

Meals on Wheels: Building towards
a new social experiment for our
times (ARC/AMOWA project)

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Brief historical overview of
Meals on Wheels:
Introduction to the Project



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Volunteer business models from around the world: Preliminary findings from the ARC / AMOWA project

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Australian meals on wheels

- A critical service, delivering meals to the homebound
- Not only in Australia but across the world
- Many local services are struggling to deliver a volunteer based service...

Challenges to volunteering in community services

- A tightening financial context
- Competition for volunteers
- Drop in recruitment and retention of volunteers
- Ageing of volunteers
- A more regulated environment
- Increasing volunteer expectations

ARC/AMOWA research project

- Aim “to analyse volunteer business models and contribute towards the development of a responsive, cost effective and sustainable Australian plan for the future”
- Stage 1: explore international models and identify innovation in service delivery
- Particular focus on UK and Canada

Findings

1. Challenges in utilizing volunteers
2. New approaches to delivering a food service
3. More than just a meal – roles and functions of MoW services
4. Embedded within community settings
5. New forms of recruitment
6. The thorny issue of retention

Challenges in utilizing volunteers

- Many services struggling with recruitment and retention of volunteers
- Services should be “powered by volunteers not run by them”
[UK service provider]
- Volunteer-led services are “dying like flies”
[Canadian MoW state coordinator].



New approaches to delivering a food service

- Move away from a daily hot midday meal
- Innovation:
 - Meals on two wheels
 - Corporates sponsoring routes
 - Using existing kitchens
 - Mix volunteers with paid staff



More than just a meal – roles and functions

- 3 functions
 - Nutritious meal
 - Social connections
 - Client monitoring
- Are all 3 supported by appropriate practices and systems?
- Is the day of volunteer-run services over?
- Innovation:
 - Separate the service
 - mix of paid staff / volunteers
 - Embed the service within a community setting



Embedded within community settings

- More than just a meal so can it be done differently?
- Innovation
 - Meals in congregate settings for more people
 - Provide support to make your own meal
 - Community settings for diversity



New forms of recruitment

- New sources of volunteers and new volunteer roles
- Innovation
 - Appeal to young people
 - Be inclusive – “members”
 - Volunteers from social programs
 - Use of corporates



The thorny issue of retention

- How do you retain volunteers?
 - Build in flexibility
 - Ensure volunteers' needs met
 - Have fun
 - Offer diverse roles



Where to from here?

- We need your participation in a National Survey of Australian Meals on Wheels
- This is aimed at:
 - Identifying the challenges faced by Australian MoW services
 - Exploring what works and what doesn't work in the Australian context

Thank you!

For further details, please contact us:

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