



VincentCare
Victoria

VincentCare Victoria Evening Meals Program

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Key Findings Report

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Executive Summary

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of the Evening Meals Program (Evening Meals Program) which was operated by VincentCare Victoria's Ozanam Community Centre in North Melbourne from December 2012 to November 2013. This has been the second 12 months period since 2011 during which the program was enabled to be operated with a generous philanthropic gift from the Caterpillar Foundation made possible through Give2Asia.

The report provides details as to the clients and their usage of the Evening Meals Program drawing attention to the link between participants' housing situation and their utilisation of the programs. The report also provides an insight into the participants' attitudes towards Evening Meals program and its impact on their practical livelihood and sense of wellbeing.

Methods of gathering information have included detailed analysis of program data collected each week by program workers, along with a individual in-depth interviews undertaken with a selection of the program participants.

The evaluation has confirmed the continued interest of clients experiencing homelessness and other forms of disadvantage in the program. People experiencing some form of homelessness continue to comprise more than half of all participants and rough sleepers alone are more than one fifth of all clients. About one fifth of all clients attend approximately one quarter of all sessions and average attendance is between every six to eight weeks.

With almost 60 people attending every Wednesday evening, approximately 2.3 referrals are made each time to a range of homelessness and welfare workers and programs that are provided by VincentCare Victoria or other agencies. A considerable proportion of such referrals have been indicated, through a sample that was studied, to have resulted in the important outcome of an attendance at a subsequent appointment.

When looking at the qualitative data, it was apparent that the rough sleepers utilised the Evening Meals Program and the Breakfast Program as a way to make their lives easier and safer. Aside from receiving a meal, participants reported to gain a brief spell of 'normality' that does not necessarily resolve their housing, health and/or economic issues but does help make their lives more comfortable, safer and enjoyable, even if for a short period. The program also provides a reprieve for people, who are marginally housed, from the more negative aspects of their living circumstances.

The qualitative findings from the staff interviews also indicate that even a weekly program can be highly useful as an engagement strategy, and those staff who have been with the program across the longer term have observed the positive changes in terms of trust and relationship with clients who were apparently very disengaged at the outset.

The evaluation indicates that the types of gains client make from attending Evening Meals Program are signs to positive longer-term outcomes in regards to housing, health and social participation.

This report will be used alongside a supplementary investigation of services usage provided at the other end of the day in the mornings by clients of the Breakfast program in order to assist VincentCare with its decision making about the options for continuing to operate evenings focussed programs in the longer term.

Introduction.

Program Overview.

The Evening Meals Program (Evening Meals Program) operates one night a week on Wednesdays from 5:00pm to 7:00pm. The program targets those adults who are experiencing various forms of homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. The program operates from VincentCare Victoria's Ozanam Community Centre which is located in the inner Melbourne locality of North Melbourne, adjacent to Melbourne's Central Business District.

The Ozanam Community Centre is a service that has operated for the past 16 years and provides a range of primary health and welfare support services including basic survival requirements such as meals, clothes washing and hygiene amenities primarily targeted to people experiencing homelessness. The Centre complements other case management, alcohol and drug, mental health and crisis accommodation services, and community and residential aged care provided by VincentCare Victoria in the inner Melbourne area. VincentCare Victoria's constellation of services in this precinct is known as the Inner Melbourne Community Hub.

The Program commenced in May 2011 with funding from Caterpillar Foundation via Give2Asia and received additional funds during 2011 from the Allens Arthur Robinson Charity Committee. It received further funding to operate for 12 months from December 2012 to the end of November 2013 from Caterpillar Foundation via Give2Asia.

The Evening Meals Program is a specialised evening extension of Ozanam Community Centre's day program, offering a subset of services available to clients during daytime, weekday hours. However it is qualitatively different to the daytime services due to a greater focus on social inclusion, a different client population compared to day time, and the general disposition of clients in the early evening.

Program History and Funding Support.

The Evening Meals Program has been run almost continuously by VincentCare Victoria at its Ozanam Community Centre since May 2011. The program has been generously supported by philanthropic funding from the Caterpillar Foundation which has been made available through Give2Asia. A local Australian charitable fund of law firm Allans-Linklater has also helped to extend the operation of the Evening Meals Program beyond the Caterpillar Foundation/ Give2Asia funding cycles.

Broad program purpose.

In terms of the major funding that has been provided through Caterpillar Foundation and Give 2 Asia, the central need that VincentCare Victoria has sought to address is

chronic and recurring homelessness among Melbourne's most marginal and disadvantaged population of homeless adult men and women who have complex needs.

In order to meet this need VincentCare's broad aim for the program has been to:

to engage with these people as individuals in a welcoming setting in order to promote health, safety, well-being and identity, and social inclusion as a vehicle to developing a relationship of trust and sense of hope that commences the personal trajectory of ending homelessness or preventing its recurrence in vulnerable (at risk) groups.

Program goals and outcomes.

The program has identified a key program goal and outcomes for program design and acquittal purposes The program goal has been to undertake:

A weekly evening meals program that provides a safe place for people to feel welcome, receive a nutritious meal, experience dignity, relaxation and enjoyment and commence an exit from being homeless and/or reduce their homelessness risk.

The outcomes that were scoped in the funding application were:

- *80% of rough sleepers attend weekly.*
- *80% of homeless, but not rough sleeping, attend fortnightly*
- *80% of housed but at risk for homelessness, attend monthly*
- *Minimum of 20% of all users are rough sleepers.*
- *Minimum 50% of users are homeless.*
- *90% of clients are homeless or at risk for homelessness*
- *50% or greater of clients attend at least 30 minutes before meal is served to have an opportunity to participate in social inclusion activities*
- *Clients engage with helping services which provide accommodation, wrap around case management and support, and management of substance use and other health issues.*
- *Volunteering provides clients with an opportunity for social inclusion.*

A separate pro-forma acquittal report summarises these findings as well as related data about program outputs and numbers of beneficiaries.

This evaluation report provides detail about the achievement of these outcomes as well as other outcomes for clients based on program registration, attendance and interview data.

Evaluation Purpose.

The purpose of undertaking a detailed evaluation is twofold. The first purpose is to report in detail on the outcomes that had been scoped and detect other effects, benefits or impacts of the program for clients. The second purpose is to achieve greater useful understanding about our clients, their needs and how our strategies are working and could be improved. This fits to Give2Asia's own acquittal questions which ask:

What have you learned through this project?

Please describe any possible improvements which you would make in the future.

Insofar as this second purpose is concerned, we had also specifically provided a brief for the evaluation to assist VincentCare Victoria in its decision making about evening based programs. While VincentCare Victoria has now had the support of two grant cycles from Caterpillar Foundation and Give2Asia, these cannot be presumed upon to support the long term operation of an Evening Meals Program. Give2Asia asks two specific questions in its acquittal ,

Will the project continue after this Give2Asia grant?

