



APRIL 2025

EVALUATION OF THE FOOD COLLECTIVE

CAPTURING COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NEPHU acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, live and play.

We pay our deepest respects to their Elders, past and present. We recognise and honour the enduring connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to this land, water and Community.

CONTRIBUTORS

This Evaluation Report was compiled by First Person Consulting with the support of the Food Collective and funded by the North Eastern Public Health Unit.

Thank you to the many stakeholders and participants who contributed their time, knowledge and insights during this project.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1. Background	4
1.2. Evaluation objectives and scope	6
2. METHODOLOGY.....	5
2.1. The approach	5
2.2. Limitations	11
3. RESULTS	12
3.1. Delivery of the Food Collective.....	12
3.2. Outcomes	29
3.3. Sustainability and future opportunities	40
APPENDICES.....	45
Appendix 1: Evaluation framework.....	45
Appendix 2: Food Collective Program Logic Model	47
Appendix 3: Comparison of VicHealth-funded Food Hubs.....	48

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. North Eastern Public Health Unit Catchment Plan

The North Eastern Public Health Unit (NEPHU) is a vital component of Victoria's Public Health Network. NEPHU's purpose is to work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to deliver a comprehensive public health and prevention program for the region.

NEPHU serves Melbourne's northern and north-eastern metropolitan regions, spanning from the inner northern and eastern suburbs to the Hume and Whittlesea local government areas in the north, and extending to Nillumbik and the Yarra Ranges in the north-east. With a population of over 1.8 million people across 12 local government areas and 277 postcodes, the NEPHU catchment area is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse regions in Australia.

To support this role, NEPHU have developed a comprehensive [Population Health Catchment Plan](#) — designed to guide effective health interventions and enhance community wellbeing across the catchment.

The Population Health Catchment Plan sets out the priorities and potential actions for prevention and health promotion over two years from 2023-2025, and articulates:

- A framework, including principles and approaches, to guide how NEPHU, partners and stakeholders work together to align and prioritise health and wellbeing outcomes for the community.
- A population profile including demographic, environmental and burden of disease information for the catchment
- A model for collaborative and collective action that enhances coordination of effort.

Developed in partnership with key stakeholders and informed by a multi-stage planning process which included a review of the prevention landscape and consultation with over 40 stakeholder groups, the plan identifies two initial priority areas for collective action:

- Increasing healthy eating
- Improving sexual and reproductive health.

These health priorities are directly connected to preventable chronic diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer.



Directly tied into the healthy eating priority area is the work of the Food Collective (FC) – which is a local food hub located in the NEPHU catchment area. The FC was established in late 2019 by Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) and the Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network (ERN).¹ The FC is a multi-faceted initiative that centres on the creation of an equitable and sustainable food system that addresses a range of local needs and opportunities. These include training and employment, food insecurity, financial hardship, and community connections.

1.1.2. Food Collective

The Food Collective (FC) itself is connected to another WCC project – the Wollert Community Farm. This broader project is a partnership between WCC and Yarra Valley Water.

The mission and aims of the FC include:

Support the creation of a more equitable food system in the City of Whittlesea while working towards:



Figure 1: Food Collective aspirations

In 2022, the FC also secured investment from VicHealth as one of seven food hubs funded under the Future Healthy initiative. The VicHealth Future Healthy initiative is aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of young people aged 0-25 in Victoria. It focuses on preventing chronic diseases, promoting mental health, and encouraging physical activity. The initiative also addresses social factors like inequality and community engagement, aiming for long-term,

¹ The Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network is an active group of local emergency relief service providers from across Whittlesea, facilitated by Whittlesea Community Connections.

sustainable health outcomes by using innovative, evidence-based approaches, and collaborating with various sectors, such as schools, local governments, and health services.²

The Future Healthy Food Hubs funding aimed to help initiatives like FC and their communities enjoy locally produced, healthy foods, together by delivering markets, services and other programs to their local communities, while iterating their models to ensure financial sustainability through the support of a business accelerator program. The food hubs also aim to provide increased opportunities for communities to celebrate, showcase and learn about diverse food cultures through programs, workshops, and cooking classes³.

Recently, FC have secured additional funding from VicHealth through the Growing Healthy Communities Grants, to further their work with local schools and organisations, as well as launch a training program for young people to build skills and knowledge in food systems and hospitality.

1.2. Evaluation objectives and scope

In May 2024, NEPHU on behalf of the Healthy Eating Project Control Group for the Population Health Plan, engaged First Person Consulting (FPC) to design and implement an evaluation of the FC. The goal was to understand the effectiveness of the model, and opportunities to extend the reach and impact to address food insecurity more broadly within the catchment and in other areas.

Separate to this, VicHealth had commissioned Deakin University to conduct a broader evaluation of the Food Hubs Initiative and the associated seven funded food hubs. FPC liaised with VicHealth throughout their evaluation to ensure duplication was avoided, and that this evaluation could serve as an input into the broader Food Hubs evaluation.

The objectives and scope of the evaluation were to understand:

- The enabling factors supporting FC, such as its co-location within the Melbourne Polytechnic campus
- The extent to which the FC has been achieving intended outcomes
- The sustainability of the FC model, and potential for scaling its impact.

These objectives were used to develop key evaluation questions (KEQs) during the planning stage, which are detailed in the methodology section. The structure of this report follows the agreed KEQs.

2 [Future Healthy initiative | VicHealth](#)

3 [Initiative to boost Victorian food hubs | Future Healthy](#)

2. Methodology

2.1. The approach

The approach to the evaluation included:

- **Inception and planning.** An initial inception meeting was held between NEPHU and FPC to discuss the evaluation approach, define the intent and scope of deliverables, and establish a vision for success. A second inception meeting, involving NEPHU, FPC, the FC team, and a representative from the Food Systems Working Group at DPV Health, provided an opportunity for broader input and collaboration on the approach, as well as a discussion of potential challenges and opportunities.
- Following these discussions, an evaluation plan was developed and shared with NEPHU and FC for feedback. A final planning meeting was held to review the feedback, which was then incorporated into the final version. This involved developing key questions based on the evaluation objectives, focused on understanding the FC model, its outcomes, sustainability, and scalability. The key questions and data sources are outlined below in Table 1 along with the corresponding sections of the report.

