops at the Queen Victoria Market on Saturdays when vendors offer food at the cheapest prices. She supplements her market shop with two supermarket shops per week:

> *When they're selling out. It's so much cheaper. Trays of meat for ten bucks. Because I can afford to cook a nice meal every day. If I went to the supermarket I couldn't do it.*



Andrea tends to buy fresh food and limits the number of ingredients in each dish to save money. Andrea researches recipes before each shop in order to budget for the family's food and shops with a list of ingredients:

> *A lot of fresh food. Pasta sauce—I don't need a lot of stuff to make* [it]. *I'm like the Italians you know, few ingredients, simple and good flavours. I do a lot of research on the internet, recipes and stuff, and work out what I can afford. Magazines and cookbooks, if I come across* [them] *at an op shop or something, but mainly the internet. I get free wi-fi.*

Unlike Julie and Tien who don't grow any food at home, Andrea grows herbs and chillies on her balcony, which add 'beautiful flavouring' to her simple meals.

Growing food was also found to be a strategy applied by respondents in Anglicare's national study of food insecurity (King et al., 2012, p. 84). Several respondents in the study reported growing vegetables and keeping chickens for eggs in order to meet some of their food requirements.

Buying food in bulk

Buying and storing food in bulk was a key strategy to improve the mothers' food situation (see also King et al., 2012, p. 72). Julie stocks up on food each time she shops in order to 'keep the cupboards full'. By comparison, Andrea shops on her own and health issues impact the quantity of food

she can buy in one shop: 'I've got a sore back and I can't carry a lot, so I'll just do little trips'. Andrea's capacity to purchase in bulk is also limited by the small amount of storage space at her house:

> *I get four kilos of chicken mince for ten bucks so it does four meals pretty much. I take advantage of the bulk. I've got a freezer, but it's not massive. I can fit a couple of weeks of meat in there, though. So I don't buy frozen veggies or anything, so there's nothing else in the freezer except meat. I'd love to have more storage, because you can go to places and buy in bulk. I just don't have the room. Even if I had a garage!*

By contrast, Tien feels lucky to live in one of the largest houses in her public housing estate, having moved from a caravan some time ago. The move allowed Tien the opportunity to buy food in bulk and she is enthusiastic about the amount of space for storing food in her house. 'So many space you can put [food] there!' she says. Since moving to her bigger home, Tien has started visiting Costco with a friend every few months. Costco is a warehouse-style supermarket that offers members discounted food and other items in bulk. Like Andrea, Tien can't afford to buy a Costco membership for her family—memberships are priced at $60 per year—and shops there using a friend's membership. This also allows Tien and her friend to share some bulk goods between them:

> *We go to Costco for the supermarket, because everything there* [comes in a] *big box. We come with my friend and we can share ... We share half and half. Sometimes we buy the noodle: one box of noodle only $7. If you buy here, $12. But when everything bigger, you need to share it. But the oil* [is] *cheaper, only $12 for five litres cooking oil. Only $2 or something per litre. And some sugar, only $2.50* [for] *three kilos of sugar at Costco. Sugar or something, sometimes cheaper if you can buy two or three.*

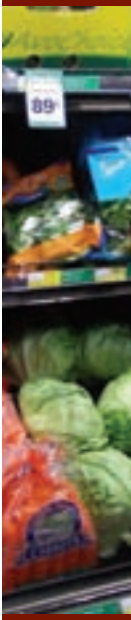
Food routines: making connections and conveying values

Andrea, Tien and Julie all prepare and cook food for their family at home. Julie regularly cooks 'about four or five dishes of spaghetti' for her neighbours and their children. She invites them to eat it in the warmth of her house. Andrea's daughters eat breakfast at home while Andrea packs

their lunch to eat at school. Although the high school they attend has a canteen, Andrea says the food prices are too expensive and her daughters aren't permitted to buy food from there. Andrea cooks with meat four nights a week and cooks vegetarian dishes three nights per week. Like Julie, her vegetarian dishes are usually high in carbohydrate and are often pasta based. Some of Andrea's dinners are inspired by her German traditions, which her daughters like: 'A lot of potato dishes and dumplings and stews and that sort of heavy stuff'.

Like Andrea, Tien's four children also eat breakfast at home each morning and eat a packed lunch at school. Tien usually cooks a separate Australian meal for her children's dinner, which they eat in the late afternoon. Cooking a variety of food is important to Tien and much of her day is spent cooking:

> *Every day I cook a little food. Maybe* [something] *easy in the morning. Lunchtime I cook for them and then that food* [for dinner] *in the afternoon, they don't want to eat the same food.*



Rather than pre-packing lunch for her children, however, Tien delivers it to them personally. The proximity of the children's school to Tien's family home is seen as a significant benefit that ensures her children eat good food. Tien drops her children at school and returns home to cook their lunch, which she brings to them in the middle of the day:

> *Because the school is very close, only five or ten minutes and because I not work, when they go to school I stay home to cook something for them.*

Tien prides herself on her ability to provide variety in her children's lunches. Not all students at her children's school eat a regular lunch, or such a wide variety of food:

> *At school,* [some children] *only eat breakfast ... My children say, 'My friend at school always says, "You are lucky. Every day to eat the different food and the food you like. And always when I open the lunch box friends say 'Wow!'".*

Tien also gets pleasure from sharing the task of cooking with other families. For Tien, sharing Aussie barbeques and Vietnamese food is another way to cut the cost of food as well as a way to build strong friendships, connect to culture and be part of a community:

> *Good for community and we are a member of community and we are now very close. I cook for them, and if I cook this Saturday, other families cook ... take turns. We are very careful with money.*

In summer, Tien and her community sometimes have barbeques in the park:

> *We share money to do barbeque. Ten dollars or 15 dollars per family. About ten or six or seven families, about 50 people. And then you only pay ten or 15 dollars and you* [eat] *good food. In the park, the children can play and the mothers can come talk and cook.*

Tien also draws on other Vietnamese families to share in pho, a Vietnamese noodle soup. Due to the number of different ingredients—the quality of the soup lies in the stock—and the cost of buying each individually, Tien only cooks pho every two weeks. When she does, she ensures there are other families around to share the cost of making the soup. ('We put the food in a backpack, then meet in number 18'). Tien describes the many ingredients and long cooking time required for making Vietnamese noodle soups:

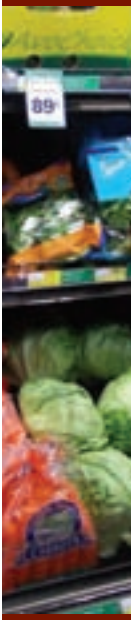
> *Very hard—you need to pay* [for] *a lot of things and cook the bones long time. The bones you cook like six hours or seven hours. You need to buy so many things ... If you want to eat that, you ask* [other families]*, 'Do you want to eat?'. I count how many families and eat* [together] *one day. If some food expensive, we can share.*

Informal food support networks, like those formed between Tien and her Vietnamese community and Julie and her neighbours, are a common strategy used among food-insecure populations (King et al., 2012, p. 84). Support from family, friends and neighbours helps lessen the burden of food cost and re-emphasises the food's social roles.

Despite the women's strategies for buying, storing, cooking and sharing food in a low-cost way, other factors influenced what food was consumed within the family. The interviews with Tien, Andrea and Julie reveal three key factors affecting how their children are fed: persistent lack of income; the demands of special occasions; and their children's own food preferences.

Income: spending it, stretching it

Low income was the primary factor impacting on what food the mothers purchased for their families. This is consistent with recent national research, in which 'the price of food and the lack of income' were the main reasons given by emergency relief respondents in explanation of their household's food insecurity (King et al., 2012, p. 67). All three mothers depended on Commonwealth income support payments as their main source of income. Tien and her husband received Newstart Allowance; Andrea received a Disability Support Pension and a Parenting Payment; and Julie received a Disability Support Pension and a Carer Allowance. While the women are grateful for this income, they reported that it was not enough to enable them to feed their family the food they wanted at all times.