What are your future plans for this project?

In the absence of additional ongoing funds to operate an Evening Meals Program, one option would be to open the Ozanam Community Centre later on a Wednesday to enable it to operate into the early evening. Of course, this would come at the opportunity cost of these service users who attend early in the morning – specifically the Breakfast Program. This impact of this needs to be properly understood alongside other centre operations including its health services delivery.

VincentCare Victoria is therefore conducting a further evaluation of its Breakfast Program to contribute to the body of evidence that supports its strategic planning around program operations.

Evaluation reports such as this report also are able to provide a helpful body of evidence about program benefits to assist the further seeking of funds from other sources.

Program operations.

Evening Meals Program sessions are held in the dining hall and adjacent courtyard behind Ozanam Community Centre (Ozanam Community Centre). Participating clients can also use the Centre's shower facilities and recreational equipment, such as a pool table and computers. Access to evening sessions is by a side street roller door that opens directly onto the courtyard, rather than through the Centre's front entrance, which closes at 5pm.

Meals are cooked offsite, approximately one kilometre away in the kitchens of VincentCare Victoria's Ozanam House 60 bed homelessness crisis accommodation facility. The food is then taken to the Ozanam Community Centre in a food transport vehicle and placed in 'hot hold' in *bain maries* in the dining hall. Clients are served their meals from a café-style counter by VincentCare Catering staff and community volunteers. The dining hall contains six large tables, each with seating for eight persons, and one smaller table with seating for four.

Tea and coffee are available in the L-shaped courtyard, which has bench seating dotted around as well as a fishpond and garden beds maintained by clients of the Centre.

The sessions are staffed by four or five Ozanam Community Centre personnel, each with allocated roles for monitoring sectors of the venue. Beyond a monitoring function, these staff members also conduct engagement conversations with attendees.

In addition, Evening Meals Program sessions feature 'visiting services' such as housing, alcohol & other drug nursing, legal aid and outreach case management. These services may be internal Ozanam Community Centre services, other VincentCare services or from wholly external providers such as North Melbourne Legal Service.

The roller door opens to clients at 5:00pm. Incoming participants are welcomed by an Ozanam Community Centre staff member who notes attendance of those currently registered with the Evening Meals Program and takes registration details of new attendees. This registration process also enables an early engagement and triage conversation with newcomers.

Clients can make themselves tea and coffee at any time. Meals are served from 6:00 to 6:45pm. Clients tend to stay on after the meal and talk with one another or with staff and visiting services until closing time. Planned activities involving music and art often span the duration of the program. Staff begin to wind up the evening at 6:45pm, with the roller door closing generally around 7.00pm.

Evening Meals Program and Client Data.

The following section contains important data about clients, program usage and program operations of the Evening Meals program during the period of Give2Asia funding Meals Provision and attendances. This data, in the main covers the 12 months from December 5th 2012 to 27th November 2013, unless otherwise specified (referred to herein as the '*funded period*'). Average is taken to be the 'mean' unless otherwise specified.

Broad program statistics.

A total of 49 Evening Meals Program sessions were held during the funded period. A total of 3,262 meals were provided resulting in an average of 66.6 meals per weekly session.

Total client attendances were 2,864, giving rise to an average 58.4 client attendances per weekly session.

As at 27th November 2013, the Evening Meals Program was able to identify up to 840 people using the program over the longer term dating back to the program's commencement of operations in May 2011. The breakdown from the perspective of degree to which the person can be identified by VincentCare Victoria includes:

- 708 registered clients,
- 16 known but unregistered clients,
- Up to 104 unknown unregistered clients.

During the period 5th December 2012 to 27th November 2013, 477 registered clients and up to 120 unregistered clients attended at least one Evening Meals Program session. Ninety-five percent of all attendances at Evening Meals Program sessions were by registered clients.

Housing status of clients

Chart 1 and Table 2 on the following page show that more than half of Evening Meals Program clients are homeless, with 21.6% being rough sleepers. Most Evening Meals Program clients who are not homeless live in government-owned public housing.

This can also be taken to be an indicator, in the state of Victoria, of disadvantage. In 2012 a consultation on Victoria's social housing system including public housing identified that there are approximately 65,300 public housing dwellings in Victoria. The state's population at the same time was more than 5.6 million people living in approximately 1.95 million private (individual) dwellings. Thus public housing represents only approximately 3.3% of these private dwellings and is therefore not a mainstream part of housing supply. Rather, it is increasingly being regarded as responding to 'marginal housing' needs. The same government discussion paper released in 2012 to inform the inquiry had noted from an earlier Auditor General's report released in March 2012 that public housing had increasingly been allocated to people with complex needs.

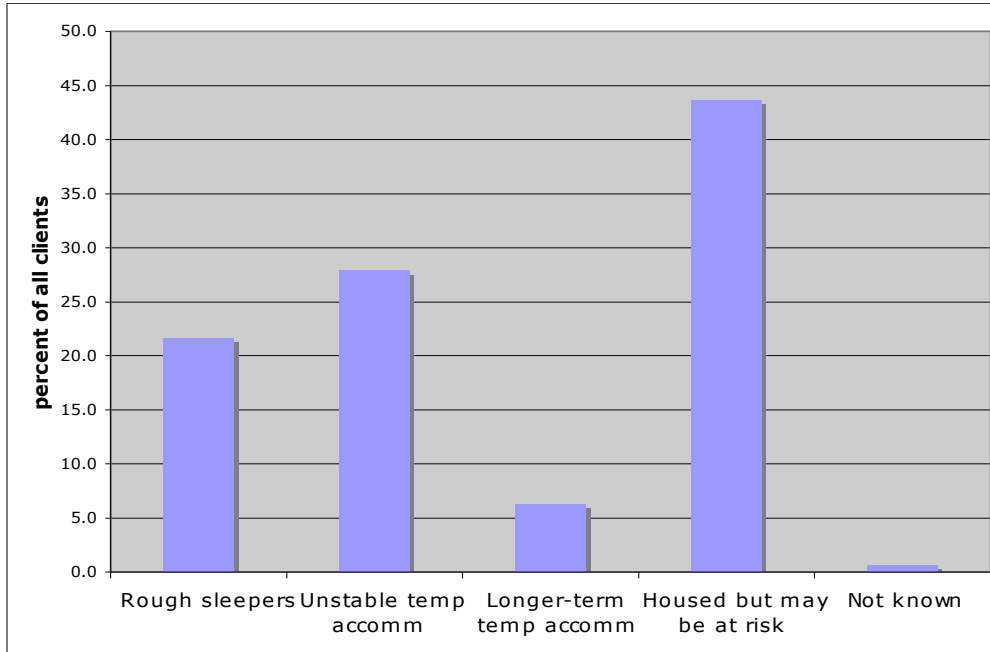
Further evidence in the discussion paper indicated the overall profile of public housing is indicative of people at risk of social or economic disadvantage. Commonwealth Government income support is the primary income support for 86% of Victoria's public housing tenants with the largest two of these sources being the Disability Pension and Aged Pension. Disability Pension was the single largest income source accounting for just over 19,000 households and had grown by 65% in the years leading up to the discussion paper release.

