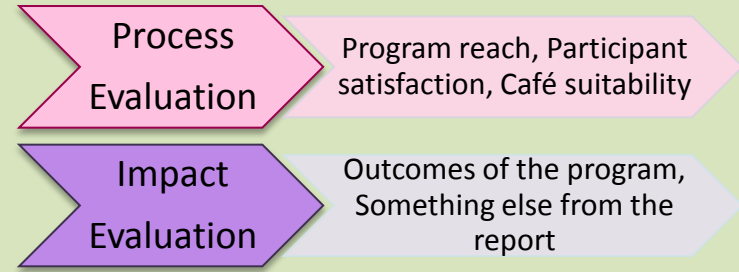


Bridging The Gap: The Lived Experience of Food Insecurity and Isolation. An Evaluation of the Social Cafe Meals Program

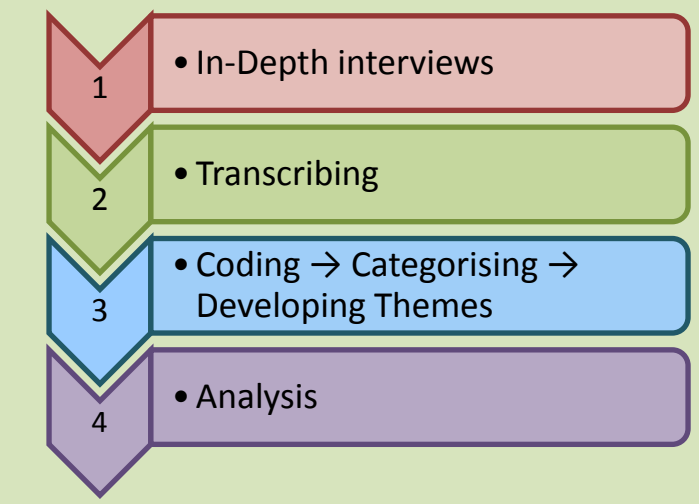
Social Cafe Meals offers socially isolated and food insecure individuals an opportunity to access subsidised cafe meals at supportive cafes in their local area.

1. Identifying the Gap

- Nine Social Cafe Meal Programs across Victoria
 - Only one evaluation has been completed
 - Hard to secure funding to prove benefits
- The project filled this gap with an evaluation to gain the lived experience of participants



2. Addressing the Gap

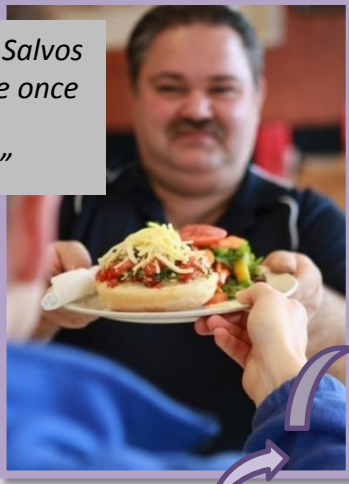


3. Filling the Gap - Findings

Food Insecurity in Vulnerable Groups

"I used to go three times a week to the Salvos in Camberwell but I've been going there once or twice now...this has changed it a lot because I come here (Bacio Dolce) now"

Members believed the program gave them access to a more nutritious meal by reducing the financial barriers to food security and decreasing reliance on emergency food relief and convenience foods.



Creating Community Cohesiveness

The program is a catalyst for establishing new relationships building interpersonal skills.



Psychological benefits for the members included feeling accepted in society, being part of the community and making friends

"...being part of normality...having a place to go where you can join in the activities with other people and feel as though you're part of it, is very uplifting to the spirit and good for mental health"

Role of Environment in Facilitating Program Use

"When you come to a place like this, a cafe, you feel good"



Members reported feeling welcomed in the cafes and that the staff are caring and friendly. The environment is less stressful and more 'normal' than that of emergency food relief centres and allows members to have greater autonomy.

Rewarding Community Contribution

The qualities & values of the cafe staff are integral to the success of the program. They have a strong desire to 'give back' to the community & believe that the program improves business.



"The effect is immediate, as soon as you help someone who really really needs help, you're helping two people."

4. Filling the Gap - Implications & Conclusion

Social Café Meals facilitates improved food security within vulnerable groups, creates community cohesiveness and decreases social isolation. This evaluation includes recommendations that will assist to develop an evidence based approach to enable future programs to be implemented, and ensure sustainability of current programs through the development of an evaluation tool.

Louise Allen, Emily Amezdroz, Pieta Bucello, Hannah Mitchell, Jackie O'Connor, Arabella Thomas