Julie, Tien and Andrea's budgeting processes vary significantly. This reflects the mothers' different approaches to purchasing food (such as buying in bulk to share between families versus menu planning for limited ingredients) and also the unique make-up of their 'food families'. Julie's food budget sits at $60 to $70 per week, a portion of which is dedicated to feeding her neighbours and their children a regular dinner of spaghetti. To feed her family of six, Tien spends $150 to $200 per week. When asked whether she has a budget for food, Andrea admits that she's given up budgeting:

> *I guess, as cheap as possible, that's my budget. It never works out, I've just given up doing it. I just, you know, can't do it.*

Andrea and Tien also find that food purchases are influenced by other requirements, such as buying their children things for school, and paying rent and bills. Andrea budgets for her daughters' school essentials after food is purchased:

> *The rent's gotta be paid and the bills of course and you've gotta eat. Then I'll just put a little bit aside each week for school and all that stuff.*

With four children in primary school, Tien finds school fees and household bills impact on the amount of money available to spend on food. When more than one bill arrives at once, Tien tries especially hard to buy low-cost food:

> *You total the money, how much you've got, how much you* [spend to] *pay the bill and how much you spend on food. Sometimes when you need to pay so many bills, the food ... you try not* [to buy] *the expensive one ... Some food, it's very expensive; I can't buy. I try my best because we need to pay the school fee and so many things—the bill, the electricity* [price is] *very high. You have to be careful.*

Julie sometimes overspends on food. In the past she had also cooked spaghetti for another family: a single mother with four children who lived downstairs. When that family moved out, Julie became aware of the significant impact feeding four additional children had been having on her food budget: 'I don't cook for four no more because the budget goes down'.

Julie has needed to implement strategies to stop her overspending on food. Previously, Julie says, she was stockpiling too much food, but now when she's shopping she does a mental check of what's already in her cupboard:

> *A lot of food. Like you can buy about five things from Coles and then putting it through* [the checkout] *and saying, 'Do I need it? No? You've got it at home, bring the change home'.* [Things] *like sauce, beef, tomato paste ... and then I've got a lot of spaghetti!*

Julie also chooses to cut back on some types of food if she looks like overspending her food budget: 'If you have to give up [that] fortnight, you give up'. On these occasions, Julie always keeps rice as a carbohydrate-rich staple, but cuts back on meat: 'Like a vegetarian, sometimes I can be like a vegetarian'.

Whether due to competing essential expenses or inadvertent overshopping, Julie, Tien and Andrea each negotiate different and constant financial pressures that threaten their weekly food budgets. While there may be a perception that emergency relief recipients live 'hand to mouth', in fact the women's typical food budget allows them a buffer from food insecurity much of the time. However, when several financial pressures converge at once, the mothers' fragile income situations are compromised and with it their family's food security. Ultimately, these pressures impact on who in their food family gets food when times are toughest.

Who gets food

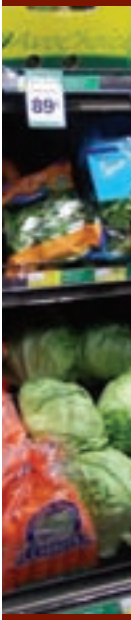
Lack of money for food also impacts on Tien and Andrea's personal food security. Both mothers go without in order to prioritise their children's food needs. Tien and her husband only eat two meals a day—breakfast and dinner. The couple skip lunch every day. They also modify the type of food they eat in order to ensure their children's food preferences are met:

> *We only spend money for the children, not for buying my own or something like that. It's always that: children first and after that we spend* [money on] *the food for us. We are easy, anything you can eat.*

Andrea also cuts back on her own food intake as a consequence of not having quite enough money for everyone in the family to eat what they want. For Andrea, skipping a meal occurs occasionally rather than on a daily basis:

> *I miss out sometimes. So that they can have a bit more. Not so much with the main meals but, you know, desserts. As long as they're fed, I'm happy. If I'm only a little bit hungry, it's okay. Or lunch, you know, if I need that for the next day or something—it just happens.*

By cutting back on the quantity and types of food they eat, the mothers are able to maintain a better level of food security for the children they feed. Their comments clearly demonstrate the protective measures taken by adults that are so characteristic of food-insecure populations (King et al., 2012, p. 43).



Special occasions

Special occasions and holidays involve extra expense and planning for mothers. These occasions influence what food mothers buy their families and even how they try to manage the event or children's participation.

Birthdays and cultural events are times when special foods are consumed and carry added meanings. They are occasions for passing on familial and cultural traditions. Whenever possible, the women keep celebrations in-house to save money. While many Australians might routinely celebrate birthdays by going out for a meal or enjoying takeaway food as a treat, for

her daughter's approaching birthday, Andrea plans to bake a cake and host a meal at her house:

> *We'll have a meal and she's got a couple of friends coming over to stay, I'll make a cake.*

Tien also hosts her children's birthday parties at home and tries to buy food in bulk for the occasion. Having one of the larger houses among their Vietnamese community means Tien and her husband feel obliged to regularly host celebrations for their community:

> *Always we have people and we do the party. We got the Moon Festival* [on the] *thirtieth of September, it's coming up.*

Tien explains that her community's cultural events can have a significant impact on her household food budget. The extra costs associated with cultural festivals include specific foods and decorations:

> *You've got the money, too, because Vietnamese culture, they got the lantern, they got to put a light in at night time. The moon cake is very expensive, very hard-to-cook cake. You need to buy* [it] *and to buy the lantern.*

School holidays are also a stressful time for mothers' normal food routines. Outings during the school holiday period are an extra expense and directly compete with the mothers' already tight food budgets. Aware that the costs of any excursions their children take also bring associated food costs, the mothers struggle with their children's requests to do activities outside of the home. Tien explains:

> *We don't have the money to spend out.* [It's] *very hard for me with* [school] *holidays.* [My children] *stay at home every term* [for] *two weeks and at Christmas time* [for] *six weeks. They say, 'Other children, why* [can] *they go outside?', or, 'They watch movies, or they go* [away] *on holiday'. I say, 'Well, they've got the money. We are not working, but we need to look after you'. If you go out, might spend money. If you watch a movie* [it costs] *$15 per kid. Four children, how much? Because when they go they need to pay the money for the ticket for the tram and money to pay for a movie and you must eat. If you want to go out, you need to eat and $100* [budget] *is not enough. Very hard when it's the holidays.*

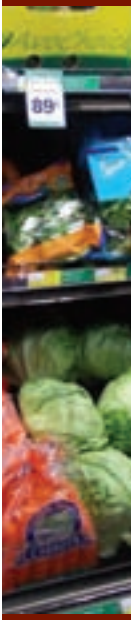
Tien tries to accommodate one outing per week during the school holidays. She works in with parents who are also on a budget to share the cost of the outing. On these occasions, Tien or her friend brings drinks for the children from home to save money:

> *I say, 'You can go with my friend', because my friend* [has] *got the ticket on sale, the food. Even if we buy KFC, we not buy the drink. We always come with my friend and eat. This time I pay and next time she pays. Then we can share. We can swap.*

Although Andrea and Tien try to keep their children at home as much as possible during the school holidays, they admit that even this strategy has its downside. Boredom and frustration at not being able to do the activities they'd like to do seems to result in the children grazing on food. Reflecting on the most recent school holidays, Andrea says of her two teenage daughters:

> *I don't know what it is, when they're at home they just eat—they just graze all day. More chocolate and more of this. All the stuff you shouldn't be eating.*

Tien agrees that her children eat more regularly and require more food when they're at home during the school holidays. She describes her children eating every two or three hours and asking for more: 'I just clean up', she says, 'Then "Mummy, I'm hungry!"'. The women seem resigned to their children's grazing behaviour, viewing it as a lesser drawback than the expenses associated with having their children out of the house.