In summary even those Evening Meals Program clients who are housed - especially in public housing - are still likely to experience socio-economic disadvantage and be vulnerable to homelessness.

This data shows that the mix of clients attending Evening Meals Program is shifting slightly over time, when compared with the same data for January to May 2012 in Chart 2 on the following page.

Notably, the proportions of registered clients who are rough sleepers or in unstable temporary accommodation have grown over time, and the proportion of housed clients has decreased a little.

Chart 1: Housing status of Evening Meals Program clients*



* Registered clients who attended at least one session during the reporting period

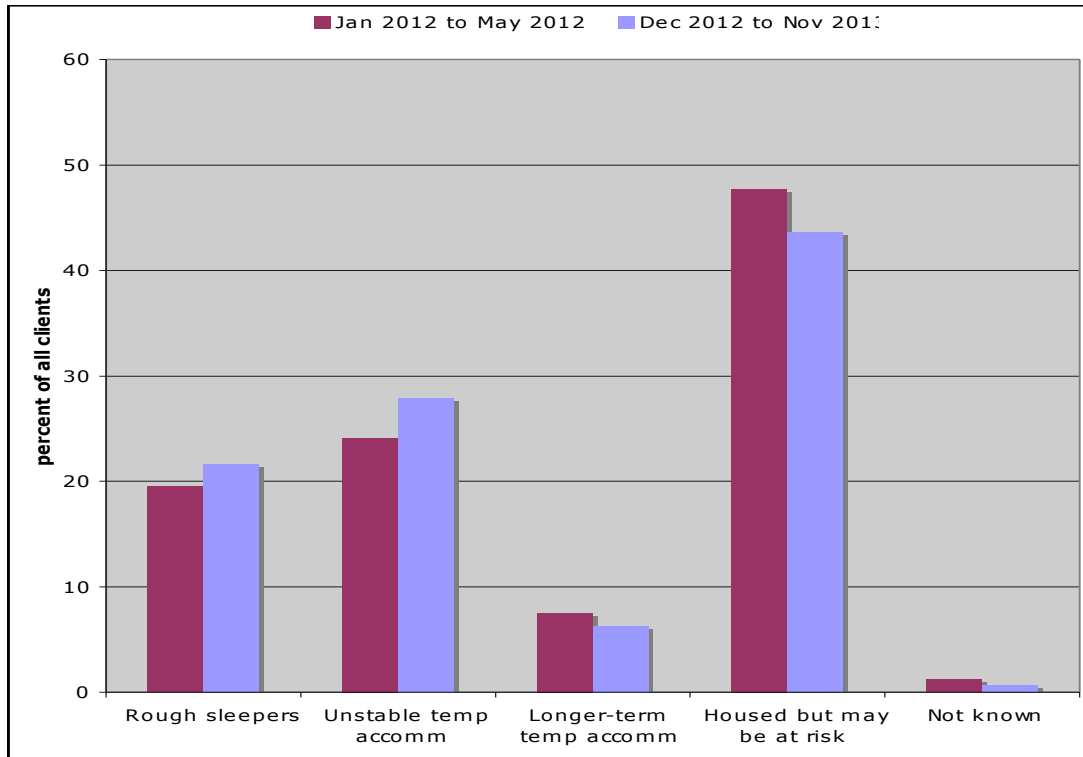
Table 2: Housing status of Evening Meals Program clients*

Homelessness category	Number of clients*	Percent of all clients*
Rough sleepers	103	21.6
Unstable temporary accommodation	133	27.9
Longer-term temporary accommodation	30	6.3
Housed but may be at risk of homelessness	208	43.6
Not known	3	0.6
Total	477	100.0

* Registered clients who attended at least one session during the reporting period

The percentage of rough sleepers is similar to the findings of a large research project in investigating the relationship between Trauma and Homelessness which VincentCare Victoria has partnered with three other service agencies for the past two years. The study concerned used randomized methods as part of its sampling of 115 research participants. It is therefore raises the confidence in the statistic presented here as it corroborated by another study.

Chart 2: Housing status of registered clients: Jan to May 2012, and Dec 2012 to Nov 2013



Attendance rates

Homeless people account for almost half of all attendances at Evening Meals Program sessions, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Total attendances at Evening Meals Program sessions 5 Dec 2012 to 27 Nov 2013

Homelessness category	Total n attendances	Percent of all attendances
Rough sleepers	484	17.8
Unstable temporary accommodation	656	24.1
Longer-term temporary accommodation	168	6.2
Housed but may be at risk for homelessness	1391	51.2
Housing status not known	19	0.7
Total	2718	100.0

On average, clients attend Evening Meals Program once every seven weeks. Rough sleepers attend Evening Meals Program more frequently than other clients, attending 16% of the time or approximately once every six weeks, compared with housed clients who attend 12% of the time, or once every eight weeks.

Table 4 below shows the average attendance rates for clients grouped according to their housing status.

Table 4: Average rates of attendance 5 Dec 2012 to 27 Nov 2013

Homelessness category	Number of clients	Percent of possible sessions attended*
Rough sleepers	101	16.1
Unstable temporary accommodation	132	12.2
Longer-term temporary accommodation	30	14.2
Housed but may be at risk for homelessness	205	12.4

Not known	3	18.6
Total clients / average of all clients	471	14.5

*The percent of sessions that clients attended since their registration with Evening Meals Program. The table excludes clients registered for less than five weeks.

Most frequent attendees

No clients who were registered for more than four weeks attended Evening Meals Program for 80% or more sessions since registration.

However, 4.9% (23 out of 471) of clients who were registered for more than four weeks attended Evening Meals Program for 50% or more sessions. Of these, 12 were homeless and 11 were housed. In percentage terms this is 4.6% and 5.4% respectively.

19.5% (92 out of 471) of clients who were registered for more than four weeks attended Evening Meals Program for 25% or more sessions. Of these, 42 were homeless, 49 were housed and the status of 1 is unknown.