The evaluation framework and program logic model can be found in respective sections of the Appendices.

Table 1: Key evaluation questions, sub-questions, data sources and methods

EVALUATION AREA	SUB-QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE AND METHOD
SECTION 3.1: DELIVERY OF THE FOOD COLLECTIVE	a) What is the FC model and how was it developed? b) What changes have been made to the FC model over time, and why? c) What are the similarities and differences between FC and other food hubs? d) What aspects of the model work well, and what could be improved?	• Design documents • Interviews with program staff • Design documents • Interviews with program staff • Desktop research of other food hub models in Australia, including evaluations and research reports • Feedback from FC stakeholders and program staff • Desktop research of other food hub models in Australia, including evaluations and research reports • Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community
SECTION 3.2: OUTCOMES	a) To what extent have the identified outcomes (as per the agreed logic model) been achieved? b) Have there been any unintended or unexpected outcomes (either positive or negative)?	• Review of data collected by FC • Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community • Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community
SECTION 3.3: FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES	a) To what extent is FC sustainable? b) In what ways is the impact of the FC scalable? c) What new opportunities are there that FC could explore?	• Desktop research of other food hub models in Australia, including evaluations and research reports • Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community



- **Implementation.** The evaluation included a review of documents provided by FC, a comparative analysis of the seven VicHealth-funded food hubs alongside other food hubs, primary data gathered from two community events, and interviews with FC staff, NEPHU staff, and stakeholders. These components are discussed in more detail below.
 - **Review of FC documents.** Documents provided by FC included operational reporting, progress report, submission to Food Security Inquiry in Victoria, and PPT presentations describing key aspects of the FC. Documents were reviewed for relevance, and key information summarised accordingly.
 - **Rapid review of other food hubs.** A Google search was undertaken to first understand the other six VicHealth-funded food hub models and identify similarities and differences to FC. The same approach was then applied to food hubs across Victoria more broadly, with the overall aim of identifying what lessons might be relevant for the sustainability and scalability of FC.
 - **Primary data collection with community.** Primary data collection focused on two events, each centred on a key aspect of the FC: the market and food produce boxes. **It is estimated at least 100 people were engaged across the two activities (refer to Table 2 below for a breakdown).** Recognising the challenges in methods, such as surveys, the evaluation team worked with the FC team and NEPHU to collect data via two event-based activities:
 - **Attendance at the market** – working with FC, we promoted the market and opportunity for people to provide feedback. To boost engagement, FPC developed on-the-day single use vouchers (up to \$10) for the local café that could be used as non-financial incentives. On the spot individual or group conversations were held, and there were two staff from FC and NEPHU who could speak Mandarin and Arabic with attendees in- language. Observations were also undertaken.
 - **A community lunch for people accessing food boxes.** This cohort is typically harder to engage as they obtain food boxes through delivery, or pick-up. FPC funded a community lunch and provided a free food box to encourage attendance at the event, where we then undertook consultations and observations. These community events are discussed in more detail in Section

- **Primary data collection with stakeholders.** Interviews were conducted with WCC/FC team members to gain a deeper understanding of the FC model, its evolution, and lessons learned. Additional interviews with stakeholders, including local council and NEPHU staff, were conducted to gather broader perspectives on the FC and identify potential challenges and opportunities for supporting the sustainability and scalability of FC within the catchment (refer to Table 3 for a breakdown).
- **Analysis and reporting.** Documents and data provided by FC were reviewed and summarised under relevant evaluation questions. Qualitative data collected through interviews with community members and stakeholders were thematically analysed to identify key insights, patterns and themes, and summarised under relevant evaluation questions. Case studies and vignettes were created to provide in-depth narratives and examples illustrating the impact of FC activities. This evaluation report was prepared synthesising all information and data to address the KEQs.

Table 2: Number of community members engaged in conversations.

Community event	Number of people engaged
Market	89 (some conversations involved two or more people)
Community lunch	11 (some conversations involved two or more people)
Total	100 (approximately)

Table 3: Number of key stakeholders engaged in interviews.

Stakeholder group	Number of people engaged
WCC/FC staff	5
NEPHU staff	2
Other stakeholders	1
Total	8

2.2. Limitations

The main limitations to the evaluation are below and should be kept in mind when interpreting the results:

- **Availability of stakeholders for interviews.** Not all stakeholders invited to participate in an interview responded, or were able to find a suitable time, due to the time of year. This means that stakeholder feedback is largely limited to the perspectives of WCC and NEPHU, and external stakeholders including food relief services, Melbourne Polytechnic and funding representatives have not been represented.
- **Evaluation scope.** The resourcing and associated smaller scope of the evaluation meant that not all components of the FC were explored and assessed for impact, and potential for sustainability and scaling. Any future considerations should therefore be considered within the context of this.

3. Results

3.1. Delivery of the Food Collective

3.1.1. Design of the Food Collective model

This section is based on a review of documents provided by FC, publicly available information from the WCC website, and interviews with FC staff. It aims to address the following evaluation questions:

- 1a) What is the FC model and how was it developed?
- 1b) What changes have been made to the FC model over time, and why?

The Food Collective was originally a vision of members of the Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network (ERN) for a place-based food hub. It was launched in 2019 with the aim of commencing operations in 2020. The intention was that the food hub would initially service community members in the City of Whittlesea, and then consider expanding to outer areas. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted plans and the FC became primarily a food relief service to support residents throughout 2020-2021.

In 2022, funding received from VicHealth under the Future Health Food Hubs Initiative enabled FC to trial different social enterprise activities, including the market and the food box scheme, and later, the café and catering. The market was prioritised initially due to the timeline requirement for operationalising the funding.