Children's food preferences

The third factor influencing food purchases was children's food preferences. The mothers routinely bought separate food and cooked separate meals for their children based on what their children preferred to eat. For example, Julie buys, cooks and serves spaghetti to her neighbour's children, despite not being able to eat the tomato-based sauce she cooks it with. Doctors have advised Julie not to eat dishes containing tomatoes as they irritate her stomach. Still, Julie caters to the food preferences of her neighbour's children and the cost of spaghetti and sauce is part of her weekly food expenditure:

> *I won't eat it because the sauce gets to me. But when it comes to the kids, I do* [cook it for them]. *I'm the carer.*

The food preferences of Tien's children similarly influence the food she buys and prepares:

> *I always ask them what food do you want to eat today? I follow them, they don't follow me.*

Each of Tien's four children prefers different kinds of food, which makes cooking for them difficult. Tien feels that deciding what quantity of food her children eat gives her some control over the children's meals and the potential for food wastage:

> *My children, very hard to cook for them—for four children. But they not eat same food, so each different foods ... Sometimes easier if you cook a chicken nugget, or noodles, anytime they eat that. There's always food on the plate for them, I put all the food there, because I know how much children eat. I already place it on the plate. This one's for you, this for you, this for you, it's already there.*

Tien admits that indulging her children's food preferences creates more work for her. At dinnertime Tien and her husband eat a separate Vietnamese meal together after the children have eaten, because their children dislike all Vietnamese food—except pho. More than an everyday parent–child dilemma, Tien's effort to accommodate her children's preference for Australian foods represents a struggle to belong. Tien has made great sacrifices in migrating to Australia; she feels significant guilt at not being able to afford a holiday to visit her family in Vietnam. Unable to return, Tien chooses to reinforce her Vietnamese community and culture in Australia through food by cooking pho and hosting community celebrations. Tien is also aware of the importance that eating 'Aussie food' holds for her Australian-born children. She accommodates her children's preferences for local food because she understands food's role in establishing their sense of identity and belonging.

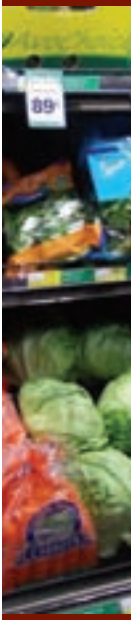
Decisions about what to cook are also made difficult for Andrea by her youngest daughter's food preferences:

> *My eldest, she eats anything. My youngest is really fussy and sometimes I'll have to cook two things, 'cause she won't eat something and me and— —*[eldest daughter] *will really love it. Then I'll cook something for me and— —*[eldest daughter] *and I'll cook— —*[youngest daughter] *something separate. Crazy, because it just ends up* [creating] *dishes!*

Andrea's youngest daughter demands a high quality in fresh fruit and vegetables and won't eat a blemished product. Andrea finds she has to choose and transport fresh food carefully, so as not to waste fruit that would otherwise be left uneaten by her daughters:

> *My daughter sees a bruise on an apple, she won't touch it. You know, I said, 'Cut it out', and she just won't. That's how it's like, I think she is obsessive. They like to sit down and look at it. They make sure I'm really careful on the way home. It's crazy.*

Andrea, Tien and Julie exert considerable effort in order to accommodate the food preferences of the children they feed. The mothers routinely cook different food for their children, eat separately and ensure quality food is carefully selected and transported. These sacrifices generate feelings of pride and satisfaction for the women and they feel positively about their ability to provide food that their children prefer, even if it means accessing emergency relief from time to time. These sentiments contrast with the shame and embarrassment described by other food-insecure parents (King et al., 2012, p. 92).



In addition to food's role in establishing belonging and a sense of self, connecting community and transmitting cultural and family values, for these families food may also provide an opportunity for children to express choice within an otherwise 'limited choice' environment. The households' low incomes impose a strict choice-constraint continuum in which children have few opportunities to express their preferences. Within this environment, food is perhaps the only daily outcome that children can shape. Tien, Andrea and Julie do their best to maintain that small freedom for their children, no matter how tight the budget.

The role of food in food-insecure families

Buying in bulk, using informal support networks, looking for specials, eating vegetarian meals and skipping meals entirely are all strategies applied by food-insecure parents to ensure members of their food family get to eat the food they prefer. Through these strategies, Julie, Andrea and Tien make and maintain meaning, and food is simultaneously an essential expense, a vital form of sustenance, a marker of culture and special occasions, and a signifier of freedom of choice for children. The mothers use food as a vehicle to carry on cultural traditions, connect with community and allow children choice in an otherwise choice-limited, low-income environment. Above all, these mothers use food to show who

they care for. Regardless of how little food parents accessing emergency relief may have, all put the children they provide for first.

The mothers' support of their children's food preferences may also work against them. By allowing children to dictate food purchase and preparation decisions, the mothers may unintentionally loosen boundaries around food where firmer limits could provide more appropriate structure and support. Based on nutrition and feeding relationship theory by Satter (1986), a 'division of responsibility' approach to feeding children holds that parents are responsible for what food is offered, when it's offered and where it's eaten, while children choose how much and whether to eat from what parents provide. The mothers' strategies to reduce school holiday food expenses also didn't work as planned, with children tending to graze for food when kept at home during the holiday period.

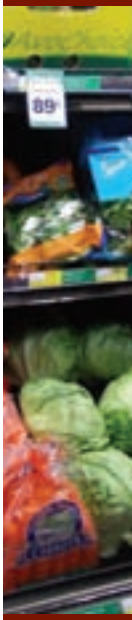
The women's stories highlight an opportunity for organisations providing emergency food relief to also provide feeding advice to parents accessing their services. Nutrition education initiatives (see, for example, Devall, 2006; Matteo, 2011) aimed at increasing or protecting parents' sensitivity to their children's feeding cues, could be disseminated from emergency relief centres. Neutrally presenting simple rules for parents to apply when feeding their children—for example, 'if you like that food a little, eat a little of it'—could help food-insecure parents to feel more confident in making decisions about what their children eat, to re-establish boundaries around food in their family and in turn improve their food situation. The potential for emergency relief services to act as a dissemination point for food education information is reaffirmed by Julie, who reflected that she became aware of her overspending on food as a result of participating in Anglicare Australia's food insecurity research: 'I used to [overspend]', she says, 'until the lady came for the survey and told me don't spend too much!'.

The mothers' stories also provide impetus for staff and volunteers of emergency relief organisations to think about and develop strategies for better supporting clients during school holiday periods and other food-significant events. Outside of annual Christmas-giving campaigns, organisations could consider running food drives associated with school holidays and cultural festivals. These times are shown to be particularly difficult for food-insecure families and can threaten the budgets and strategies that parents use to hold their delicate food situation in balance.

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 16 OCTOBER

AUTHOR

On completing a Bachelor of Arts (Honours in Geography) at the University of Melbourne in 2004, ***Sez Wilks*** developed her research skills at the City of Melbourne and independent research agency, Alliance Strategic Research. Sez joined the Policy, Research and Innovation unit at Anglicare Victoria as a Research Officer in 2009 where she has completed several community needs analyses and outcomes evaluations. She brings to the work her dual passions for social justice and the interrogation of place and change.



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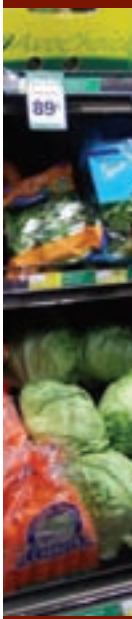
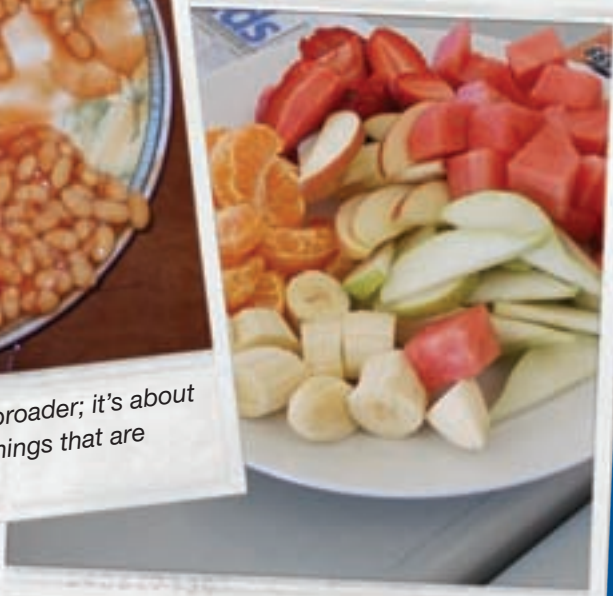


Poverty is not just poverty. It's broader; it's about social exclusion and all these things that are intersecting.



'It's a perception thing and one day you could be accessing the services.'

