



More Hunger, More Waste

A Report on the Experiences of Emergency Food Relief Agencies in Melbourne and Hobart in 2009

Last year...we witnessed a huge increase in young people accessing our Youth Bus and also our night outreach program where we provide warm blankets and meals to those sleeping rough. The operating hours of these programs have been extended to meet the demand. This increase has obviously impacted our need for more resources – especially food

Alexis Diggins, Salvation Army Project 614, Victoria

Introduction

Since 2005, SecondBite has been collecting fresh food that would otherwise go to waste, and redistributing it to emergency food relief (EFR) programs. In 2009, SecondBite redistributed three times the amount of fresh produce that it delivered the year before. In part, this expansion was due to the rapid growth of our organisation and improved support, logistics and resources. However, through the stories and experiences of our staff and recipient agencies, we also felt that the need for food-aid was growing. Katy Barfield, SecondBite Executive Director suggests “there has been a significant shift in the demographic of people who are accessing food relief services. Agencies such as St Mary’s House of Welcome are seeing a marked increase in the number of young people, families and elderly people who are needing to obtain emergency food relief. Sister Roseanne the Program Manager at St Mary’s attributes this to increased living costs meaning that the dollar just doesn’t go as far as it used to”.

In December 2009 SecondBite surveyed agencies providing food-aid in Melbourne and Hobart. Fifty-two Victorian and 29 Tasmanian agencies took part. The research found that agencies are under resourced, as many are unable to train staff and volunteers with Food Safety and Handling certificates. More than half of the agencies are interested in nutrition information for their staff and volunteers and education on cooking skills to improve their meal and food programs. Currently, however, very few organisations operate to provide such skills. Our findings also suggest that almost 90% of EFR agencies have experienced an increase in the need for food related services in the last twelve months.

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Australians throw out more than \$5 billion worth of food annually, which contributes to organic landfill and methane emissions.¹ With increasing rates of diet-related disease such as diabetes and hypertension, health professionals continually promote increased fresh food consumption.² Beyond the importance of redistributed food, for health and the environmental benefits, our agencies also suggest that food can be an excellent method of socially engaging their otherwise often isolated clients. For example, Jarrod Gunn from the Street Soccerroos (a

¹ Baker, D., Fear, J. & Denniss, R. (2009). “What a waste”. *Australian Institute: Policy Brief*. No 6 (November).

² See, for example, Dietetics Association of Australia. Accessed 9/4/2010 from <<http://www.daa.asn.au/index.asp?PageID=2145847032>>

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team of soccer players that represented Australia in the Homeless World Cup) explained: “food plays a significant role in developing a social atmosphere at our training sessions and with the support of SecondBite we are able to provide this at every session, during every week of the year”.

In 2009, due to the Global Financial Crisis and the slowing of the economy, experts predicted adverse health and welfare outcomes all over the world.³ More recently, the price of vegetables increased 10.3%.⁴ There is little research, however, on the impact of this period and price hikes on the services that support disadvantaged community members in Australia.

This paper provides an insight into how many and what types of food relief programs are available in Victoria and Tasmania and a snapshot of how SecondBite’s agencies experienced the 2009 period, given the financial crisis, increased rates of unemployment and escalating food prices in these metro-centers. The research exposes areas that urgently require attention, to address deficits in capacities of community groups providing a vital service for thousands of people across Victoria and Tasmania.

Keywords: food insecurity, Melbourne, Hobart, emergency food relief, disadvantaged communities, fruit and vegetables, redistributed food.

³ Webb, P. (2010). “Medium- to Long-Run Implications of High Food Prices for Global Nutrition”. *Journal of Nutrition*. Vol. 140(1).

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010). *ABS Consumer Price Index March Quarter 2010*. Accessed 29/4/2010 from <<http://www.abs.gov.au>>

Methodology

A survey was distributed online, to ensure an accessible and easy method of data collection, to staff or volunteers at the recipient agencies. It was facilitated by the survey tool *Survey Monkey*. The Victorian recipients were invited by Russell Shields, SecondBite Food Program Manager, to voluntarily complete the survey. Pat Burton, SecondBite's Tasmanian Manager, invited the Hobart agencies to participate. They had 30 days to do so, and the survey required approximately 10 minutes to complete.