“It’s been continually changing. Food relief has been the core program since the Food Collective started, but with this funding from VicHealth, we’ve really been trialling different things these last two years and started off with the market, then moved on to food boxes, then we dropped the market for a while to focus on the catering and café. And so, it’s been a period of trials to try and come out with what is it that are we best placed to do that’s going to have the best impact that will be sustainable.” (WCC/FC staff)

Through the various programs and activities, the core vision of the FC has remained the same, to support those most in need by providing dignified and culturally appropriate options, wraparound support and education and training opportunities.

“At the core it was still about choice, dignity and culturally appropriate service, and the underlying principle of no judgement. Our model is based on the fact we have been working with people really financially insecure and food insecure for a long time from that base with different options” (WCC/FC staff)

Since its founding, FC has evolved over time both in adapting to the current needs of the community, as well as available resources and capacity. At the time of preparing this report, the scope of FC activity consisted of:

- **Café and catering social enterprises.** Located at Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping, the café and catering aim to provide healthy and culturally diverse food made on the premises. The café and catering delivers training and employment pathways for young people and people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, supporting them to build confidence to work and develop skills in hospitality.
- **Weekly produce market.** Market produce is sourced locally where possible from the Melbourne Wholesale Market in Epping and sold at discounted prices. The market is held at Melbourne Polytechnic campus between 10am-1.30pm every Wednesday.
- **Produce boxes.** The produce box scheme aims to increase community access to healthy, affordable and locally grown food, with a focus on people experiencing food insecurity. Boxes are filled every Tuesday morning and can be picked up from the Whittlesea Food Collective on a Tuesday or Wednesday or delivered free on Tuesday to postcodes in the City of Whittlesea and some surrounding suburbs.
- **Food relief.** WCC have a Hardship Help Program and as part of this program, clients can access a free supermarket which operates from the FC twice weekly. Clients can choose from a range of fresh fruit and vegetables, staples, eggs and frozen meals along with pet food and small range of toiletries. Clients can also receive a voucher for a produce box and may continue purchasing the produce boxes after receiving food relief support.
- **Demonstration garden.** Located at the FC, the demonstration garden provides a space for community members to engage in volunteering and learn about growing food. Harvested produce is donated to the food relief program.
- **Grocery service.** FC has recently commenced a grocery service that sources and sells locally grown fruit, vegetables and local produce to food hubs, organisations, and businesses.
- **Schools program.** FC seeks to engage with schools and work with young people to increase their knowledge and awareness of food security issues through practical activities.

- **Wollert Community Farm.** The Wollert Community Farm is a partnership project between Whittlesea Community Connections and Yarra Valley Water. It is located in Melbourne's outer northern suburbs and is an environmental education hub and local food system that aims to restore nature and ensure that local community members can live and eat well. The Farm will be completed in stages.. Activities at the farm will include:
 - Social enterprise indigenous plant nursery, nugal biik plants and seeds.
 - Community food growing and seedling propagation
 - Education, training and volunteering
 - Conservation and land management
 - Crop trialling and research
 - First Nations-led activities.

Through these programs and activities, FC aims to provide food relief to those in need, offer affordable and healthy food options to the broader community, and support the wider food system by prioritising local produce and providing education and training opportunities.

Future activities are planned to focus on operationalising the farm and expanding wholesale offerings, with a particular focus on organisations delivering services to children and young people, following the recent acquisition of additional VicHealth funding to support this.

Feedback from FC/WCC staff identified the following challenges and lessons learned through delivery to date include:

- **Limited capacity to run multiple programs and activities simultaneously.** While exploring various activities and programs has its benefits, the spread of resources and capacity may have limited the impact of some components that could have been more effective with greater focus. For example, setting up the café and catering enterprise demanded a significant amount of time which meant other programs had to be paused, including the market. Without being able to measure and evaluate each component in detail, it is difficult to assess what is working well and what should be prioritised moving forward.

“We’ve done a lot of different things all at once, which kind of means that we haven’t been able to properly measure and evaluate one program and really refine it so it’s really good and instead we’ve been trying to do lots of different things all at once, which means there’s less time to properly plan and evaluate each program. There are other things to explore, but also with being mindful about not wanting to bite off more than we can chew because I think that’s what we have done a bit too much over the last couple of years.” (WCC/FC staff)

- **Procuring and providing produce at a fair and affordable price.** A challenge has been providing affordable produce to the community without compromising on other important principles, such as ensuring fair prices for local regenerative farmers. Additionally, particularly in the winter months, sourcing local food that is culturally appropriate for the community has been difficult.

“The challenge of trying to pay farmers fairly but also trying to address the needs of the community, which is people experiencing food insecurity and they can’t afford expensive food.” (WCC/FC staff)

- **Time and funding constraints.** The time constraints associated with funding have impacted the ability of FC to research and plan activities that would likely have the greatest impact, as well as develop partnerships that could support implementation, including through monitoring and evaluation. This has flow on effects to understanding which enterprises could be financially sustainable within the funding period.

3.1.2. Similarities and differences between FC and other Food Hubs

This section is based on a desktop review and analysis of VicHealth Food Hubs, and supplemented by interviews with FC staff. It aims to address the following evaluation question:

1c) What are the similarities and differences between FC and other food hubs?

The seven Food Hubs funded by VicHealth under the Future Health Initiative include:

- [Food Collective](#)
- Ubuntu Food Hub
- Common Ground Project Food Hub
- Acres and Acres Food Hub
- Grow Cook Share Food Hub
- Nourish Sunraysia
- [Wimmera Food Collective](#)

These Food Hubs deliver markets, services and other programs to their local communities, while iterating their models to ensure financial sustainability through the support of a business accelerator program. While the FC shares many characteristics with the other Food Hubs, it also has unique features. In particular, FC stands out for its diverse range of services, its co-location with Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping, and its education and training pathways designed to help individuals transition out of food insecurity.