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 16 OCTOBER

6

Food insecurity: an eye-opening truth

Asking some hard questions about Australian values and the attitudes we bring to the disadvantaged, this essay explores the experiences of a small group of interviewers who participated in Anglicare Australia's national food insecurity study. *JOANNA HARPER* and *TESSA PHIPPS* asked eight interviewers to reflect on their own responses and to share what they found when talking more closely with people about hardship, food insecurity and emergency relief.

Fairness and equal opportunity are integral to Australian cultural identity. The idea of a 'fair go' is embedded in our vernacular; it is frequently used in casual conversation, political debates and media discussions. The notion of a fair go may be one of the important aspects of how Australians see themselves, but how do the ideals of fairness and equality for all measure up to the reality? Many young people feel that the idea of a fair go is too generalised and assert that it has never applied to some minority groups, such as Aboriginal people and early Chinese migrants (Johnson, 2002, p.7). In a survey of Australians in 2000, most people who took part believed that no one should be living in poverty in a country like Australia (Johnson, 2002). It is widely accepted that all people should have access to

food, shelter and employment. The concept of poverty is often drawn from images of developing countries and, for some people, from experiences of economic depression. Many Australians have an ambiguous idea of what it means to live in poverty and are not always able to relate to the more than two million Australians who do. Perceptions of poverty seem to be formed by life experience and often stem from our knowledge and understanding of what poverty means and how it is present in our communities.

Food insecurity remains one of the most fundamental aspects of poverty in Australia. Half of the two million Australians who rely on food relief each year are children. They often go to school without breakfast or to bed without dinner (Foodbank Australia, in Gallet, 2010). In the 2010–11 financial year, the Commonwealth government's Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) provided $64.4 million for emergency relief nationwide to address the needs of individuals and families facing food insecurity. Seven hundred organisations across the nation combat the issue of food insecurity through targeted service delivery. This can range from the provision of food hampers and grocery vouchers, to funding assistance for rent, utilities and other bills, to longer-term investments that have the potential to alleviate food insecurity further into the future, in areas such as education (Department of FaHCSIA, 2012).

Surveying the surveyors

When Anglicare Australia commissioned research into the food insecurity of emergency relief clients across Anglicare agencies (King et al., 2012) Anglicare WA was invited to examine the attitudes and perceptions of the staff and volunteer survey interviewers, who for the purpose of this essay are called interviewer-respondents, towards poverty and emergency relief clients. A small group of eight interviewers was recruited from the Anglicare Australia network, representing four Australian states (New South Wales, Western Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory). The interviewer-respondents spoke with 111 of the 590 clients that participated in the research. Half (that is, four) of our interviewer-respondents had no direct experience in the administration of emergency relief, while the other half had more than a year's experience each. Of the group with no direct emergency relief experience, interviewer-respondents were either research staff already working with the agency or research staff employed specifically for the purpose of this project; some were service staff involved in other programs unrelated to emergency relief. Those with experience in emergency relief were volunteers, predominantly parish-

based, some with backgrounds in community services such as counselling and home care assistance. The clients they spoke with came from strikingly diverse circumstances, and included a former paramedic, young single people, sole parent families, and elderly people. Clients ranged from those who were as surprised as the interviewer was to find themselves seeking emergency relief to those whose families had experienced generations of deprivation and hardship.

A phone interview was conducted with the interviewer-respondents, asking questions about their experience of conducting the survey, their life experiences, their perspectives on clients, client circumstances, poverty, food insecurity and emergency relief models, and what interested them about the results of the food insecurity project.

It should be noted that such a small group can provide only limited insight into the process of surveying clients and understanding how interviewers participated. Nor can their comments be interpreted as expressing the experience or views of most emergency relief providers or even those who work within the Anglicare network and the wider community sector. However, it is useful to explore what can be learned when individuals engage with emergency relief clients in a different way—when, rather than providing a direct service, they survey clients and hear about their lived experience. After all, this is what the larger food study led by Sue King (King et al., 2012) attempted to do. In writing this essay, we were of the view that it was worth finding out what the lived experience of this direct engagement with clients, meant for interviewers. By reflecting on interviewer-respondent perceptions and learning, there is an opportunity to inform the way Anglicare member organisations engage with clients, how they conduct and use research, and the strategies they decide to use to expand and develop their service delivery.

Compassion: chronic or crisis

Australian culture has a strong tendency towards expressing concern for less fortunate members of the community, with more than 90 per cent of respondents to one survey saying that a 'fair go' was an important Australian value (Levine, 2006). The national sense of compassion and concern is evident during times of natural disaster, as seen in the community response to the Victorian bush fire appeals in 2009, as well as the response to recent floods in Queensland and New South Wales.

But does that compassion extend to individuals and families experiencing daily hardships? Is compassion related to our perceptions of what it means

to be in need of social welfare? People's values, beliefs, and attitudes are shaped by their experiences and by their peers' actions. Often one's perceptions are based on second-hand sources such as portrayals in the media and on common stereotypes. However, according to a Salvation Army report (in Gallet, 2010), *Perceptions of poverty: an insight into the nature and impact of poverty in Australia*, traditional stereotypes are inaccurate, and more understanding about poverty is needed. The report goes on to say that judgments about those living in poverty are often based on these misinformed stereotypes. Some argue that the media orchestrates people's perceptions and that media consumers simply accept that what they see in the news is what the outside world is like (Fields, 2006). Poverty is often portrayed in the Australian media as a product of the welfare system, and is associated with welfare dependency, suggesting that poor people lack capacity for initiative and effort (Peel, 2003). These reports omit the views of the people living in poverty, portraying them as 'powerless' and 'excluded', rather than as people who might have an insight into their problems and solutions. Another factor in media reporting on poverty is that it can be defined and interpreted in different ways. For example, debates over the exact proportion of Australians living in poverty and the precise measurements of poverty distract from the true dimensions of this phenomenon—its causes, effects and remedies (Peel, 2003). Whether media reports focus on 'relative' or 'absolute' poverty, the preoccupation with the 'best' reported measurement arguably dismisses the more important aspects of poverty—people's experiences of poverty and its social consequences across the community. When reporting on poverty, Australian media often captures sympathetic stories of heroism and bravery, while neglecting to report on the profound challenges of living with hardship. As Peel observes, 'If it is unearned, unfair, and unlucky, poverty seems very cruel' (Peel, 2003, p. 10). Consequently, there is a tendency to blame the victims, and an expectation that people living in poverty can simply 'pick up the pieces', get a job, and lead a functional life (Peel, 2003; Johnson, 2002).

In a survey conducted by Roy Morgan Research for the Salvation Army, 90 per cent of respondents agreed that they 'feel sorry for people who are living in poverty', and 17 per cent agreed that 'people who are living in poverty have generally brought it upon themselves' (Gallet, 2010). Another report found that 'higher-income individuals tend to associate some "blameworthy" aspects with poverty … one example is the use of the word "inertia" (or at times, of "laziness")' (Johnson & Taylor, 2000). In some ways the national Anglicare food insecurity study and the follow-up research with interviewer-respondents is an attempt to challenge those

portrayals and examine deeper aspects of people's perceptions of poverty and the experience of those living it every day.

Following the study, it was found that many interviewer-respondents were surprised at how wrong their assumptions had been. Some interviewer-respondents said that they expected 'really rough' people, or those that are 'quite content to not do very much and just be supported the whole way'. For others, the experience of conducting interviews exposed them to 'very normal people … victims of circumstances'.

Many interviewer-respondents noted the possibility that they could quite easily find themselves in the same situation as the client sitting in front of them. As one interviewer-respondent put it: 'It's not too many steps from where I am to where they are'. Any one of us could walk past a person in similar circumstances on the street and never know the hardship that they may be enduring.

Jean, a parish volunteer with a year of experience in emergency relief, said, 'It's so wide, the range of circumstances clients find themselves in when they need to visit emergency relief'. Jo, a research staff member with no previous exposure to emergency relief clients, often noted her surprise at the 'normality' of clients and observed that 'everyone makes mistakes and so do people experiencing poverty, normal people like my interviewees are having these crises, it's not that hard for it to happen'. In fact, the research project found a strong correlation between a client's food insecurity and an unexpected expense or event. Nine out of ten respondents said this had happened in the last three months (King et al., 2012).

A number of the interviewer-respondents were prompted to reflect on their own lives, to form a new appreciation for their circumstances and perhaps to wonder what they would do if they found themselves in the same situation as the clients they were speaking to.