A pilot of the survey was carried out on the 9th December and amendments were made after receiving feedback. The survey was distributed via email on the 11th December 2009 in Melbourne, and 3rd January 2010 in Hobart.

The response rate:

Victoria:

52 of 73 SecondBite agencies participated = 71.2%

Tasmania:

29 of 39 SecondBite agencies participated = 74.3%

The data from the survey was then compiled into an Excel spreadsheet and reported in *The 2009 Annual Recipient Survey Report* (yet to be publicly released). *SurveyMonkey* produced graphs and the results were interpreted and reported by the SecondBite Research and Development team. Testimonials about the impact of SecondBite fresh produce were gathered in the survey and are displayed throughout this report.

Children, young people and families have had access to foods they have never tasted before like mangoes, raspberries, tangelos, strawberries, cherries and kiwi fruit. This has had such a positive effect on our client group. From understanding and education, health, a new experience and also enjoyment.

David Kutcher, The Venny Victoria

Results

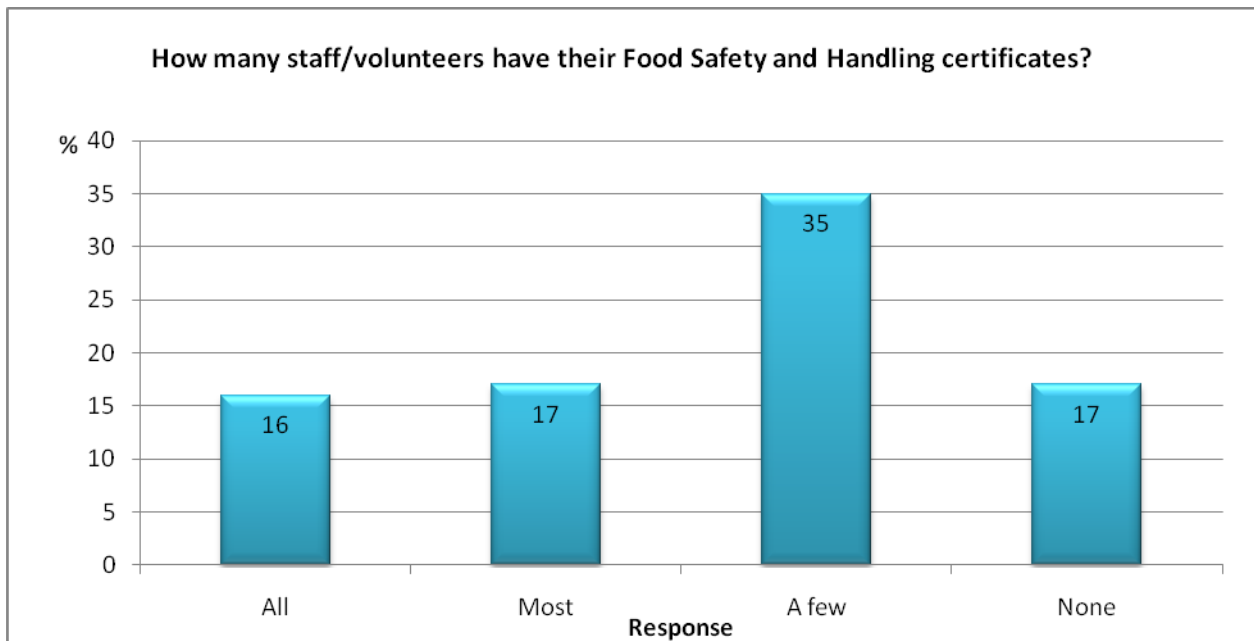
Recipient agencies participated in the following forms of emergency food relief:

- On site, sit-down meal programs (23 agencies)
- Food-parcel and food-pantry programs (21 agencies)
- Breakfast in school programs (4 agencies)
- Social activity or drop-in centre with snack/food (20 agencies)
- One or more of the above programs (13 agencies)

As per SecondBite’s recipient strategy, these groups support mainly homeless, low Socio-Economic Status families, Indigenous Australians and asylum seekers through their food and social programs.