This information is summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Most frequent attendees 5 Dec 2012 to 27 Nov 2013

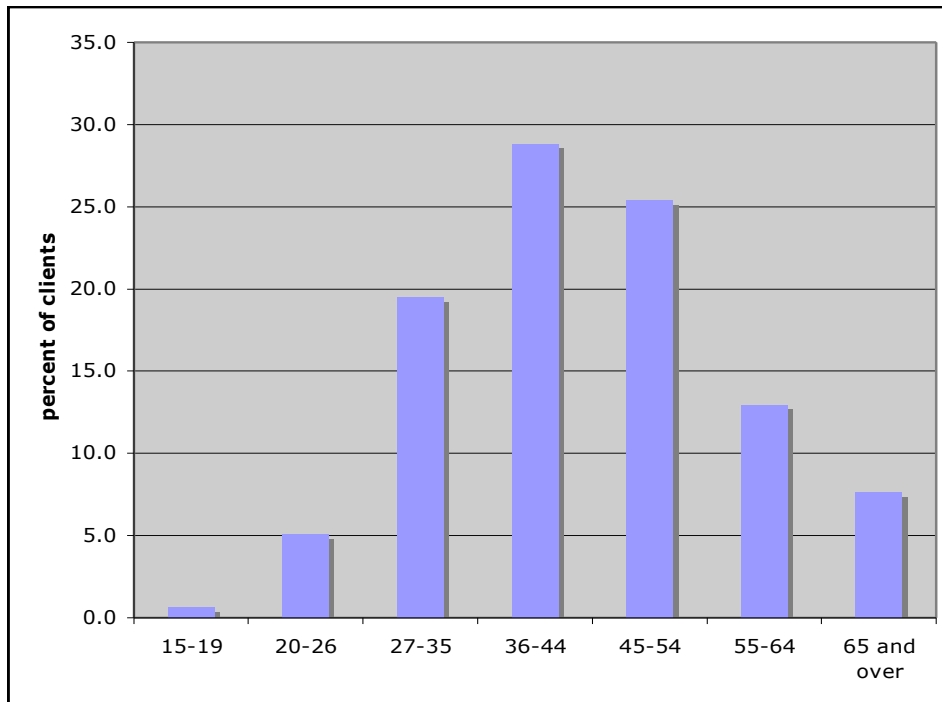
Homelessness category	50% or more sessions*	% of category	25% or more of sessions*	% of category
Rough sleepers	2	2.0	14	13.9
Unstable temporary accommodation	8	6.1	24	18.2
Longer-term temporary accommodation	2	6.7	4	13.3
Housed but may be at risk for homelessness	11	5.4	49	23.9
Unknown			1	
Total number of clients	23	4.9	92	19.5

*The table excludes clients registered for less than five weeks.

Gender and Age

The majority of registered Evening Meals Program users are in middle age or older cohorts, as shown in the chart 3 on the following page.

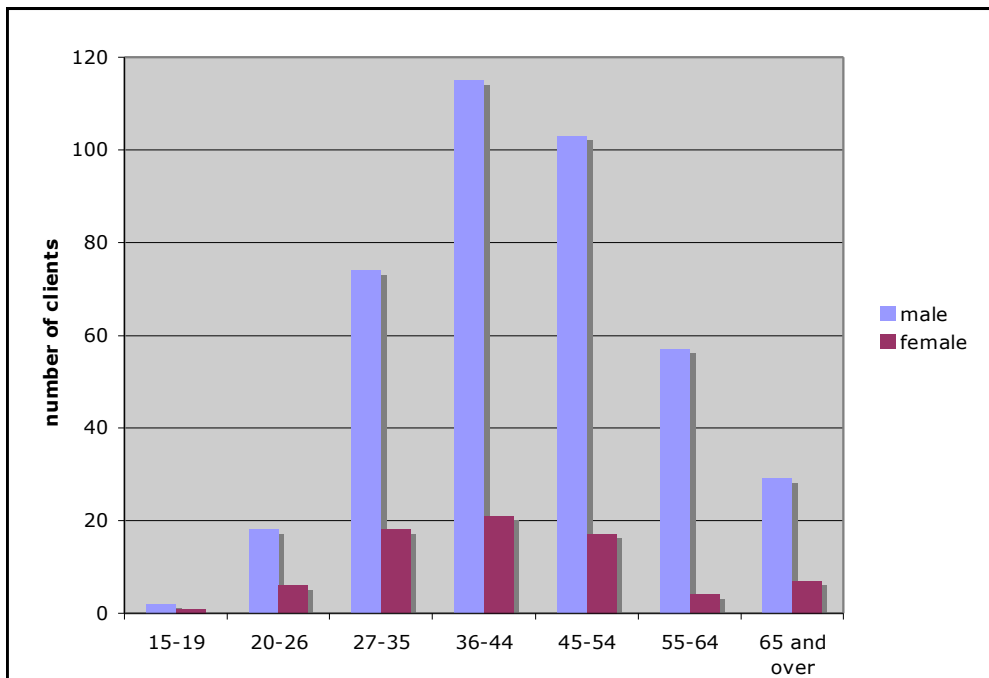
Chart 3: Age of registered Evening Meals Program users* 5 Dec 2012 to 27 Nov 2013



*Age data available for 472 registered Evening Meals Program users

84.3% of clients are male. The age structure is similar for males and females as shown in chart 4 below.

Chart 4: Age and gender of Evening Meals Program users * 5 Dec 2012 to 27 Nov 2013

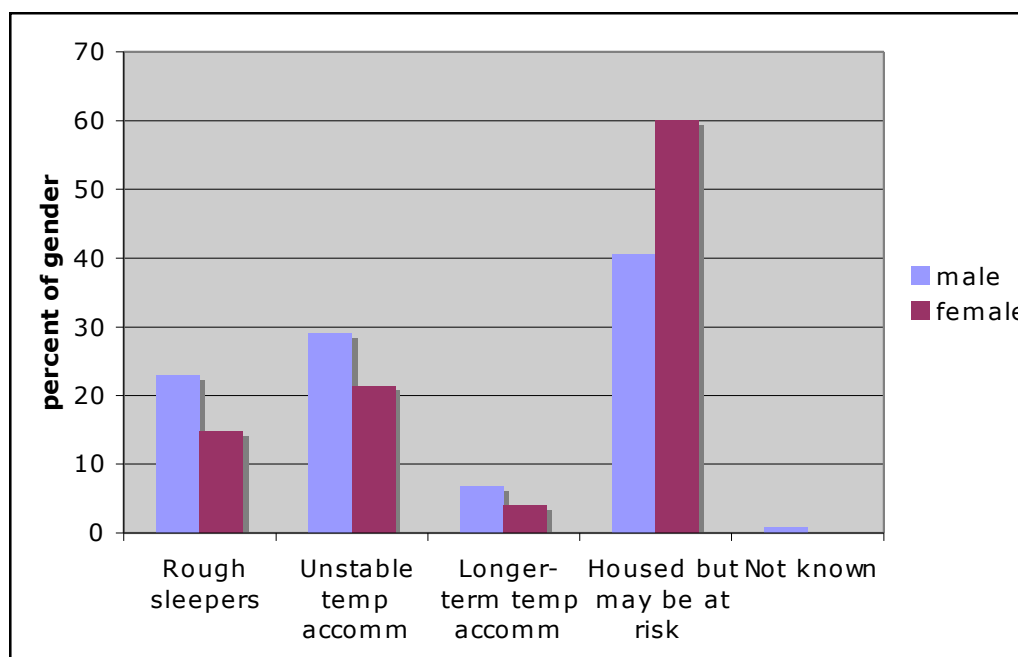


*Age and gender data available for 472 registered Evening Meals Program users

Gender and housing status

Females attending Evening Meals Program are more likely to be in stable accommodation than males. Chart 5 below shows that 60% of females are housed, compared with 40% of males.