After hearing the clients' stories, Kelly, a research staff member with many years of academic experience in community services, described her reaction as: 'admiration, and empathy as well'. She noted that one client was also quite close to her age and fairly strong, yet Kelly didn't know how she would cope in similar circumstances. One client's story reminded Kelly of her mother's: 'I felt a very strong connection with her [the client], I had a different look back over my life'.

Father James, a clergy member involved in the provision of emergency relief via his parish, thought that although the clients were struggling,

nevertheless they were doing what they could to provide for themselves and their families. Jo hoped that society could:

> *be more inclusive and sympathetic to this group of people, rather than just thinking of them as people who are cheating taxpayers out of their money because they are lazy. No one deserves to not have enough food to eat. It's a perception thing and one day you could be accessing the services.*

Assumptions made, lessons learnt

We might be able to assume that a connection exists between the way these clients are viewed by others and how they view themselves. Are these clients 'shameless dole bludgers' with no qualms about accessing assistance? Spending all their money on cigarettes and alcohol? Should we get *Today tonight* on the phone? Johnson and Taylor (2000) note that many people condemn the poor for 'wasting money' on tobacco, on alcohol and even, sometimes, on pets. Research (Gallet, 2010) indicates that one of the most unsettling aspects of food deficiency is the stigma that people feel when they have to turn to a charity for help, a stigma born of these community perceptions. Many people report that they never thought they would find themselves in a situation where they had to access emergency relief services to get by. And in fact, Anglicare's food insecurity research found only a weak correlation between food insecurity and the amount of money spent on cigarettes, and no correlation at all between food insecurity and spending on alcohol or gambling (King et al., 2012).

Amy, a research staff member and emergency relief volunteer with over three years experience, reported that 'quite a few people expressed shame at having to access emergency relief services' and Kelly used the term 'embarrassment'. It's a feeling no doubt compounded by the fact that clients often had a negative experience with providers, according to Amy.

Beth, who normally works in a community development role, noted that she has:

> *heard some workers say things that are quite judgmental and I don't really know how you deal with that if you're going in there because you need some help. I think that is a misunderstanding of what puts people into that situation.*

On the other hand, fact-finding by reading is not the same as seeing the impact on real people. Jeremy Halcrow's essay in this collection refers to confronting food deprivation firsthand too. Reflecting on the interviews, Kelly, who has an extensive background in research and academic endeavours in this sector and recognises that intergenerational poverty is not a new concept, was nevertheless:

> *a bit surprised that some people from the lower socio-economic areas seemed to experience hardship generationally; they had seen it with their grandparents and parents and accepted it as their lot, that there was no escape from it and it's just the way life is.*

Kelly's comments perhaps highlight one view of poverty as an inevitable social phenomenon, and that people experiencing it are somehow 'trapped' and unable to shed any light on their struggles (Peel, 2003). Indeed, Peel argues that if the focus is shifted from the dimensions of the problem (for example, whether five per cent, ten per cent, or some other percentage of Australians live in poverty), and more on the causes, processes and possible remedies, then the debate will be more profound. Moreover, the key is to 'listen to people who know injustice and to insist on seeing things from their point of view' (Peel, 2003, p. 178).

There are signs that the wider discourse around poverty appears to have become increasingly negative with the emergence of descriptors such as 'dole bludgers', 'welfare dependency' and 'cheats'. This cannot be entirely attributed to the evils of the media as 'the media … responds to public desire for exposure of deviant behaviour' (Johnson & Taylor, 2000).

Amy captured this knowing-yet-not-knowing well:

> *Even as an emergency relief volunteer I didn't really have an understanding of people actually going hungry … talking to them about going without food was quite confronting.*

Jean observed that 'most of the clients interviewed said that they would be unable to manage without emergency relief assistance'. Perhaps it is this acceptance of intergenerational disadvantage that results in a perception that some clients believed 'that it was their right to come in and get that assistance'. Father James reminds us that 'there is of course the odd one who will play the system, but that's the same for any system probably'.

'If they didn't have to they wouldn't come.' This comment consistently recurred among the interviewer-respondents' statements, regardless of the life circumstances that had brought the client to emergency relief. Jean told us of:

> *one particular client who said that if it wasn't for emergency relief agencies that he would have to resort to other means to acquire food, I was personally shocked that this would include stealing food. It's uncomfortable that people have to be driven to that situation.*

It seems that even with a background in community services, an interviewer-respondent might still express surprise at the comments and experiences revealed by emergency relief clients during the survey. Perhaps this calls for further training for staff with exposure to clients experiencing poverty in their daily roles—training around how this circumstance really manifests in people's lives. Even, or perhaps especially, staff without this daily contact would benefit from a more informed perspective of the challenges faced by clients and the methods they use and lengths to which they go, to survive.

The effect on interviewer-respondents of direct exposure to the realities of people's lived experience—even among those with experience and training in the theory of social exclusion and poverty—seems to have implications for social policy making: highlighting the value of directly exposing policy makers, politicians and government administrators to real people grappling with food security problems. It also has implications for those in non-contact roles in organisations across the Anglicare network and similar agencies. One of the drivers for Anglicare's national food insecurity survey was to find the voice and lived experience behind the statistics. And it seems at least for interviewers this did occur.

Ongoing learning process

In the Anglicare food insecurity study (King et al., 2012) clients were presented with a gift card upon completion of each survey. Despite the desperate circumstances of some clients, few were expecting to be rewarded. Most were 'just thankful for the opportunity to talk to an adult who was prepared to listen and not judge them', as Amy said, finding they were 'grateful to the centre and as a result happy to do something in return to help us'.

Susan's clients 'were saying it made a heap of difference because it showed that people cared and people needed to know about these things'. Furthermore, Jo found that 'most of them really contributed and appreciated the chance to have their voice heard'.

This appreciation of the opportunity that the surveys gave clients was mirrored by the interviewer-respondents. For some it was a personal experience of connection and learning, while others recognised a unique chance to deepen their professional understanding or knowledge of issues that held wider interest for them.

Susan 'felt privileged that I was given that job' (interviewing clients for the survey), while Rebecca appreciated 'meeting all those people and hearing stories that I wouldn't have heard otherwise'.

Interviewers were confronted with the discrepancy between their preconceptions and what they found. Rebecca said she had 'always expected that if people could be clever about their food that it would help, if they were shopping the right way'.

Amy also noted that 'you sort of think that you could probably survive, that some of them probably make poor decisions'. But after implementing the surveys both interviewer-respondents had discovered that 'quite a few people were doing really innovative things with their food and it still hadn't helped much'. Amy is not alone in her initial view. Johnson and Taylor found a 'fairly widespread view that those in poverty are to blame for their situation to some degree because of their perceived inability to budget or manage their limited income responsibly'' (Johnson & Taylor, 2000).

Indeed, conducting the surveys placed the interviewers in the unique position of being able to delve into the narratives of clients in difficult situations. This, in turn, highlights for both seasoned and less experienced interviewers that the cycle of poverty, as well as situational crisis, is real and that clients have compelling reasons to seek help.