Under-resourced

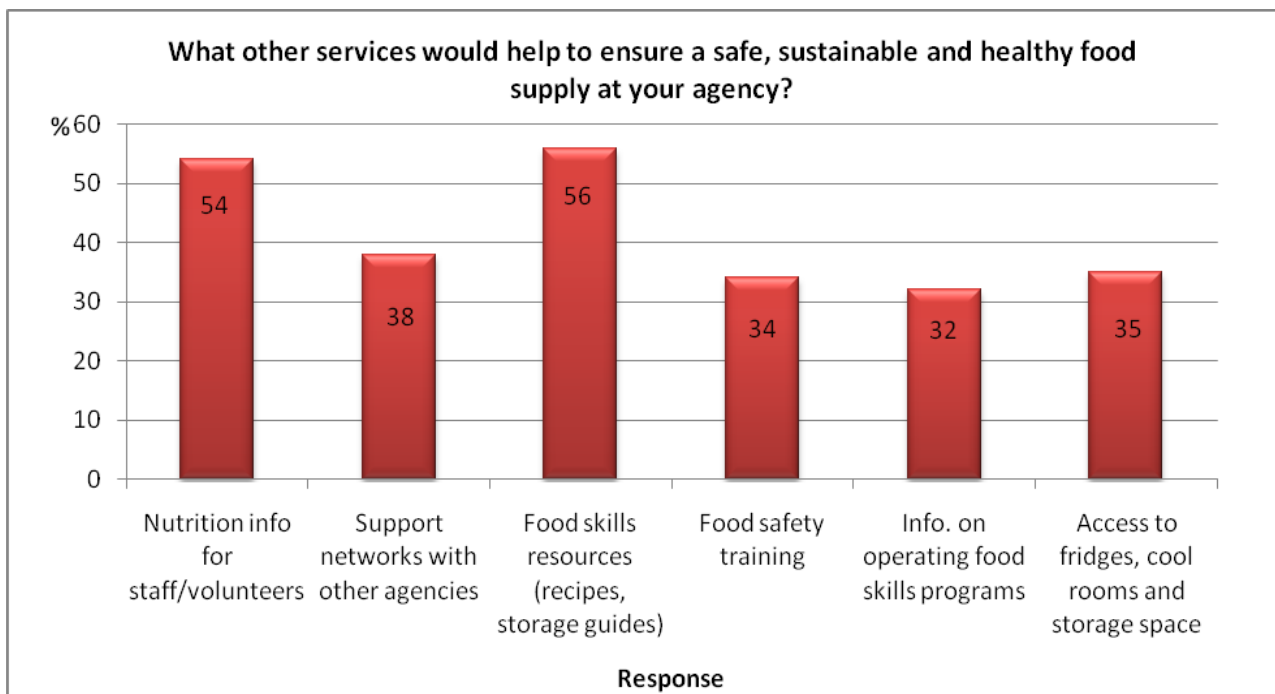
Agencies were asked about the food safety training of their staff and volunteers and 17% stated that ‘none’ of the people working on their program had Food Safety and Handling certificates.⁵ This training can be expensive and time-consuming for agencies, a drain on their already scarce resources.



⁵ The agencies who do not have FS&H certificates only receive low-risk products from SecondBite such as fresh fruit, vegetables, dry goods or bread.