Chart 5: Housing status and gender of Evening Meals Program users* 5 Dec 2012 to 27 Nov 2013



*Gender and housing data available for 477 registered Evening Meals Program users

Aboriginality and country of birth

Thirty-four out of 477 registered Evening Meals Program users (7.1%) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Country of birth information is available for 457 registered users. Almost three-quarters (73.3%) reported being born in Australia, and the country of birth is known for 122 of those born overseas. The most frequent countries are: New Zealand (21), the UK (15), Vietnam (10) and China & Hong Kong (9).

Clients who have stopped attending Evening Meals Program

There were 193 registered clients who did not attend any Evening Meals Program sessions between 5th December 2012 and 27th November 2013. Table 6 below shows the housing status of these clients at the time of registration.

Table 6: Housing status of registered clients who did not use Evening Meals Program

Homelessness category	Number of clients	% of non-attenders	Data for attenders
Rough sleepers	47	24.4	21.6
Unstable temporary accommodation	56	29.0	27.9
Longer-term temporary accommodation	15	7.8	6.3
Housed but may be at risk for homelessness	71	36.8	43.6
Not known	4	2.1	0.6
Total	193	100.0	100.0

The shaded column in Table 6 shows comparable data for registered clients who attended at least one session during the reporting period. Notably, homeless individuals are more likely to stop using Evening Meals Program than housed clients. Whether this is due to changes in life situations, itineracy or other factors is not known.

Arrival Time

Full data on client arrival time are available for 19 sessions, occurring between 13th February to 19th June, and 10th to 17th July 2013.

Table 1 shows that a little under half of client arrivals arrived at least 30 minutes before meals were served, allowing those clients the opportunity to participate fully in social inclusion activities.

Table 1: Average arrival time 5 Dec 2012 to 27 Nov 2013

Arrival time	Percent of arrivals
5.00 – 5:30pm	45.2
5:30 – 6.00pm	22.2
6.00 – 7.00pm	32.6

Visiting services, therapeutic groups and material aid

Visiting services are normally present at Evening Meals Program sessions, with the type and number of services varying from session to session.

On average, there were 2.1 visiting services generating a total of 1.4 client contacts per Evening Meals Program session. There was one session where no visiting service attended, and no session where all six services were in attendance.

The number of sessions attended by each service, their total contacts for the year, and their average number of contacts per session are listed in Table 7 below.

The table also provides participation data for Music and Art groups as well as shower usage and provision of material aid. What should be noted is that the Music and Art Therapy were regularised into the program during this funding cycle.

The data in table 7 suggests a high number of contacts each session - which also reflect the capacity of these two initiatives to engage with more than one person at a time.

It should be noted that the actual numbers of contacts and of sessions attended by services may be slightly higher than shown in the Table, as the source documents were not able to capture all attendances on a small number of occasions for the whole of the reporting period.

Table 7: Provision of services, groups and material aid 5 Dec 2012 to 27 Nov 2013

Type of service	Number of sessions (out of 49) that the service was present at Evening Meals Program	Total number of contacts	Average number of contacts per session
Community Aged Care Package (CACP)	4	4	1.0
Alcohol and other Drug (AoD)	27	31	1.1
Adult Outreach Support Services (AOSS)	23	36	1.6
Initial Assessment and Planning (IA&P)	26	34	1.3
Homeless Persons Program Nurse	1	1	1.0
North Melbourne Legal Services	22	37	1.7
Music Group *	37	339	9.2
Art Group*	44	408	9.3
Showers	49	21	0.4
Material Aid	49	40	0.8
Pool competition	6	48	8.0

*actual participant numbers are marginally higher as numbers were not recorded for two sessions

Client Volunteers

An addition to the Evening Meals Program in this funding period was client volunteers. Client Volunteers were introduced in May 2013. Client volunteers are clients from across the Inner Melbourne Community Hub. They work in teams with other volunteers recruited from the community and the corporate sector.

At the Evening Meals Program a team of volunteers each week (including the community volunteers) enable the meals to be transported from the main kitchen 1km away, plated up and served while providing an environment of hospitality and friendly welcome to clients.

For the 31 sessions between 1st May and 27th November 2013, a total of 10 client volunteers worked at 27 sessions, with an average attendance rate of 2.7 volunteers per weekly session worked. The target set was 2 volunteers per week.

Referrals from Evening Meals Program

Referral data were collected for the period 6th March to 27th November 2013. During this period there were 86 referrals to external or daytime services, averaging 2.3 referrals per session.

A sample of thirty-four referrals that were generated from contact with clients at Evening Meals Program sessions were tracked for a three-month period, from September to November 2013. The results are shown in Table 8 on the next page.

Table 8: Outcomes of referrals generated from Evening Meals Program sessions 4th Sept to 27th Nov 2013

Type of service	Referral no longer applicable	Client did not present	Client attended appointment	Appointment outcome is recorded
Alcohol and other Drug (AoD)	1		1 yes and 1 unknown	
Adult Outreach Support Services (AOSS)	3	4	2	2
Initial Assessment and Planning (IA&P)	1	6	3 yes and 1 unknown	3
Nurse & optometrist		1		
North Melbourne Legal Services			2 unknown	
Womens Early Intervention Program (WEIP)	1	1		
Drop in		3		
Intensive Case Management Initiative (ICMI)		3		

Six referrals were found to be no longer applicable. Of the valid referral count (referral still applicable 28 referrals that proceeded, clients are known to have attended the appointment on 6 occasions, not attended the appointment on 18 occasions, and the attendance is not known for 4 referrals.

Based on the valid referral count of 28 clients and the potential appointments that may have taken place amongst the 4 unknown outcomes an overall rate of follow through to attendance of at least a first appointment has been estimated for the sample. This rate is shown to be between 21.4% and 35.7%.

While the data has demonstrated that the referral target of two clients per week was exceeded, the limited follow up sample suggests that other strategies might support greater follow-through in terms of clients subsequently attending appointments. One such strategy could be to provide a regular core of more structured, longer consultation with clients for Evening Meals Program users, concurrent to the operation of the Evening Meals Program.