Beth appreciated that participating in the survey put her 'at the coalface':

> *I'm passionate about food security from the global point of view so it's good to be able to have that direct client contact to bring it down to reality. To see what it crunches right down to.*

Beth has worked with people experiencing disadvantage and intergenerational poverty and acknowledged that:

> *there were times where people were suddenly without, even though I was aware of it due to my training but it still does come across as quite surprising. But not so unusual, as we know the data shows that there are more and more of these people experiencing situational poverty and hunger.*

However, the experience gave some interviewer-respondents a new appreciation of the trajectory leading to clients seeking emergency relief. Rebecca's responses are complex: surprise mingled with different perceptions of what constitutes poverty, including the sudden onset of difficulties for some emergency relief clients. She noted the number of people:

> *who described having a very functional life recently, like within the last five to ten years. But something's happened to put them out of work or a family crisis that's derailed things. The picture I have is often long-term cyclical poverty. There were people I interviewed who didn't fit that at all.*

Rebecca noticed that some clients could not adjust to their new circumstances, lacking either the life skills to avoid difficulties or the coping strategies to manage when they arose. Her comments also reflect the struggle with managing her own preconceptions:

> *Coping with this new lifestyle that they've never had to deal with before … There were a couple of people where I was almost shocked about why they were going to ER. One of the people I spoke to had no food because he'd saved up all his money to buy a ticket to a music festival. I thought that was just a priority thing but I kept that to myself. But then I had people with really traumatic stories so that was when I more felt for them and didn't know how to talk to them.*

In fact, as Johnson and Taylor (2000) point out:

> *many* [Australians] *admit to being blinkered to poverty for a number of reasons—it does not impact on their lives, they are too busy to think about it or to notice it, they are unwilling to confront it, it does not look like poverty. The face of poverty is often masked behind the desire of low-income people to enjoy the same material comforts as other Australians.*

Interviewer-respondents felt the impact of conducting surveys long after the interview had finished. Amy found that:

> *after I did a two hour session with a client who really wanted to chat—not immediately after but the following week—while I was looking to buy food at uni I would actually not. I was thinking if she can't afford food then I shouldn't.*

Possible reasons for food insecurity

So how are people getting into these situations? Popular media headlines might imply they are wastrels, just terrible at managing their money or 'bludgers for life' as one newspaper put it (Herald Sun, 2012), but the reality is inevitably much more complicated.

'Doing the survey,' Amy said, 'made me realise that if something breaks, or your car rego is due, or you need to drive somewhere even, or an unexpected medical expense, a benefit often just isn't enough for even the smallest extra expense.'

For Father James the survey interviews:

> *just confirmed what I'd already been hearing and observing. The cost of food, utilities, all sorts of things, continues to rise and that's got to have an impact somewhere, if incomes aren't going up much.*

According to the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), since 2000 the cost of living in Australia, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), has risen by 34 per cent. Energy expenses doubled over the past decade and are expected to double again in the next five years. ACOSS further notes that 'nationally over a million low-income households are in housing stress with housing costs exceeding more than 30 per cent of household income' (Australian Council of Social Service, 2011). Of people on low incomes living in privately rented accommodation, ACOSS found 65 per cent were experiencing housing stress, 'with many of these households spending over half their income on rent'. The Anglicare food insecurity study (King et al., 2012) revealed that 69 per cent of households surveyed were in rental stress (that is, more than 30 per cent of household income was dedicated to rent costs). Emergency relief clients are under more and more stress. Amy noted that the survey 'really opened my eyes a bit more to how tight the budget is for some people'.

Amy also noted:

> *It's not hard to accept that maybe benefits aren't enough for people to buy cigarettes or go out, as well as pay their bills, but this is awfully easy to say when it's somebody else who has to have no social life and nicotine withdrawal.*

She highlights the subtle attitudes and preconceptions that even those working in 'caring' organisations, let alone those in the general public, may carry. These moral judgments have been noted as pervasive and routine (Hill, 2010), yet attitudes can often be implicit and thus harder to recognise and disrupt (Brender, von Hippel & Kippax, 2007). People living in poverty are often viewed as being in that situation of their own accord—it is assumed that either they actively choose to be, or that some fundamental deficiency inhibits them from functioning in society as others do.

Impacts

Research shows that there are many ways that going without food affects people. Babbington and Donato-Hunt (2007) show that food insecurity can lead to disengagement and social exclusion from family, friends and the community, and has also been linked with poorer mental health outcomes. Their study cited research by Hamelin, which identified that people living with food insecurity experienced intensified feelings of exclusion and powerlessness, including feeling pessimistic about overcoming obstacles. In their pilot study on food insecurity, Babbington and Donato-Hunt (2007) found that around two-thirds of respondents reported an emotional/psychological effect of not having enough food to eat, and 26 per cent reported social and interpersonal impacts. In addition, 19 per cent of respondents reported impacts on parents and children (Babbington & Donato-Hunt, 2007). In Anglicare's recent national food insecurity study (King et al., 2012), more than one-third of survey respondents indicated that they experience stress and anxiety as a result of their food situation, more than a quarter experienced depression and sadness, and more than a third said it compromised their physical health (King et al., 2012).

The interviewer-respondents reported their insights into the impact of not having enough food, as told to them by survey participants. Jean said:

several clients felt that because they were accessing emergency relief it gave them low self-esteem: because they weren't supplying their children or family with food and the basics of life.

Under these pressures it is no wonder that clients 'didn't really give much time to think about the situation they were in, they just spent each day battling through', according to Kelly. Despite this, one consistent observation from the interviewer-respondents was that clients went to great lengths to protect their children:

… clients' concerns were about their children.

… people were going without food because their children needed it.

… they always make sure that the children have got something to eat.

Susan even noted that: 'clients that did answer the children section were more than happy to do so'. Evidence of this strong protective mechanism has been revealed in Anglicare's food insecurity report. Of respondents living with children, 55 per cent were living in households where children fell into a less severe food insecurity category than the adults, and 43 per cent of respondents were living in a household where the children and adults fell into the same category (King et al., 2012).

Those interviewer-respondents with experience administering emergency relief appreciated the opportunity to speak with clients more extensively. 'You got to speak more one on one with the clients,' said Susan. Father James agreed:

I had to ask them a lot more questions, obtain a lot more information from them than I normally would. The intention was to know a lot more in depth how the lack of funds affected their ability to feed their families long term, whereas normally one addresses here and now.

Beth even noted that: 'the clients very often would talk about their personal situations beyond what the survey questions asked for'. This enabled the interviewer-respondents to recognise concerns and contributing factors that they may have missed otherwise: notably, the

impact of complex circumstances on clients' experiences of need. In fact, the benefits of carrying out the survey were twofold—clients were given an opportunity to have their voices heard, and the interviewers had firsthand experience of seeing 'real' people in 'real' poverty. The importance of both these facets cannot be underestimated. It has been documented that clients who need emergency relief face dilemmas that often go unrecognised because they are required to 'tell their story the right way' (Peel, 2003). In his interviews with emergency relief clients, Peel (2003) discovered that telling stories in order to obtain a service was a part of a performance, and people felt that they had to 'act poor', and describe their lives over and over again to someone who had the power to either give or deny them what they needed. Part of this process involved clients needing to establish a number of factors: that they were suffering and that their suffering was unearned; that the reasons for accessing emergency relief were as a result of a crisis and not as a result of, say, poor decisions, reckless spending, or poor budgeting; that they were determined to break the cycle; and that their problems were of their own making and they were ready to 'learn' from their mistakes (Peel, 2003). If clients feel that they need to tell their stories without arousing any suspicions or being perceived as 'helpless', then this makes it more prudent to ask more nuanced questions (Peel, 2003).

Many factors contribute to disadvantage, including disconnection from others and the community, lack of employment opportunities and income, lack of access to education, lack of access to housing, poor health, and lack of access to services ('Poverty in Australia', 2012). 'Pretty much everybody had some sort of health complication that they told me about during the interview,' said Beth, reflecting what Mason calls a 'poisonous relationship' between mental health and poverty (Mason, 2011). Rebecca explains:

> *Poverty is not just poverty. It's broader; it's about social exclusion and all these things that are intersecting: isolation and also health. It's not money, and giving people a food card at the end of the survey, or every week at emergency relief, it's not going to fix it.*

In a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship in Australia, Tracy Schrader (2004) states simply that 'one's health affects one's socio-economic status'. Conducting surveys as part of Anglicare's food insecurity study exposed the interviewer-respondents to the multifaceted circumstances that bring clients to an emergency relief

service, something that may be missing in an ordinary interview session. Clients also have their own insights to offer. Jo noted how one client helped her to understand the cyclical link between health and poverty:

> *The lady I interviewed was a paramedic before and she told me how food insecurity would bring a lot of damage to the Australian economy, as people without nutritious food have a higher tendency of heart diseases or obesity et cetera, which would cost the government a lot of money in the long term. So, for a more sustainable future, it's smart that the government deal with the food insecurity situation in the country sooner rather than later.*

Clients constitute a reliable source for service providers on the best strategies to address their needs, their own development and the development of other clients**.** Within communities, there is a potential for reciprocal or collaborative movements of people helping people. Beth's story of a man who first donated food, then soon after came seeking emergency relief, throws a spotlight on the complex and delicate shifts that can occur when working with clients and illustrates how practitioners and services have to be alert, flexible and responsive to opportunities as well as need:

