

The Salvation Army

Community Meals



Overview

A community meal is a space for the community to gather together while sharing a meal, conversation and life. It aims to bring people together regularly so that relationships can be built by doing life alongside each other. Community Meals are an easy and natural way to share the love of Jesus, create faith pathways and help build healthy communities for the members of your local area. If you have a space where people can sit down and eat together you can run this program! If you have a space where people can cook together even better! Choose a time and day that suits you and let the invitations be extended to all that are interested in joining.

How does this initiative support our Mission Intentions?

	Caring for People	Creating Faith Pathways	Building Healthy Communities	Working for Justice
How does this initiative support the Mission intentions of TSA?	Creates a community in which people are known and can be cared for	Provides opportunities for Christians to share conversation, life and faith.	Creates an intentional space for people to belong, connect and contribute to each other	Prevents social isolation. Provides a regular meal.
How will success be measured?	People report a greater sense of belonging and care	Connections that extend beyond the community meal	People engaging in the meal, both in terms of preparation and conversation	People meeting regularly at the meal

Principles

While a community meal assists people with the practical need of food, a well-run community meal can achieve so much more than this: it can create a space where genuine community can be formed. Community is at its best when people belong, are cared for and can show care, and when people can genuinely participate and contribute. As such important aspects to consider are how you can create safe spaces for conversation and sharing of each other's lives, and how you can create a meal where everyone who wants to can contribute, rather than setting up a dynamic where a selected few serve everyone else

Creating Community

- Ensure all are welcome.
- Encourage friendships to be formed that extend beyond the meal.
- Ensure the meal runs regularly and people are invited to continue the journey. This is not a one-off meal but a community forming engagement.

Facilitating participation

- Invite everyone to be involved in the preparation.
- Encourage everyone to make a contribution to the cost of the evening. Those with more, support those with less.
- Create a meal that isn't welfare, but family. It's not a handout but a hand-up.

THE T@BLE PROJECT



Getting Started

Planning

Find out what other community meals are offered in your community. If you are looking to meet a community need for meal provision ensure you schedule your meal on a day/time where no other local community groups are running a meal.

Recruiting a Team

Recruit a team of volunteers and communicate the principles of community meals to them. It is recommended that the following roles are implemented to maximize participation.

Program Leader

- Responsible for the evening, go-to person for any issues
- Creates a positive team and encourages them in all they bring.
- Ensures all the below roles are filled and understood.
- Follows up any needs that were raised and require further action

Catering Assistant

- Confirms the meal and prints out the menus for the evening.
- Ensures ingredients are purchased and cooking equipment is available.
- Lays out the preparation stations, explains the stages to the guests.
- Oversees and directs the meal preparation, assigning tasks

MC

- Ensures appropriate music is on.
- Welcomes people and outlines the flow of the evening.
- Moves people to the tables once the meal is served.
- Collects the money from participants by the end of the night.
- Ensures everyone knows they have a 'pass card' and they do not have to answer every question that is part of the conversation
- Invites people to return to the next community meal and shares any announcements or engagement opportunities.

Discussion Presenter

- Prepares the table conversation (this may be the Pass The Salt Cards or something that helps encourage conversation.)
- Prepares the 5-6 minute discussion starter talk
- These talks are centred around 'life issues', and are aimed at kickstarting conversation at each table.
- Prints out discussion questions for post talk discussion.

Table Host

- Each table needs to have their own table host
- Ensures that conversation is shared, positive and no one is left out.
- Creates an inviting space to share around the table.
- Brings to the facilitator any issues that were raised in conversation that may require follow up.

Menu and food

Affordable or free food may be able to be sourced from organisations such as Second-Bite, Oz Harvest, Food Rescue or Foodbank Victoria. Talk to your Divisional Doorways coordinator if you would like more information about accessing these organisations. You may also receive food from a community garden or a donation direct from a local company. Local Government and Community grants may also be available to assist with funding food purchases.

The food and table should represent a home or restaurant quality meal; if possible, avoid serving meals on disposable plates or using plastic cutlery.

As much as possible plan a meal that has a number of different elements, so that more people can be involved in the preparation: ie. A soup/starter, a meat dish, a vegetarian dish, a salad, another side dish, a dessert. Can creative drinks be prepared with the food you have available? Also think about the cooking equipment each element of the meal requires. For example: Only have one element that involves the stove, one element that involves the oven, use electric frypans for other elements, and have some no-cook elements (such as salads) so that people can spread out while preparing. Some menu ideas can be found at [The Table](#).

Involve as many people as possible in the preparation: tasks include cooking meals, cutting up ingredients, setting tables, reading the menu etc.

Facilitating Community

Table sizes should ideally range from 5-10 people. These numbers ensure that everyone can be engaged without it being too daunting. It is crucial that each table has a table host, this is a vital role for the meal. The table host is there to help people feel comfortable and to facilitate discussion. The MC should be sure to explain that everyone has a metaphorical "Pass Card". This means for the discussion around the tables people are welcome to "pass" or not to answer. The group dynamics that we are looking to create are not a pressure situation, but a welcoming, open and inviting environment.

Have some conversation starters present on the tables: a resource such as [Pass the Salt](#) is a great way to break the ice and get people talking.

Some discussion starter talks are available [here](#). These talks will optimally go for no longer than 5 minutes, be on general well-being and motivational topics and will lead into table discussion around the provided questions or just general discussion as a result of ideas raised in the talk.

From meeting together to talk around the tables as we eat, we can build friendships that go beyond just this one off gathering. So, encourage people to:

- Play or watch sport together
- Go out for tea/coffee/hot chocolate together
- Go to a park or go for a walk as a group
- Hire a movie together or go to a movie theatre

When people are meeting up beyond the facilitated time we have COMMUNITY!



Physical Resources

- Enough space for people to sit comfortably around tables for a meal
- Kitchen space – ideally large enough to have multiple people participating
- [Pass the Salt Cards](#)
- Cooking Utensils
- Access to Food

Finance Resource

The main costs involved in this initiative are:

- Crockery and cutlery for a large group
- Ongoing food costs

You may need extra funds if you do not have access to an appropriate kitchen space.

Recording Keeping

Record numbers attending your community meal in your SAMIS.

Funding opportunities

- [Government Funding Dashboard](#)

- Red Shield Appeal Community Initiative (Coming Soon)
- Check your local council website for community grant opportunities

Maintaining our DGR Status

If using publicly funded finances (e.g. philanthropic, RSA) for this initiative, please ensure it meets the requirements of our DGR status, as described by the Australian Taxation Office:

“A registered charity that is an institution, and whose main purpose is to provide for the relief of poverty, sickness, disability, destitution, suffering, misfortune or helplessness. The beneficiaries must be members of a class of people that particularly needs this protection and assistance, rather than the community as a whole.”

If you need further clarity around this, please contact your Divisional Public Relations Secretary.

Promotion and Advertising

Promotion can occur through social media, local community groups and community notice boards. A warm invitation from another mission expression, corps member or friend is the best promotion for a meal.

[Download Social Media graphic](#)

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