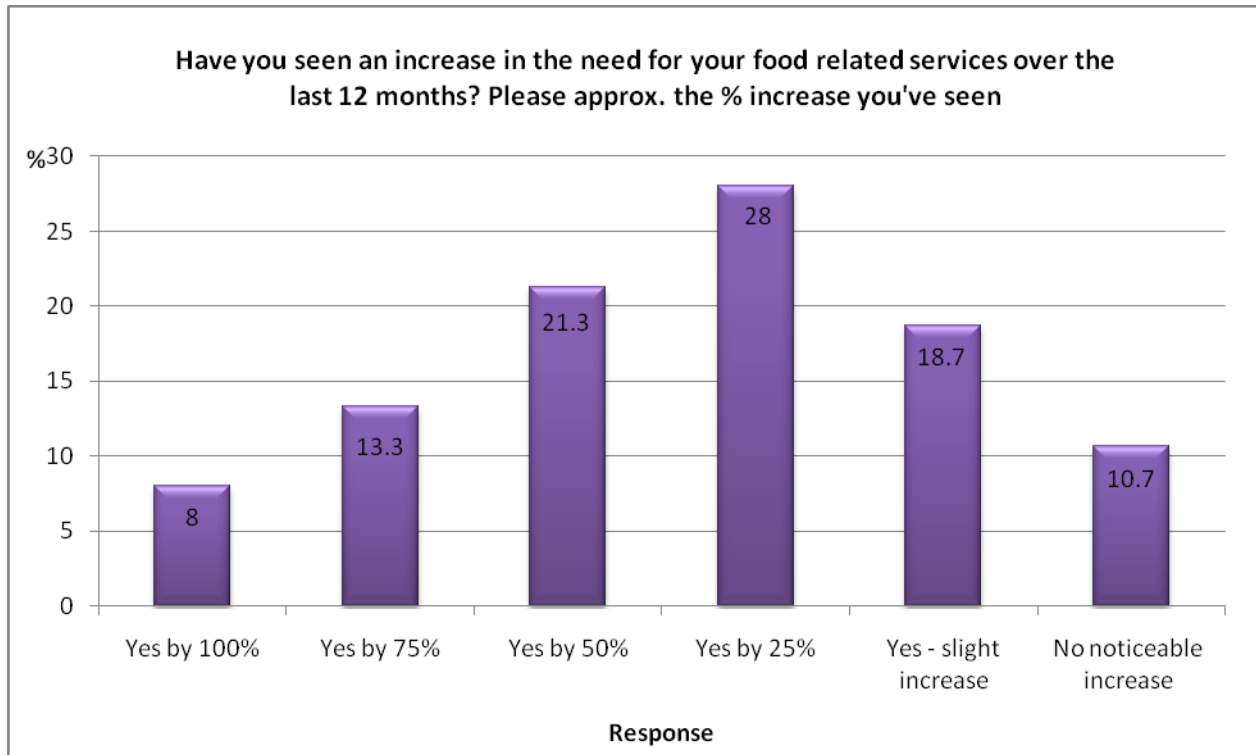
Capacity deficit

Community groups play a vital role in operating food and outreach programs. Their clients are often marginalised and at an increased-risk for diet related disease, and yet have the worse access to health care, economic resources and good nutritious food. Compounding this issue is the fact that the EFR services they rely upon are frequently unsupported and therefore, may not have the skills or resources to incorporate nutritious food practices and health-promoting activities (like cooking programs) at their agency. The data below suggests that many agencies would be responsive to improved capacities in this area.



Increase in hunger

Almost 90% of the agencies agreed that they have experienced an increase in the need for food-related services over the last twelve months. Whilst some estimated that this increase was only 'slight', 21.3% said that the need had increased by at least 75% (see graph below).



The Salvation Army Project 614 was one of the six agencies stating it had experienced an increase in demand of approximately 100% or more. Alexis Diggins, the Food Coordinator at Project 614 explained:

“last year we certainly noticed more families and young people were in need of assistance. We witnessed a huge increase in young people accessing our Youth Bus and also our night outreach program where we provide warm blankets and meals to those sleeping rough. The operating hours of these programs have been extended to meet the demand. This increase has obviously impacted our need for more resources – especially food.”

I have received a lot of vegetables and fruit from SecondBite and I have encouraged our Youth Group to eat it. One of them ate a carrot for the first time and went home and asked his mother for some more carrots. She was happily surprised.

Louise Sullivan
Goodwood
Community Centre
Tasmania

What to do about more hunger and more waste?

Support SecondBite

With this increasing need and our expanding programs in greater Tasmania and Victoria, SecondBite requires more volunteers, financial support and food donations than ever before. Please see:

http://www.secondbite.org/get_involved/

A time for action

SecondBite is dedicated to achieving a sustainable and healthful food supply that all community members can access. **The time for action is now.** Both state and national governments need to urgently consider the very real food insecurity that many thousands of Australians face every day. An Australian national food policy is required to enable a safe, sustainable and nutritious food supply. **It is vital that the policy includes the provision of nation-wide infrastructure to ensure fresh food is not wasted, but redistributed to our community and EFR programs are supported with adequate training and resources.** Instead of losing up to 50% of food from the field to the fork, there is a great opportunity for the government, industry and the health profession to support the development of fresh food redistribution to ensure nutritious food is not wasted.⁶

⁶ Lundqvist, J., C. de Fraiture and D. Molden (2008). "Saving Water: From Field to Fork – Curbing Losses and Wastage in the Food Chain". *SIWI Policy Brief*. SIWI.

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