> *a really interesting situation of a gentleman coming into a service with a huge bag of silverbeet* [to donate] *and about a week later he himself came in as an emergency relief client and it turns out that he doesn't like silverbeet but has a whole heap growing. And it was just ironic that this guy who does need food support has a whole heap of silverbeet growing. My brain was ticking over about the cooking group that's starting up and potentially he could bring in that silverbeet weekly and come back for a cooked lunch. Perhaps he could even bring seeds in and give them to a mate and all of a sudden he's involved in this wonderful social experience and that's another layer of the whole capacity of giving food and people having the opportunity to give something back without having to actually pay for what they get, to have this free opportunity to give something back and it's a really valuable capacity-building model. There's something in that modelling that would be of far greater benefit for people than only receiving food.*

This concept of a reciprocal relationship with client as both consumer and provider, whether in the short or long term, is a way that some organisations have developed their emergency relief service provision and has the potential to have far-reaching and long-lasting impacts for clients across a wide range of programs. Elsewhere in this collection, essays discuss local and participatory approaches; Hollie Pezet looks at COOLmob, for example, while Jeremy Halcrow visits Havannah House. Anglicare's national food insecurity research report notes that this kind of self-provisioning community model has 'the added advantage of building community and enhancing community resilience and efficacy' (King et al., 2012, p. 114).

Client involvement may have a significant impact on the confidence levels of clients, their sense of connection to their community and their confidence to access support should they need it. Are these results highlighting for us the importance of client mindset in determining their circumstances? The relationship between food insecurity and clients' perceptions of their ability to cope defines an important aspect of service provision that emergency relief can miss: the fostering of optimism, confidence and hope.

Interventions

Administering the surveys had a profound impact on the interviewer-respondents and their views on poverty in Australia. Father James said, 'It made me realise that there's a whole section of the community that's doing it tough, that are getting left behind, that is getting deeper into that poverty cycle'.

Susan 'gained a better insight into the needs and how much poverty is out there', while Jean 'hadn't really thought about it but it's obvious that there is a large percentage of people out there that can't afford the variety or quality of food that we all deserve'. Jean has more than a year's experience administering emergency relief, so her comments highlight the different aspects of food insecurity and the different levels of awareness around them. Not only does food insecurity involve not having any food to eat, something that the average person would easily recognise as a problem, but it also extends to not having access to a variety of food that is nutritionally balanced and of good quality. This is a more subtle aspect of the experience that may be easily missed; it is often thought that people without food should accept any edible substance they are given, without argument. Father James also noted:

> *It confirmed for me that …* [clients] *were finding it tougher to make ends meet, to provide food for their families and themselves. It confirmed anecdotal evidence, hearing the same story again and again, that clearly there's a problem.*

While emergency relief services were recognised as an essential part of the national response to food insecurity, Father James has a view that 'the resources are insufficient to deal with the problem'. This was a view shared by other interviewer-respondents.

Susan 'found it frustrating that nothing is being done' and is 'definitely glad that the research will be used to advocate on behalf of the sector'. Kelly describes the efforts of services as 'underfunded and underresourced' while Jean hopes to see:

> *if it has any effect on government's opinions, because people on government salaries have obviously no idea how people who are struggling on Centrelink payment are having to try and cover higher rents and the lack of accommodation and the utilities mounting up all the time.*

At Budget time, during political campaigns and in the uneasy financial times of the last few years we hear calls across Australia to reduce expenditure by targeting unemployment and other welfare payments. Again, this brings up the concept of the 'deserving poor' and highlights the contradictions between community sentiments regarding people in poverty and the governmental interventions that may be required to alleviate it.

While Rebecca had not 'met anyone who thinks that giving people food to eat is a bad idea', our interviewer-respondents were left looking for (as Father James put it) 'answers, somewhere'.

Even workers regularly exposed to clients using emergency relief and other services and those with relevant academic or research backgrounds conceded their limits. Some were unsure about how to tackle poverty or had not until now turned their mind to longer-term solutions. Others tried to resist, or at least acknowledged holding, judgmental or misinformed opinions about poverty: its origins and solutions.

'[It] isn't something I've really given much thought to, which isn't necessarily something to be proud of,' Kelly said. But the experience of implementing the surveys triggered each to reflect on the value of non-contact staff being involved in a direct client contact project like this research. When even contact staff can be surprised given the opportunity

to hear more from their client base, the learning potential for executive and management is huge; this is particularly important given that these are the people making decisions about an agency's service provision.

The question that may be asked is whether industry training adequately prepares people for their roles, or develops the understanding and sensitivity that is needed to view clients in an entirely unprejudiced way. While some may see this as unrealistic, non-government and commercial organisations make extensive efforts to train staff and comply with legislation around culturally sensitive practices, the needs of people with disabilities and gender equity principles. Reconciliation Action Plans, and the use of interpreters and translated materials for culturally and linguistically diverse clients, are just two examples of how organisations aim to inform their work in this way, increase the organisation's capability and focus on the needs of particular client groups. Yet interviewer-respondent comments in this study lead us to question how organisations such as the Anglicare network equip themselves and their staff to work with people living at the extremes of disadvantage and hardship. This cohort of our community has specific systemic challenges to face yet it is not clear that training and preparation to work with this group is comprehensive or systematic.

In an analogous scenario one national study suggests there is room to tackle this area. More than 800 government-employed child protection workers in all states and territories participated in a survey looking at the mesh between personal and professional codes of conduct and organisational values. Only a third of respondents were exposed to discussion of their organisation's values, just under half thought the organisation shared the burdens of staff, while slightly more than half felt supported when the going got tough in their work (McArthur et al., 2011). One question arising from the interviewer-respondent comments was whether those working with the most marginal in our society are left to develop their views and perceptions much as the wider community might: through the media, through announcements of government programs and policies or via political campaigns and lobby groups. Many working within the sector may not be nearly as aware of their own biases and limitations when supporting the most marginal in society as they may be when working within protocols for other clearly defined groups, for example in cases of family violence and child protection, or when working with people from other language or cultural groups or with Indigenous communities.

Adding depth

Having recognised the multitude of pathways into food insecurity and extreme hardship, given a variety of client circumstances (from chronic, intergenerational disadvantage to sudden life-changing events), this survey opens up the possibility for further recognition of the needs of the disadvantaged, and for addressing those needs.

Within Anglicare Australia, emergency relief providers could draw on the survey findings and experience. A strategy to devise and share service approaches, training and support among contact staff seems to be an explicit recommendation. Another is leadership and education initiatives and strategies to address attitudes and preconceptions about people experiencing food insecurity or extreme hardship. Such leadership and education would extend throughout the whole organisation, from the agency boardroom to reception staff. Other agencies and government bodies might consider the implications of the survey findings for their own policies and for the benefit of the less fortunate. We ascertained that a more in-depth, relaxed discussion and interaction was something both interviewers and clients benefited from, the former reviewing their services to incorporate such recommendations into their emergency relief systems. Furthermore, such strategies would help strengthen links between service delivery and other facets of an agency, deepening its capacity and responsiveness to client needs.

And ultimately, it is the clients who are expected to benefit the most from this research project and the conclusions drawn from it. The views of the interviewer-respondents recognise ways the sector can enhance its service to the community—addressing intrinsic notions that even seasoned community services staff can hold about clients and the ways these views can affect service delivery. Ensuring that staff at all levels of agencies are highly aware of what the clients are dealing with at ground level on a daily basis, and their capacity to contribute to their own assistance, could begin to contribute to lasting change for the less fortunate in the Australian community. These seem to be simple ways that organisations can reinvigorate the long-cherished and widely espoused value of a fair go for all in our society.

It also seems apparent that more research is required to explore and examine how food insecurity affects different aspects of a person's life, both to increase awareness and to enable us to learn more about the social dimensions of food insecurity. One's sense of belonging and the experience of shame and isolation expressed by so many in the survey

need to be better understood and must not be neglected. This would also extend to an examination of how household food insecurity affects children's social, psychological and educational development.