Evening Meals Program’s effectiveness: the perspective from clients

VincentCare Victoria’s 2012 evaluation of Evening Meals Program found that – according to clients and staff – the program provides substantial benefit to participants in the domains of health and safety, sense of identity and social inclusion.¹

While these positive impacts are ends in themselves, they are also believed to strengthen an individual’s capacity to engage with other services and opportunities including longer-term exit strategies from homelessness.²

And for people living in public housing who are Evening Meals Program clients, often with past histories of homelessness, the fact that they also identified these same benefits would suggest that attending Evening Meals Program helps keep them housed by meeting some of the primary human needs that housing alone does not provide.

In this evaluation round, a small number of clients were interviewed at greater depth than the previous evaluation to understand better how Evening Meals Program works (or does not work) at the individual level to facilitate positive change.

Over a two-month period, ten Evening Meals Program clients were recruited and interviewed by two Ozanam Community Centre staff members who were familiar with the program and its clients. Interviewees were reimbursed for their time with \$20 supermarket vouchers. The selection criteria for interviewees were that the clients should have attended Evening Meals

¹ *An Evaluation of Ozanam Community Centre’s After-hours Meals Program for Homeless and Marginalised People: Final Report.* June 2012. VincentCare Victoria.

² *Evaluating Strategies for Drop-In Centres,* Toronto Drop-In Network, 2008.

Program regularly for a period of time and be sufficiently articulate and focused to complete an in-depth semi-structured interview of 15 to 30 minutes duration.

The two staff were given preliminary training in semi-structured interviewing and provided with a set of suggested interview questions that were to guide but not dictate the flow and direction of their conversations with interviewees.

The ten interviewees are male. Five of these are 'rough sleepers', another slept in his van for 14 years before obtaining housing recently, and two of the remainder are in temporary or insecure housing. Most have been attending Evening Meals Program since its inception two years ago, and a few of the older men have been coming to the Ozanam Community Centre venue for 15 or more years. One interviewee explained that the site was previously a bolt and nut factory, and in the early 1990s City Mission would provide meals and pay piecework wages for putting nuts on bolts.

Clients' experiences of Evening Meals Program

The rough sleepers

The first interviewee has been attending the Centre for 15 years on and off, and presents himself as homeless and itinerant by choice:

I'm not a settler. It's exciting that way, who knows what's going to happen the next day when I wake up (...) I've been in Melbourne for a few years now so it's time for me to move along.

For him, sleeping rough is a rational decision because 'life's too difficult to plan things, it's too hard', there's 'no job security', and with the closure of high capacity cheap accommodation like the Gill his other housing options are squalid and overpriced rooming houses. He believes that in Melbourne and Sydney warehouse-style dormitories should have been built to make up for the closure of the old accommodation centres.

He is streetwise and talks knowledgably about the various facilities accessible to homeless people in Melbourne. Throughout his narrative, one gets the impression of a person who is content for now with his adaptation to the routines of life on the streets:

Normally I'd get home under the bridge about nine, nine-thirty. Get home, have a cigarette (...) It's a good spot so there's no worries about getting wet or having cars or anything like that run over you.

He rises early every day, around 5.30-6.00am to make sure that his sleeping spot is not discovered.

When asked about what he gets out of attending Evening Meals Program, he speaks appreciatively of the practical benefits of the program and the Centre overall:

I use this service mainly just to eat and have a shower. The evening meals is good because there is nowhere else that I know of on Wednesday night you can get an evening meal unless you go to the food vans and they've got half cold meat pies and sausage rolls where here it's a home cooked meal virtually (...) also you've somewhere you can come for two hours, sit down have a coffee, watch a bit of TV when the TV's here. It just saves walking around the city (...) I wouldn't say it's made changes in my life but it's given me a nice feed for the night.

Say if this place closed I could still live roughly like this but it would be a little bit harder because not everything's going to be in the one spot.

He says that if he is still feeling 'a little peckish' after Evening Meals Program, he might go to the food van. For the other evenings of the week he usually does not eat at all and waits until the next day to get a meal.

The art and music groups at Evening Meals Program hold little interest for him but he believes that the socialisation is good for other attendees. He says that because he does not have a drug or alcohol problem he has no suggestions for other types of groups for Evening Meals Program to run. He does however work as a volunteer with the Client Volunteer Program (CVP):

There's one thing I like about the kitchen is that it keeps me busy – that's my activity.

Three of the interviewees sleeping rough are from New Zealand. Two of them have been attending Evening Meals Program since it started, and the third for a couple of months.³

One New Zealander reports making good practical use of Evening Meals Program, for 'catching up with people', charging his phone, having a meal, having a shower, and talking with the AOD counsellor. He says that:

Once a week it gives you a chance to go somewhere of an evening and sit in.. like a house and watch the news 'cos I've been homeless a long time and it's quite good to sit down and watch the news and have a sing. ... Feel a bit normal.

He does not believe that coming to Evening Meals Program has made any difference to his life, it is 'just convenience'. Nevertheless, he thinks that attending Evening Meals Program and chatting with the AOD counsellor is helping with his depression and alcohol problem; and that if he were to get stable housing and employment that would also help resolve the depression and alcohol issues. He thinks Evening Meals Program is 'a bloody good service' and does not see how it could be improved, apart from the addition of pool competitions.⁴

The other two New Zealanders are less engaged with Evening Meals Program activities: they come for a meal and generally do not participate in the art or music groups and do not take advantage of the visiting services. One of the two does however appreciate that the services are available for those that would use them. This person just wants to find work and sells The Big Issue magazine on the street for the moment. The other person is fairly negative about the music group, numerous Ozanam Community Centre and visiting service staff, and about other homeless people as well. He only speaks appreciatively about the food at Evening Meals Program. This person also wants to find work and housing, but does not mention any other problems he needs to resolve.

The fifth rough sleeper in this round of interviews comes to Evening Meals Program regularly after his weekly hydrotherapy session for chronic back pain, which is due to a significant work injury. He enthusiastically participates in both the art and music groups and uses the laundry; and he particularly appreciates the convenience that the evening meal and later Centre closing hours offer him and other homeless people:

... with Wednesday being all about my back injury I don't have to stress about anything, I can just come here on Wednesday and then go down the road and come back again and everything's here (...) so being able to sit down after I've had hydrotherapy and digest a meal, whereas in the park it's

³ New Zealand citizens are unable to access unemployment benefits in Australia unless they have resided in Australia continuously for ten years.

⁴ Pool competitions were added to Evening Meals Program after this round of client interviews

.. you never know what, if the police drive past you've got to leave the park unless you want to get hassled by them (...) the evening meal takes the edge off everyone...Amongst homeless people we're less hectic towards each other because we're all relaxed, the familiarity and the meal helps relax.

He does not access any of the visiting services at Evening Meals Program and was not aware that housing workers attend Evening Meals Program sessions; but he did suggest that there should be a nurse, commenting that they 'are at every other drop-in centre.'