“I think what's sort of unique about what we're doing is that we're trying to broaden out our services kind of beyond people that are in crisis or hardship to people who are on low incomes to hopefully provide an alternative for them to either avoid getting into crisis or, you know, to help at the other end of that situation.” (WCC staff)

The key similarities and differences between the VicHealth Food Hubs are highlighted below, and a comparison table is provided in Table 4. The comparative analysis involved first identifying the key components of the FC which are categorised across the top, followed by a review and comparison of the components of the other Food Hubs. A more detailed table outlining the offerings of the Food Hubs can be found in Appendix 3: Comparison of VicHealth-funded Food Hubs.

Co-location

The FC is the only Food Hub located on an educational campus, the Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping. This co-location not only makes fresh produce readily available to students, staff and the community but also facilitates hands-on learning opportunities for hospitality students. A key benefit of this co-location is being able to reach one of WCC's priority population groups of community members from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Opportunities for hands-on learning also enables students and staff to learn how to grow, prepare, cook and store food that they might otherwise not be familiar with, and learn and celebrate food from different cultures through food demonstrations. Other food collectives, such as Ubuntu Food Hub and Common Ground Project, are located on farms and have a more agricultural focus. Each Food Hub reflects the location and community it services, and contributes to a unique environment for community members and visitors.

Market and produce Sales

Similar to other collectives, FC operates a weekly market that offers fresh, locally grown produce. The market is unique given the location at the Polytechnic campus, which gives FC an avenue to address food insecurity and social connection among students and staff. Both FC and Ubuntu Food Hub operate their markets only one day per week, in comparison to other collectives, such as Common Ground that operates from Wednesday to Sunday at its farm gate and Acres and Acres that run sporadic farm gate events, and frequently pair these with farmers markets.

Café and catering services

The FC café and catering is an integral part of FC's overall operation, providing training and employment for young people and people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This emphasis on education aligns with FC's mission to empower the local community. Other food hubs, such as the Common Ground Project and Wimmera Food Collective, also have cafés, however FC's direct link to a training institution makes it a unique approach. The approach does share similarities with STREATs café and catering offerings, which serve as job training and revenue for the social enterprise.

Farming and local produce

FC aspiration to establish food growing at the Wollert Community Farm, to supply produce for its market, produce boxes and, café could foster community connection and awareness of food systems, especially among refugee and migrant populations. Other food collectives, such as Acres and Acres manage multiple community farms to cultivate fresh produce for local distribution, and connect a community largely disrupted by Black Summer Bushfires (2019-2020 Victorian summer period), while Ubuntu Food Hub aims to bridge the intergenerational and cultural gap within their communities through the farming programs. The positive link between farming and community is evident through these initiatives, ensuring food is not only grown locally, but can provide valuable opportunities for meaningful social and cultural connection among communities.

Community events and workshops

Workshops and community events are common among food hubs trying to promote awareness of food systems and healthy eating. FC hosts workshops and community events, such as demonstration gardens and school events, to engage the community and promote sustainable practices. It is commonly recognised that meaningful engagement with the community is an important component of any food collective or social enterprise. This is common in many other collectives like Ubuntu Food Hub, which organises cultural events to connect diverse community members. Common Ground Project offers a variety of cooking workshops and community cooking experiences. Acres and Acres take a slightly different approach to their community events and workshop, working closely with primary produces to build capacity and share resources, and to grow knowledge in the community of food networks.

Training and career opportunities

FC's program for hospitality students benefits from its partnership with the Melbourne Polytechnic and provides a valuable avenue to increase social participation among people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This focus on education is also evident at the FC and Common Ground Project, both with training initiatives aimed at supporting people and communities facing inequities around access and opportunity promoted via public channels. While other food collectives offer some training, FC's physical connection with an educational institution amplifies its capability to provide training and employment opportunities in the food service industry and connect with a large cohort of students.

Grocery services

FC provides a grocery service that prioritises locally grown, culturally appropriate produce, supplying other organisations and businesses that aim to support local agriculture and improve access to healthy fruits and vegetables for their communities, including other food hubs. This is similar to the operations of Common Ground Project and Acres and Acres, who each supply local restaurants and businesses with fresh produce, both finding it a valuable avenue of revenue, connecting the community with local food systems and reducing food miles.

Food relief and produce boxes

FC's commitment to providing food relief boxes demonstrates its strong focus on addressing food insecurity. This approach is shared by other food collectives, such as the Wimmera Food Collective and Nourish Sunraysia, both of which prioritise food relief for low socioeconomic and multicultural communities, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, who are more likely to experience food insecurity.

Table 4: Food Hub comparison table

Food hub/location	Market	Produce boxes	Co-location	Café/catering	Farm	Community events/workshop	Training/careers	Wholesale	Food relief
Food Collective , The City of Whittlesea	Established in 2019 by Whittlesea Community Connections, the Whittlesea Food Collective aims to create a more equitable food system in the outer north, by supporting households experiencing financial hardship, strengthening community connections, improving health and wellbeing, and increasing training and employment opportunities through community-based food production and distribution.								
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ubuntu Food Hub Cardina Shire	The United African Farm project is a community-based initiative founded and run by the members of African descent, with the aim of bridging the inter-generational and cultural gap within their community, through adopting the farming model, market showcase, capacity and cultural excursion within the community								
	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Common Ground Project Food Hub Surf Coast Shire	Common Ground project Food Hub connects the community with locally grown produce and allows them to support the local food system and protect vital growing land for future generations It supports local producers from around the community and region.								
	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acres and Acres Food Hub Towong Shire	Acres and Acres CO- OP was established in March 2020 in response to the bush fires that impacted the Towong Shire in January 2020. It was established to support bush-fire affected communities and grew rapidly as a response to Covid19 to create food security and community resilience and to create employment and training opportunities.								