It would also be valuable to examine how different models of emergency relief can be reformed to better recognise and deal with clients whose initial reason for presenting is food related. As the national study and the interviewer-respondent comments show, food is both the way in to these clients' lives and a complex and compounding factor in their hardship. Some serious reflection on how emergency relief services respond to clients' immediate food needs will elicit ideas on reshaping the approach and reviewing the skills required by organisations. These are after all people who are the most marginalised in our community: living with chronic hardship or experiencing out-of-the-ordinary stress in their lives.

AUTHORS

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UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 16 OCTOBER

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CONCLUSION

Food is far more than 'just' nutrition, as Sue King makes explicit in 'When the cupboard is bare', the first essay of this report. You can't begin to understand being without food in our society if you don't see how that excludes people in so many ways from full participation. Yet as George Orwell, quoted in the essay, put it—not having enough to eat also reduces you to a set of cells, a stomach on legs. It is dehumanising.

When there's not enough to eat is the report of Anglicare Australia's national study of food insecurity. It rests on 590 interviews with people receiving Emergency Relief from Anglicare agencies right across Australia. It is their voices that tell the stories.

As this research and the essays in these two volumes make clear, the underlying problem here is poverty. Inadequate income. Without a doubt people relying on Newstart Allowance do not have enough money to live on. If their home is privately rented, they are almost certainly struggling to pay the rent every week as well to put food on the table every day.

Being eligible for the slightly higher Disability Support Pension or Supporting Parent Allowance instead is no guarantee that you can afford high quality food, particularly should you find yourself dealing with unexpected events or if your health requires special foods. And people's circumstances are complicated.

And that's a common factor. While the perception persists that people using emergency relief live 'hand to mouth', in fact for many, resourceful budgeting and creative recipes buffer them from food insecurity much of the time. However, many are only one step away and when several financial pressures converge at once, as Sez Wilks points out, fragile income situations are compromised and with it their family's food security. These pressures include common occurrences such as car insurance falling due, funeral or travel costs or winter fuel bills.

Australia has a social security safety net which some may argue is stretched too thin. It provides health, school and savings assistance for almost everyone. But this report provides further undeniable evidence that we fail our fellow citizens living in the most vulnerable situations; leaving them, should things go wrong, hungry, isolated and unwell.

The essays in this volume and the research report itself, also give us a much richer understanding of food insecurity. They point to factors that compound the effects of poverty and lead to an experience that is deep

and damaging, and they offer guidance to the kind of connections and support that can answer these challenges right across our communities.

In short, we can see that food insecurity is isolating. All manner of normal social interactions, for children and adults, become impossible when you can't pay your way, join in, or offer hospitality. It denies belonging and participation through the dignity of contribution. The emotional impact and consequent stress and tension in families and across social groups are evident in the interviews and personal accounts.

It's clear that inadequate, unsuitable and irregular food is unhealthy. You can see in this report that most people know what good food is, but for many of those we interviewed, it becomes too expensive, inaccessible, or hard to manage. For so many people too, food is their only discretionary expenditure. Rent and power bills, for example, almost always win out.

This report also casts light on some the subtleties of poverty. Not everyone has a fridge that works, or power to run it. Good, affordable food is neither good nor affordable when it is too far away and there is no transport. Family and community obligations can empty your cupboards in no time.

For Aboriginal people living in Central Australia, as Hollie Pezet describes so clearly, these obligations, ranging from feeding others to attending funerals, can be particularly hard and complex. But they can have an impact too on families from every background and situation, as Wilks teases out in her discussions with three mothers in Melbourne.

And while transport is an issue in Central Australia it's also a big feature of life in rural New South Wales as Jeremy Halcrow found, and can affect people anywhere, as Leah Galvin argues. Galvin also points out that low-income, working households are now the fastest growing group of people needing emergency relief support, which underlines her case for the need to make all our communities food resilient.

The comments and experiences of the people we surveyed reflect how complicated and difficult managing food is for people with little or no disposable income, and how the consumer economy of today's Australia accentuates the impact. Food insecurity has a significant impact on interaction within families. And while parents report they protect their children, where possible, from the worst of food insecurity, they often can't pay for other food-related activities. And they are too aware that their children feel the impact of this exclusion.

Joanna Harper and Tessa Phipps write about the experience of shame and isolation expressed by so many through the survey, highlighting the need

to better understand how household food insecurity affects children's social, psychological and educational development.

On top of that, the individualised eating habits of modern Australians, the expectation that so many of us have to simply choose to eat what we like when we like—even at family mealtime—adds to the challenge for families living on very low incomes. It is also hard for parents to say no to treat food, especially perhaps when they are saying no to so many other things. It seems it is easier to hold a dietary line when you are educated and doing well in other areas of life, but we can see that food insecurity erodes people's confidence in so many areas.

This survey does not include every voice. The children who are central to many of our concerns do not speak for themselves. Nor do young people most at risk of severe food insecurity, as they rarely access emergency relief services. And while many of the people we spoke to were over 65 years old, a number of aged community care recipients chose not to complete the survey because it was too intrusive. It's also true that for this group in particular, food security is as much to do with frailty and isolation as it is with income.

For everyone of every age however it is clear that the relationship between food poverty and social exclusion is mutually reinforcing.

All the essays in the report talk of strength, independence and resilience. Wherever we looked in this research, wherever there were people going without, people were also finding ways to share food, to connect through food. The essays give examples of Anglicare services running cooking sessions, communal market-to-table groups, people getting together to buy bulk food, community co-ops, breakfast clubs, food provided as hospitality, as an indication of hope in unrelated services, and, as Halcrow describes, as a parish response.

In terms of connection, this isn't just about food. We shouldn't underestimate the impact and value services can have in and of themselves. Some people in the survey said that approaching an emergency relief service is one of their only opportunities to be heard and spoken to with patience, respect and kindness: 'they gave me a food voucher when I was in hospital … they came to see me … it was good', one respondent said. It is fair to say that the importance of the quality of the interaction—seeing 'friendly and good people'—is integral to what works in emergency relief.

The first answer is simple: food insecurity cannot be separated from lack of income. And further, it is clear government benefit levels are too low to

drag people out of food insecurity. Yet the other part of the solution, as the essays show, is more complex and lies in collaboration. From informal partnerships—such as neighbouring families making traditional food together—to food programs at community houses linked into emergency relief and capacity building. From more wide ranging social action such as community gardens, to a national food plan that looks to ensure we all have access to good food. The question, as always, is about how we live together.

Just as food is more than nutrition, its absence, or the absence of secure knowledge that you will have enough of the right food to eat, when needed is a symptom of something far deeper.

It is a sign of poverty, of a diminution of dignity, an erosion of the tools with which to participate, belong and connect in our society.

It is a poverty for all of us.

One impetus for Anglicare's national food insecurity survey was to find the voice and lived experience behind the statistics. And it seems at least for interviewers, as Harper and Phipps found, this did occur. This State of the Family report can take those voices and lived experiences further.

Sue King quotes George Orwell, writing about poverty in the 1930s, at the start of this report. 'You thought it would be quite simple; it is extraordinarily complicated'. In my mind there is no simple answer, but we can find a right response. If we listen to the voices captured in *When there's not enough to eat* and pay proper regard to their experiences.

Kasy Chambers

Executive Director
Anglicare Australia

Community Sector Banking is proud to support the work of the Anglicare network throughout Australia.

When there isn't enough to eat strongly correlates to our experiences working in financial inclusion and wellbeing. It clearly demonstrates that food insecurity is caused by inadequate income, and as we know, this is exacerbated by low-income Australians being excluded from financial services.

Community Sector Banking knows and respects the work of our customers in alleviating negative impacts from being down on your luck; a position we could all find ourselves in.

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WHEN THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TO EAT

'I worry and stress out that I will not have enough food to feed the kids.'

'You're just living to survive. Social life doesn't happen.'

'I just ration everything.'

Anglicare Australia's *State of the Family* report this year – ***When there's not enough to eat*** – is based on a national study into food insecurity among people seeking Emergency Relief.

The first of these two volumes presents the study's key findings and Anglicare network perspectives on what's to be done across Australia. The second volume, the research report, identifies causes of food insecurity and factors that influence its severity.

As the lead essay in this collection points out, many ordinary Australians will be shocked at the extent of food insecurity and the way it intrudes into people's daily lives and futures. But they may also be surprised at the resilience, strategies and insights of those living with hardship, whose voices speak out so clearly from these pages.

#NotEnoughToEat

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