



Salvos Catering Social Enterprise

A Case Study



The Issue

Refugees and people seeking who come from collectivist cultural backgrounds are sometimes burdened by the struggle to integrate into individualistic Australian society. A refugee is an individual who has been granted a visa because of the persecution they have experienced in their home country, and a person seeking asylum is an individual who is still waiting for the protection visa to be issued. The lack of integration due to settlement issues cause anxiety and depression among the refugee community, leading to serious medical problems. Individuals can often find it difficult to make new friends and socialise with other members of the community because of cultural differences and the fears associated with moving to a foreign country. Integration has been recognised as a critical concept, and the Australian government has given significant attention to the effective integration of refugees in Australia. Considerable support for refugees to successfully integrate into Australian society is provided through various settlement services. The research indicates that while the government offers considerable support, refugees are still unable to integrate easily relative to other migrants. This inadequate integration often results in refugees being unable to realise their ambitions and exercise their reasoned agency. Some of the reasons behind the difficulties of resettlement include, beginning a new life in a new country and the differing language and cultural expectations that can lead to various social and economic challenges. The evidence has shown that social integration, freedom from discrimination and access to economic opportunities such as jobs and income improve refugee's mental health and wellbeing. In the stable integration of refugee populations, these three factors have been deemed critical.

Background

Captains Monty and Mera Bhardwaj are Salvation Army Intercultural Officers based in Melbourne. Intercultural Ministries in Victoria has been working alongside new arrivals since 2014, forming into a faith community of more than 35 families from multiple nationalities.

A refugee community from Iran was grappling with many settlement issues in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, like those listed above. Although numerous settlement organisations have offered government help, they were still unable to find employment and integrate into their newfound community. An informal relationship between the Iranian community members and Intercultural Ministries was established when interacting with them in the places where they volunteered and by participating in various cultural festivals organised by the refugee community and other organisations. Via informal discussions with individuals, the common issue of settlement and integration came to light among the refugee community. Lack of social inclusion, lack of access to economic opportunities, and inequality are the three major settlement problems identified through these conversations.

In 2017, a social enterprise called 'Salvos Catering' was created based on the identified need's and opportunities conducted among the community. A number of community members had expressed a need to gain work skills and experience in Australia. The Intercultural Ministries community also had a strong desire to be financially self-supporting and contribute the mission of The Salvation Army by enabling financial viability of the worshipping community and associated outreach.

Since 2017 Salvos Catering has been able to give employment and generate income for the women who have been struggling financially, as well as providing work experience opportunities for those looking to get into the industry.



Getting Started

In 2017 a number of catering opportunities, both internal and external to the Salvation Army, were presented for Intercultural Ministries. The first coming from Melbourne University, who approached the group to cater for a conference involving 70 delegates which was held on 15th November 2017. Mera shares "Through community connections Melbourne University approached us if we could cater to one of their events". Other examples of catering events that followed included, City of Darebin Christmas lunches, a Refugee Week Event and TSA Asylum Seeker and Refugee Service staff Christmas party.

Growing the Initiative

In December 2017 the group gained some funding and TSA Divisional Board approval, allowing them to further develop the business and officially establish Salvos Catering. The business was launched in February of 2018, with following items in place:

- Use of secure kitchen space to operate from
- Secure storage space
- Food Handler's certificates obtained (One qualified person must be present during all food preparation).
- Purchase of catering equipment
- Salvos Catering brochures designed and printed
- Salvos Catering T-shirts and aprons designed
- Promotion through internal publication, TSA website and external contacts

One of the unique selling points of the social enterprise is that they can design their menu for the budget of the customers, rather than the other way around. Another, being the diversity of the cuisines offered, from Western to Persian, Indian, Thai, Chinese and beyond.

The Model

In keeping with the Social Enterprise Business Model ¹, this initiative uses commercial strategies to achieve social objectives. In doing so, the following is achieved:

- A viable catering business in operation
- Participants gain work skills and work experience in the Australian context
- Intercultural Ministries is financially supported (50% of profits)
- Participants gain income (50% of profits)

The business, including funding for growth has been completely self-sustaining. There, however, were some establishment costs needed, including catering equipment, printing, storage cupboards and uniforms. The total amount of funds received to cover these items was \$2000 as well 'in kind' support for groceries, use of community kitchens and some kitchen equipment. These were received from the TSA Multicultural Ministries Team and supportive community and Corps members.

Challenges

Some of the main challenges have included:

- Participants needing a lot of support during the initial stages of the initiative
- Finding a permanent kitchen space that suited the operation needs
- Not being able to continue operating through COVID-19 restrictions (looking to adapt to virtual kitchen and delivery model).

Successes

As of August 2020, Salvos catering has catered for more than 100 events. A total of 7 people has worked for Salvos Catering since it started, 3 of which have gone on to find employment in the industry.

Plans for the Future

- To open a Café onsite at Thornburg Corps – not just events catering.
- Operate as a Virtual Kitchen with food deliveries around Melbourne
- Creating more opportunities and pathways for participants to enter self-entrepreneurship
- Partnership building with other agencies.

Interested in starting a similar mission imitative in your area? Check out the FAQ's below or contact diversity.inclusion@salvationarmy.org.au for support on how to get started.

¹ <https://learn.marsdd.com/article/social-enterprise-business-models/#:-:text=Social%20enterprises%20apply%20business%20solutions,solely%20on%20grants%20and%20donations.>

What training and certification do participants need? (e.g. food handling certificates)

Any food handling certification offered online or through community groups in your local area. For participants unable to cover the cost refer to local agencies, as some provide the course for free to eligible participants.

Do you require any council permits to operate a food catering business?

Yes, it is best to inform your local council of your plans to start a catering social enterprise and seek their advice as every council operates differently.

What skills are needed or important to running a catering social enterprise?

In the case of Salvos catering, most of the participants were good cooks to begin with, coming with traditional cooking skills and recipes from their home country. Some basic knowledge in book-keeping and marketing within the team is valuable. Prior experience in the hospitality industry is also advantageous, but not necessary.

Does each participant require their own ABN?

Yes, participants work as subcontractors so they have their own ABN and public liability insurance.

Who manages the overall operations of Salvos Catering?

In the case of Salvos catering, the Corps Officers manage the overall operations of the enterprise. However, this could be a Salvos employee or volunteer with the appropriate skills.

What are the different aspects of running a catering business and who does what?

Marketing material - The internal Salvation Army brand and marketing team were able to assist in designing brochures and a basic website.

Marketing - Joint effort between participants, Corps Officers, Salvos staff, volunteers and general word of mouth.

Shopping for ingredients - Done by both participants and Corps Officers.

Booking and Menu Design – The standard menu is designed by participants. However, at the time of booking, adjustments might be made based on the client's requirements and requests. Currently the Corps Officer is responsible for all bookings.

Finance, invoicing and payments: Handled by Corps Officers.

Which suppliers do you use for ingredients? How did you go about sourcing suppliers?

There is an opportunity support local business and to develop community connections. Thus, most ingredients are sourced from local supermarkets that usually provide discounts because of this established partnership.

What is the financial overview in terms of profits from the past year or two?

The average mission income is approx. \$8000. This figure excludes expenses and shared profits (50%) with participants.

What is the hourly commitment per week from both participants and Corps Offices/Managers?

Depends on the business. Approximately:

With total of three Participants: 2-3 days per week (or average of 12-14 hours) per person

With total of two Corps Officers: 2-3 days per week (or average of 12-14 hours) per person

What is the number of events done per week?

2 per week on average.