	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Wimmera Food Collective , Horsham Rural City	Wimmera Food Collective is an initiative by the Centre for Participation. It is an inclusive and vibrant space providing food programs, where people can sell, buy, and celebrate local, affordable, and culturally desired produce. Projects include a social garden, social pantry, Laneway Cafe Without Borders, Migrant Hospitality Pathways Program, Micro-Business Program, retail food outlets, bulk buying groups, a storage facility, food enterprise incubator/co-working space and a community kitchen.								
	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓
Grow Cook Share Food Hub Greater Bendigo Shire	Grow Cook Share Food Hub is an agreed vision with Bendigo Foodshare and the Bendigo Community to further strengthen Greater Bendigo as a leader in food sustainability. It is a hub and spoke model, living at places where community can access, feel safe and connect, including Golden Gums Farm market garden, local Growers' Markets, schools, and community houses.								
	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Nourish Sunraysia Mildura Rural City	Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC) have partnered with Food Next Door (FND), by connecting new migrant and refugee farmers with unused farmland, FND trains and supports them, using regenerative farming practices to strengthen resilience in community. The aim is to nourish Sunraysia's diverse multicultural community with access to locally grown, culturally appropriate healthy food.								
	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓

3.1.3. Lessons from other food hubs

In addition to comparing the VicHealth Food Hubs, a rapid literature review of other food hubs and collectives identified lessons on what has worked well and what have been some common challenges. Like the previous section, this supports answering the following sub-key evaluation question:

1c) What are the similarities and differences between FC and other foodhubs?

This section is based on a literature review of wider selection of food hubs, including the VicHealth Food Hubs and other local food hub and social enterprises, including:

- Streat Enterprises
- Sustain Network

In summary, these lessons include:

- Community engagement is key to many successful food collectives, with workshops and events playing key roles and education.
- Volunteering plays important roles in fostering social connection and training aspiring workers; however, volunteers want meaningful opportunities to learn and socialise.
- Food hubs can contribute to sustainable farming practices, environmental stewardship and foster positive cultural connection.
- Resource challenges are common through the social enterprise sector, and grants rarely fund project management roles.

Each of these are explored in more detail below.

Community engagement and education

Acres and Acres have had a lot of success engaging with the community through various channels, including farmers markets, their market garden, and by visiting community groups and schools. They organise workshops on topics, such as composting, mushroom growing, and fruit tree pruning⁴.

Their approach demonstrates how food hubs can build capacity of community-based producers and increase knowledge of local food systems. It could be a useful lesson for the Wollert Community farm, showing the benefits of engaging with the community and schools when setting up community farming operations.

⁴ [Acres and Acres: A Living Growing Document](#), Acres and Acres, DELWP, Gateway Health (2023)

Volunteer management

Acres and Acres find volunteers through various avenues, including food swap groups, gardening groups, and social media. They note that volunteers have a range of diverse motivations for volunteering, including social connection, community support, and skill development, and that tailoring volunteer streams to meet expectations has had a positive effect on volunteer numbers. Acres and Acres do operate in a different context than FC, in rural, and somewhat remote region with a larger number of primary producers, their approach to recruiting volunteers leverages their networks of primary producers.

In FC's context, a more urban environment and a more diverse community, understanding volunteer motivations is beneficial. Volunteers at FC are recruited through WCC, with promoted opportunities and online EOIs. FC could benefit from considering how different streams of volunteers could support FC and tapping into existing networks from those seeking social connections, training for paid employment and those looking for more agricultural and market garden experience.

Employment and Training Pathways

Given FC's co-location with the Polytechnic campus and connection to the café and catering, FC is well positioned to promote employment opportunities and social participation. STREAT demonstrates the importance of social connection in offering employment training and pathways for young people. Common Ground Project also runs social initiatives supporting training and employment in the hospitality industry, specifically targeted at women from asylum seeker and refugee background.⁵

Partnering with education institutions

YouFoods⁶ found that partnering with educational institutions and having strong youth engagement avenues was effective in addressing food insecurity and discomfort with accessing food relief among younger community members. Their research highlights different experiences and perspectives between high school and university students regarding food insecurity and access to food relief. The co-location of FC at Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping offers similar benefits, providing students—many of whom come from refugee and migrant backgrounds and may be more vulnerable to food insecurity—with access to more affordable produce and fewer barriers to accessing food relief services.

⁵ [Improving Health Equity Among Young People: The role of Social Enterprise](#), Centre for Social impact (2020)

⁶ [Youfoods Insights: Bendigo Foodshare](#) Youth Research, 2020

Addressing food Insecurity

FC plays a significant role in addressing food insecurity, which is widely recognised as critical for improving the wellbeing of people and communities experiencing disadvantage. The 2023 Foodbank Hunger Report reveals 94% of food-insecure households changed shopping habits by cutting back on meals⁷. Food insecurity disproportionately affects culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and single parents. This research reinforces the importance of FC's role in supporting community members at risk of experiencing food insecurity with food relief, as well as fostering social connection and positive wellbeing.

Farming and social enterprises.

Both Acres and Acres, and Common Ground have effectively demonstrated how food hubs can contribute to sustainable farming practices and environmental stewardship.

Acres and Acres community farm system serves as a strong model for community-based farming for social enterprises. They implemented a holistic approach that utilises waste, maximises production, and includes their own processing and distribution network, all while bringing the community with them at every step. They have also developed their Living, Growing Document, a blue-print for new and growing farmers and social enterprises that sets out approaches to managing community farms.

The Common Ground Project also demonstrates the role of food collectives in regenerative agriculture, reporting impacts, such as:

- 800+ native trees planted
- 50% reduction to landfill
- 1.2T of food waste diverted to compost

Community perceptions and values

There is a definite desire among the community for more visible food systems and fresh local produce. The Common Ground Project engaged with their community to identify their perceptions of the value of the food collective and what they would like to see. They conducted a survey that found that 91% of respondents believed their area (Surf Coast Shire) was missing a space for local growers and makers to sell produce and for communities to learn about regenerative projects⁸.