The securely housed

One man who has had a long association with Ozanam Community Centre slept in his van for 14 years, accessing meals and other services at the Centre the whole time, before finally taking up housing assistance in his early 60s. This man is now happily housed and he is linked into ongoing support from the Centre through a Community Aged Care Package. Nevertheless he still follows some of the practical routines of when he was homeless: he has lunch regularly at the Centre, he goes to Evening Meals Program and even frequents the 'soup van' at night:

I've got diabetes and I've got to be careful how much I eat and what I eat. The food here's not bad. If you go to the soup van it's only pies and pasties, it's not so good. So I only go once or twice a week for that reason (...) If I was home I'd be eatin' rubbish food and takeaway food and that's no good for me of course, and the company of people (...) this would be my main meal today, my only meal today.

His involvement with Evening Meals Program revolves around getting a meal and eating it in company. He is not interested in the art and music groups, and he speaks nostalgically about the time when the venue was a bolt and nut factory and one of the activities provided for clients was to fix up a car and sell it. He would prefer the Centre to provide both lunch and dinner five days a week, like in the old days, but otherwise he is content with his life:

The only thing I don't like about this life is when you're old everything goes. You get aches and pains and stuff. Memory goes. But we all get old don't we.

Another two men who are now housed also continue to engage with Evening Meals Program. One of them, now in his late 50s, works in the Client Volunteer Program helping with the meals at Evening Meals Program and also with the daytime lunch program. He does this because he wants to help people. He is not interested in Evening Meals Program's art or music groups and he doesn't think coming to Evening Meals Program has made a lot of difference in his life. He would like more women to attend Evening Meals Program – 'bring some decent *birds*⁵ in' – and to have dances, so that he can find someone to marry.

The other man, who is younger and in receipt of a disability support pension, believes that attending the Evening Meals Program has made a big difference for him physically, mentally and socially:

It's helped me to make choices, positive choices. I'm a lot healthier than what I used to be (...) It's most probably helped with my dietary intake. I've got hepatitis C, now it's pretty much under control. I had a growth in my liver, that's disappeared now. It's going good.

⁵ A now far less frequently used Australian and British colloquialism spoken by some older men in reference to women.

I've been more open and not being so much isolated. It's breaking me out of my shell, starting to get me to accept others (...) It's given me more confidence to get out there and take that long leap of faith that's needed. It's not easy but it's getting there slowly. [If not for Evening Meals Program] I'd most probably be wandering around, nothing to do. I wouldn't be as healthy as I am, and I wouldn't have the social circle that I do, so it's made a big change.

Through using the computers at Evening Meals Program he found family members that he didn't know about, and he thinks that this could be a service that Evening Meals Program could promote for the benefit of other clients.

Marginally housed clients

The remaining two interviewees both live in temporary accommodation – one in a private hotel and one in supported accommodation - and they both work as client volunteers for Evening Meals Program as well as for daytime programs. They are diametrically opposite in character but work with each other as volunteers.

One is chronically alcoholic but at the same time has a strong work ethic. Consequently he uses – or tries to use – volunteering as a means of reducing his alcohol intake, because he knows he is not allowed to work intoxicated. Inevitably there are times when he turns up for work drunk and he is sent home but even so, he feels that volunteering for Evening Meals Program does help him control his alcohol use and improve his health.

Before working at Evening Meals Program as a volunteer, he used to attend just for the meal:

Sometimes I just want to get a hot dish you know what I mean. So it's not like I've got a need to talk to people or anything like that. It doesn't interest me at lunchtime, it doesn't interest me at breakfast.

He has not participated in the music group, and he attended the art group just a few times in Evening Meals Program's first year of operation. He says he may take up these interests in the future. He is very critical of some Centre staff, of how the volunteer program is run, and of some of the other volunteers.

The final interviewee has anxiety and depression issues.

He enjoys the art and music programs at Evening Meals Program, and tries to attend both even though they run concurrently. He also likes to talk with the counsellors and other staff and appreciates the socialization benefits of the program:

Getting me out and about and doing something instead of sitting at home watching TV .. mixing with people, getting fed properly 'cos I can cook and all that but I just have trouble doing it (...) It's improved my health, and like I said about mixing with people, it's improved that (...) I take depression tablets, if I'm not eating properly I notice that I'm not quite on top of things, I get a bit more depressed if I'm not being around people. I'm not isolating myself as much.

Committing himself to attend Evening Meals Program has also helped him begin to overcome his anxiety about going out at night:

I get a bit scared at night for some reason. I like to be at home indoors, I've been scared a few times trying to get home. I've had a couple of encounters and stayed home a couple of weeks and then come back. I had a girl abusing me at the tram stop (...) Putting up with them things too makes me a little bit braver. I might be scared at the minute. Things like that happen and I

know how to deal with it instead of not coming back, so it's teaching me to handle things a bit better.

Due to his past bad experiences in public housing, he is not quite ready to consider permanent independent accommodation:

I think a lot of bad things have happened to me and I don't look at it. I just think down the track it'll be the same again (...) I had housing in Shepparton, I was there for 10 years. I was getting terrorized by people, I just gave everything away and took off. I've done all that, I just don't know. At the moment I'm just taking a little bit at a time. I get overwhelmed if I start thinking about that.

Commentary on the client interviews.

The rough sleepers interviewed here appear to use Evening Meals Program instrumentally to maintain their current existence: Evening Meals Program makes life a little easier, safer and more enjoyable but they could survive without it. They present as independent, self-contained and adapted to living homeless.

This would suggest that for some people, homelessness becomes deeply embedded as a way of life and it may take a serious health issue or old age before they decide to or are forced to pursue longer-term housing strategies. Until that point, Evening Meals Program functions as practical support for them in something of a 'harm minimisation' role.

The two older men interviewed – in their late 50s or early 60s and both now securely housed – also use Evening Meals Program instrumentally to meet their practical day-to-day needs, with one of them maintaining very similar eating habits to when he was homeless. In some sense these men have finished their journey and are not looking for any more than that from Evening Meals Program (apart from a bride for one of them).

The interviewee living at a private hotel uses Evening Meals Program as some type of foil for his alcoholism – not quite successfully – and appears unready to take advantage of the other benefits that participating could bring. Nevertheless, he senses that those benefits are there.

The remainder of the interviewees – one housed and one in temporary supported accommodation – appear to be more vulnerable than the other interviewees, and less adapted to the isolation, stress and periodic violence of homelessness or rooming houses. They take up all the opportunities that Evening Meals Program has to offer - within their own limitations - and describe clearly the benefits from doing so.