⁷ [FoodBank Hunger Report](#), Foodbank, (2023)

In their community there is a strong community desire for local food hubs and the services they provide, including access to fresh produce and educational opportunities. They also found their community value food collectives for their variety of seasonal and culturally relevant produce, affordability, traceability, and community connection. While a more rural context than FC, these are no doubt transferrable to the Whittlesea community. Other findings include a desire for promotion of local food systems through a directory, sharing of recipes, storage and preservation techniques.

Barriers to accessing food relief

YouFoods⁹ research in rural Victoria identified several barriers to accessing food relief, including:

- feeling embarrassed about seeking help (41%)
- not knowing relief was available locally (40%)
- feeling uncomfortable approaching support organisations (37%).

Some other practical barriers include inflexible pick-up schedules, price concerns, and preferences for certain produce appearances. While reported psychological barriers involve feelings of embarrassment, lack of awareness, and discomfort in seeking help.

Interestingly, those with lived experience of accessing food relief reported different top barriers, including:

- Thinking others might need assistance more than them (52%)
- Believing they were ineligible (31%).

Addressing this could be done through targeted awareness campaigns. Information campaigns about food relief services that are tailored to different age groups and educational settings are examples of activities that FC could undertake to address both practical and psychological barriers in accessing food relief services.

⁸ [Common Ground Community Consultation Report](#), Common Ground Project Food Hub (2023).

⁹ [FoodBank Hunger Report](#), Foodbank, (2023)

By taking a community engagement approach, such as awareness raising and education campaigns, and leveraging the relationship with Melbourne Polytechnic, there is an opportunity for FC to address both practical and psychological barriers to improving access to food relief services, with particular attention to reducing stigma and increasing awareness of available services.

Resource challenges

Funding challenges aren't exclusive to FC. Acres and Acres for example, experienced a number of grant and funding constraints, including a noticeable lack of funding for project management roles, as well as a heavy reliance on volunteers.

3.1.4. FC strengths and areas for improvement

This section is informed by interviews with FC staff and stakeholders and aims to answer the following evaluation question:

1d) What aspects of the model work well, and what could be improved?

The following aspects of the FC were identified as key strengths:

- **Co-location of FC with Melbourne Polytechnic.** This partnership provides access to WCC priority population groups, particularly refugee and migrant communities. The location also provides access to hospitality programs and is close to public transport making it accessible for people that do not have a car or are unable to drive.

“They (clients) seem to really like it, it’s quiet, private, separate from main offices. It’s its own place, and near transport. There is not much in Epping so it’s good to have it there, most people are from Epping, Lalor those areas.” WCC/FC staff

“Huge benefits in that we’ve got access to really good spaces and infrastructure and programs. So, in particular in the cafe, we’ve got the access to their hospitality programs and the possibilities of linking up with them so that trainees can get a more comprehensive kind of experience. It’s not just work experience. It’s also part of their English program or part of their hospitality program. And it just gives us a really strong foundation to apply for further funding because we’ve got such a strong partnership and basis to kind of start with.” (WCC/FC staff

- **Food relief vouchers.** Food relief vouchers provide individuals who may not otherwise afford quality produce with access to fresh, nutritious items. The benefit of this is the ability for recipients to select their own food, which fosters dignity and empowers them with choice—an approach that sets it apart from other food relief programs.

“So, the choice thing gives power to the client that is not there when you prepare the things for them. Also, they have a say when they come physically to the place and they can choose what they want to use the, like if the voucher for or what they want to collect from the shelves and so on. It’s empowering the community. They feel dignity because it’s their choice.” (WCC/FC staff)

- **Food box scheme.** Food boxes expand the reach of fresh, nutritious, affordable produce beyond the weekly market. Recipients commented on the quality and freshness of the items, especially when compared to other food relief services, which often lack quality and rely heavily on packaged and discretionary items. The convenience of ordering online, with options for delivery or in-person pickup, is also appreciated. Additionally, the food boxes offer individuals receiving food relief an opportunity to connect with another facet of the FC, allowing them to continue accessing low-cost, high-quality produce.

“It’s been really nice to be able to offer something really high quality that they might not otherwise prioritise amongst all of the other things that they have to spend limited income on and might not otherwise be able to access.

(WCC/FC staff)

- **Café and catering.** The café and catering enterprises provide multiple benefits and opportunities, including a variety of quality food options, an activated space for people to connect and training and employment pathways. The catering service was launched in August 2024 and has had a variety of businesses, including council, using the service regularly.

“The café and catering enterprises weren't part of the initial picture, but turns out are a good way of offering training and employment pathways because of where they're located and how that can be made convenient to people from the cohorts that we want to support, people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and young people, because there's not many other social enterprises in the local area that are doing it. We've had really good support and because of just the connections that we have with organisations in the local area. We've had really good support with those enterprises that have been more sort of successful than we anticipated.” (WCC/FC staff)

- **Providing wraparound support through other WCC services and programs.**
The FC takes a holistic and long-term approach to supporting clients through pathways rather than just addressing immediate needs.

“I think that's crucial and that's brilliant of them to be thinking that far out head as well, that it's not just people coming and purchasing food or picking up their food hampers, but that they can also see someone to help them get back on their feet or step them in the right direction.” (Stakeholder)

- This includes providing training and volunteer opportunities as well as two-way referral between FC and other WCC programs and services. This connection to the target group enables FC to learn about the specific food needs and preferences of the community, particularly relating to cultural appropriateness.

“So we always enhance what the clients want and need and whether it is healthy enough, good enough and what they use, to introduce the team to especially the Mediterranean or Halal sector. So that was a part of our communication. Those needs to be reflected in the food relief packages.” (WCC/FC staff)

- **Pop-up food relief markets.** Twelve pop-up markets were delivered over an 8–12- month period in partnership with the ERN, with produce purchased from Melbourne Market. WCC worked with 10 Emergency Relief providers, 15 community support services, 30 local businesses, 50 volunteers, and 45 students who supported market service provision, food supply/distribution, and coordination on the day. Evaluation of these events were suggested to have demonstrated strong community outcomes that will likely see additional pop-up events be run in the future.

Staff and stakeholders proposed the following areas of the FC model and delivery that could be improved:

- **Engagement between FC and the Emergency Relief Network.** Although the FC was originally an idea of the ERN, there has been limited engagement since the FC was launched. To expand the FC's reach and impact, it would be helpful to identify opportunities for effectively accessing and utilising the RN, while considering the limitations of time and resources. One suggestion was to promote wholesaling through the network, ensuring a clearly defined plan.

“We need to be much clearer in terms of what we are and how we can work with the network. Having a very clearly defined plan from our end about what it is we can do and how and what it looks it – previously it’s been communicated in a way that’s very vague, so they won’t even look at it. And backing up the plan you need to follow through.” (WCC/FC staff)

- **Awareness and access to the market.** Co-location with Melbourne Polytechnic offers many benefits; however, it also presents challenges, such as limited parking and a lack of awareness that the facility is open to the public. Broader promotion is needed, and offering services at different times, when the parking lot is less crowded, could be considered, depending on capacity and resources.
- **Marketing and promotion of FC.** Broader awareness of the FC could be improved. Many attendees of the market and community lunch events had little knowledge of other aspects of the FC, suggesting that more could be done in terms of promoting FC, whether this be through the ERN, NEPHU, VicHealth or other community organisations.
- **Availability of culturally diverse food options.** While the challenges of accessing a wide range of culturally diverse and appropriate food sources were acknowledged, several market attendees and a few stakeholders requested increased variety. Suggestions included offering more organic produce, providing halal options where possible, and exploring partnerships or referrals to other services or initiatives that could meet these needs.
- **Further develop training program.** There is an opportunity to develop the training program further, considering the diverse needs of participants, as well as how to reach other participants outside of the Melbourne Polytechnic.

“The training program needs to be further refined and developed, and we need to think about how we make it a really good experience for young people in particular, because I think that's quite a different model to working for some, especially if it's young people who are experiencing barriers to engagement that we need to think about what supports we can offer through the program or who we can partner with. And we have applied for some funding to do that with together with our youth team.”
(WCC/FC staff)

3.2. Outcomes

3.2.1. Achievement of intended outcomes

Results against general outcome domains are based on interviews with FC staff and stakeholders, and a review of documents provided by FC. This section aims to answer the following evaluation question:

2a) To what extent have the identified outcomes been achieved? The FC program logic model is shown in Figure 2 of the Appendices

Since this evaluation did not cover all aspects of the FC, we have provided a summary of some of the key achievements under the outcome areas below.

Providing access to affordable, quality, healthy food options

From August 2023 to July 2024, 2,125 customers¹⁰ were reached through the market and food boxes. Around 52 people attended the market weekly. Feedback from those who access the market and food boxes highlighted the quality of the produce compared to supermarkets and other food relief services, and the convenience in being able to access healthy food options.

“I never saw the quality of pomegranate that we have in the market. Because the food collective market because it's come from local providers not from the supermarket who travel in their containers.” (WCC/FC staff)

¹⁰ Some of these were repeat customers.

Providing food relief

The FC offers an alternative to traditional food relief services by allowing recipients to select their own items, ensuring dignity of choice. In 2023-24, the program provided food vouchers to 110 clients and delivered 2,715 food packages to 844 households, benefiting at least 916 adults and 540 children. Each food package was valued at \$75, and the total value of emergency relief assistance through food packages amounted to at least \$203,625.

Increasing social connection

Many FC programs and activities are centred around creating spaces for people to gather, enjoy the environment, and connect over food. The café at Melbourne Polytechnic, which previously faced challenges in attracting staff and students, now offers a broader range of food options and hosts social events. This has received positive feedback from teachers, who have observed a notable improvement in the overall atmosphere.

FC also organises a variety of community-based events, including school programs and community lunches. In 2023-24, three senior lunches were held, with approximately 75 seniors accessing fresh fruit and vegetables from the market. Additionally, four community lunches took place, each attracting an average of 45 attendees. Of these participants, 50% were food insecure, while the other 50% were seeking community connection.

Increasing food literacy and connection to food

A range of activities have been delivered to increase community knowledge and a deeper connection to food. These initiatives have included cooking demonstrations featuring cuisines from various cultures, as well as guidance on how to use seasonal produce.

“We’ve offered cooking demonstrations a few times as part of the food collective. During these sessions, they can show how to prepare meals, and people can see what can be done with the available products.” (WCC/FC staff)

Food boxes at times have also included information cards, detailing how to use and store certain items. These cards have been particularly useful for those who are unfamiliar with different seasonal produce.

Creating a connection to where food comes from is another priority, especially for those accustomed to the appearance of supermarket products. For instance, local eggs, which are typically smaller compared to the larger supermarket varieties (typically 700-900 grams).



“The eggs for example, so they’re from local provide and because usually the supermarket ones are 7, 8, 900 grams, and the local ones are really very tiny so the story behind the product.” (WCC/FC staff)

Additionally, the FC has hosted school visits to raise awareness about food systems through hands-on activities, such as gardening, food packaging, and cooking. These experiences help strengthen the relationship between young people and the food they consume. In 2023-24, 12 visits took place with three local schools, engaging an average of 10 students per visit.

Providing training and employment opportunities and pathways

FC offers training and employment pathways through the café and catering enterprises to people facing barriers to employment, prioritising young people and people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The purpose is to support them to build confidence to work and develop skills in hospitality.

Participants that would like to undertake further accredited training in hospitality can be referred to Melbourne Polytechnic for assistance to enroll in relevant courses and given the opportunity for further work experience with partner food enterprises. Those that are ready for work can be referred to the WCC employment team for support to find a job with a local employer.