To summarise, within a brief weekly two-hour window Evening Meals Program offers a lot to its homeless, marginally housed and housed clients. What the clients take from Evening Meals Program depends on their character, life situations and preparedness for opportunity: hence the 'effectiveness' of Evening Meals Program depends as much on the readiness of its users as what Evening Meals Program has to offer.

Operating the Client Volunteer Program in Evening Meals Program appears to be producing benefits for clients, and discussions are underway for how the CVP program could be extended further.

Over the past year the presence of outreach workers at Evening Meals Program has been increased, and there are plans to open more rooms in the Centre during Evening Meals Program to enable more private consultations in the evenings. In terms of visiting services the absence of a nurse continues to be a gap, and there are ongoing negotiations with the service provider to remedy this situation.

On the whole however, the clients who were interviewed felt that Evening Meals Program has it 'about right' in terms of providing a mix of services and activities with meal provision, relaxation and social inclusion opportunities, all within a brief two hour timeframe.

Staff perspectives on Evening Meals Program.

Four Ozanam Community Centre staff with direct experience of Evening Meals Program, and the Centre manager were interviewed about the Program.

As in the 2012 evaluation of the Program, staff identified clear immediate and longer-term benefits for clients attending Evening Meals Program. Beyond the positive effects of a healthy meal – both physical and psychological - for people who may not eat well or often enough, Evening Meals Program was seen to provide clients with:

- Somewhere safe to hang out at night
- Opportunities for relaxation and recreation
- Out-of-hours services
- Social inclusion and personal development opportunities, and
- Life changing opportunities.

Now that Evening Meals Program has been operating for well over two years, staff are able to observe and reflect on changes over time with some clients. The longer-term changes or client benefits that staff identify flow primarily from the social inclusion opportunities that Evening Meals Program provides.

Being known and accepted somewhere, if just for one evening a week, can have a profound impact for people who are socially isolated and withdrawn:

What I see is a person who's come to Evening Meals Program for the first time, they'll be quiet, they'll be perhaps a bit withdrawn, a bit reserved. You'll engage them, start to share names, they'll come back next week. What you'll observe over a period of time is that they might make acquaintances with a couple of the other clients, and then within a period of time you'll see them come into the Centre with a smile on their face like they're happy to be in this place, they've sought this place out and it's meeting some need that they have (...) the social is so important for maintaining your tenancy and if you have problems in your relationships and you don't have social capital, your tenancy is going to be at serious risk when an issue arises (...) I'm not sure if it's a question of social skills improving or more that (...) they are feeling a sense of belonging.

Staff were able to recount several specific instances of clients going through this process and thereby gaining confidence in themselves and with the staff, the Centre and its services.

Although one clear outcome of social inclusion is initiating or improving client engagement with Ozanam Community Centre and other services, staff said that generally it is difficult to attribute significant changes in a client's life situation directly to their participation in Evening Meals Program, due to the Program's very small time window and its integration with Ozanam Community Centre's broader operations.

Nevertheless, staff members were able to identify a couple of cases including this one of a man in his early seventies:

I've built up rapport through engagement and ascertained that he's alone, he's vulnerable to elder abuse, he's illiterate (...) this is a man who's been in care up until the age of sixteen, he was abandoned at the age of seven by his family. Placed into institutions for intellectually disabled people, describes terrible abuse that other people suffered, and the extension is that he suffered it as well (...) And he looks around the Centre and he says when I was a boy I lived with him, when I was a boy I lived with him, several clients he can identify (...) A perfect candidate for community aged care support, what particularly with his age and increasing health needs so he's currently awaiting assessment from the Aged Care Assessment Service

(...) So out of Evening Meals Program, that relationship was built (...) and CACPS will then accept him once he's approved and then begin working with him until he passes away or moves into a nursing home.

As in the previous evaluation, staff point out that the less busy, more relaxed and more intimate atmosphere of Evening Meals Program compared with the daytime drop-in program enables deeper engagement with clients in a relatively short space of time.

Conclusions.

The evaluation has shown that the Evening Meals Program has continued to be well patronised by adults who experience some form of homelessness, social disadvantage or homelessness risk.

The benefit provided by the Evening Meals Program can be measured objectively against performance measures that look towards instrumental outcomes such as meals and nutrition, and rates of access to other services and participation opportunities that the program setting creates.

Attendance.

Outcomes sought.

- 80% of rough sleepers attend weekly.
- 80% of homeless, but not rough sleeping attend fortnightly
- 80% of housed but at risk for homelessness attend monthly

There is a pattern of use that suggests a degree of repeat use for a large percentage of attendees - averaging 1 in out 6 sessions for rough sleepers and 1 out of 8 sessions for people who are housed. There is a small group of approximately 5% of clients who attend fortnightly divided equally among homeless and non-homeless client categories. Both the 2012 evaluation and this evaluation suggest that most clients simply will not attend as frequently as scoped.

These are evidenced by the various program data

Reaching people in need.

Outcomes sought.

- Minimum of 20% of all users are rough sleepers.
- Minimum 50% of users are homeless.
- 90% of clients are homeless or at risk for homelessness

The data indicates the profile of service homelessness and homelessness risk corresponds with the outcomes sought.

Moreover, staff qualitative interviews confirm the time it takes to establish working relationships with very isolated and unengaged clients – and the opportunity and benefit that the Evening Meals Program has provided to working slowly, over time, to engage clients and achieve engagement in other programs or services.

Social Inclusion.

Outcomes sought.

- 50% or greater of clients attend at least 30 minutes before meal is served to have an opportunity to participate in social inclusion activities.

- Clients engage with helping services which provide accommodation, wrap around case management and support and management of substance use and other health issues.
- Volunteering provides clients with an opportunity for social inclusion.

The data supports each of these outcomes, although slightly less than half of clients (45.2%) arrive half an hour before meals are served.

Referral targets were met and the follow through for valid referrals to attendance of an appointment at another time and location may actually be considered quite high for this group of people in our community who have high rates of trauma history and ensuing sets of issues with mental health (including trauma symptoms), substance use, trauma and social and emotional difficulties. Other valid measures that could be considered are the opportunity to undertake 'brief interventions' in suit a the Evening Meals program which assist people to feel safe and understood – as part of a spectrum of helping engagement. These probably do occur –but we have not sought to measure these interactions.

Volunteering through the client volunteer program has been apparently successful since the program commenced and the target set for client volunteer participation has been exceeded.

Benefit and meaning according to circumstance and the individual.

The in-depth client interviews suggest that the ultimate benefit needs to be understood from the client perspective. The rich data of the interviews confirmed a very practical benefit for the rough sleepers to make life a little easier, safer and more enjoyable.

For people in temporary or marginal forms of shelter, the program provides a reprieve from the isolation, stress and periodic violence of life in rooming houses. People once homeless, but now in stable accommodation, might choose to maintain long-term patterns of relying upon programs such as the Evening Meals Program for both practical benefits and to meet their social inclusion needs.