The social enterprise café was operational from July 2024 and the first cohort of trainees commenced in August. In the 2023-24 financial year, previous food hub workers have gained employment in roles aligned to their interests, including:

- Two casual staff employed as Food Purchasers to procure produce for the wholesale enterprise
- A Café Coordinator and Cook/Trainer have been employed
- Three Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) completed their hours at the FC doing warehousing and two of them found employment after the program.

3.2.2. Case studies: Market and community lunch

The below sub-sections showcase data collected via the two events used to understand the benefits produced from activities delivered via the FC. These complement the results presented in the previous section addressing KEQ 2a).

Community Market

Primary data was captured at a regular community-based market run by FC. The market was held on Wednesday 20 November from 10am - 1:30pm at the Melbourne Polytechnic campus.

While the market and other logistics were coordinated by FC, FPC and NEPHU staff managed the engagement and data collection. An Arabic interpreter was made available through NEPHU, and Mandarin interpreter through WCC.

To capture data at the market, the following methods were used:

- **Intercept surveys** were used to capture qualitative feedback, taking a conversational approach, using the intercept surveys as conversation guides while capturing conversation notes and responses to survey questions.
- **Observations** were used to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, such as data on foot traffic other general notes (behaviour, weather and atmosphere etc...)
- **A feedback box** was provided for customers to provide written feedback.
- **Remuneration was provided to engagement participants** through vouchers for the FC café, these were redeemable on the day for up to \$10. This proved to be a very useful way of recognising the time and effort of engagement participants.

In total, feedback was collected from 89 people, while observations recorded over 120 people at the market.¹¹



¹¹ As this event was held in person, we are unable to provide an exact number of market customers. Observations were used to capture data on number of attendees and atmosphere, however observations inherently carry limitations related to accuracy.

Based on conversations and observations of the market:

- Most attendees were staff or students of the Polytechnic campus. Primarily, English-language students from non-English speaking background.
- There were many English language students interacting with one another, and there was a sense of a supportive and social environment where students would practise English, browse the produce, and learn from one another about their culture.
- Many students, being on a break between classes, took the opportunity to get lunch from the FC café and purchase fresh produce.
- Teachers and administration staff were also in attendance, interacting with students and purchasing produce from the market.
- There were a small number of people visiting the market who were not affiliated with the Polytechnic campus, either being locals coming for the market, or people coming to eat at the café.
- The weather on the day was sunny and warm, which likely led to a higher number of people enjoying the market.

Conversations with market attendees revealed a strong sense of positivity towards the market. For many attendees, being able to do their grocery shopping while studying is a great **convenience**. It gives them more time to spend with their families at home and saves them the trouble of going to the supermarket. For those who are supporting families, having access to this market helps them manage their busy schedules better.



The main reason people attended the market was to **buy fresh fruit and vegetables**, followed by **connecting socially** with other students or the wider community.

"I have 3 kids, and it provides me with an easy way to get fresh veggies and saves me from having to go to the supermarket after work."

"We come every week, it's good to catch up and be a part of this community"

"I have come to get food for my baby, I come every week when it's on"

As many were English language students, the market provides an opportunity for them to **practice their English and numeracy skills** in a real-world setting, supported by their peers. Observations included students supporting one another at the market, offering translations, speaking on behalf of each other and sharing recipes and skills.

"I meet friends and connect with other students; we talk about how to cook and share recipes"

"A lot of our English students come down, it helps them to learn to speak and use the markets as a place to practice numeracy and literacy."

Many market customers said the produce **is always fresh and high quality**, finding the offerings fresher than the supermarket equivalents and providing them convenient access to fresh and healthy foods.

"It's the freshest food I can get access too"

"I meet friends when I'm buying food here. The food is so fresh I come here every week!"

Attendees also noted the **affordable price of the produce** and financial relief they find compared to shopping elsewhere.

"It's [the market] good, I get lots of help learning about food. It saves me time and it's a really good price."

Community lunch

In collaboration with FPC, FC hosted a community lunch that aimed to bring together approximately 20 customers and food relief beneficiaries to gather insights into the outcomes of FC, in relation to their food relief service and produce boxes. The lunch was held on November 29th, from 12pm to 2pm, at the FC community café. FC coordinated the logistics and attendees, while FPC and NEPHU staff handled engagement and data collection, with an Arabic interpreter provided by NEPHU.

Attendees enjoyed a free lunch and received a complimentary produce box as an incentive for their participation. Local service providers, including Uniting Church, Whittlesea Community Connections, Neami Mental Health, and Services Australia, were also present and providing attendees with information about their services, reinforcing the holistic approach of the FC.

FPC held detailed conversations with most of those in attendance. There were several key themes that emerged through this event, including:

- **Food Security and accessibility:** Participants consistently highlighted the critical role of the FC in providing reliable access to fresh, nutritious produce. The convenience of delivery and affordability were key factors that enabled people facing financial constraints or mobility challenges to maintain a healthy diet.
- **Health and nutrition outcomes:** The diversity and quality of produce directly impacted participants' dietary choices and overall health. Many noted how the food boxes supported better nutrition, particularly for those managing health conditions or caring for families. The program enabled people to explore new ingredients and improve their cooking skills.
- **Diversity and inclusivity:** FC demonstrates remarkable ability to cater to diverse community members - from international students, multi-generational households and locals, across various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Economic resilience:** For many participants, the FC provided critical economic relief by reducing food expenses and offering high-quality produce at affordable prices.

The following vignettes outline stories from the community lunch, and demonstrate the positive impact of the food relief and food box scheme on community members:



Health and Healing through Food Collective Support

A man in his late 50s shared how the FC had helped him make positive changes in his life. After experiencing homelessness, unemployment and struggling to afford healthy food, he suffered a heart attack. When he reached out to Whittlesea Community Connections, they connected him with FC, where he began receiving food boxes filled with fresh, nutritious items. This support has been a game-changer for him. He expressed relief at being able to provide healthy meals for himself and his elderly mother, which is crucial for his recovery and ongoing wellbeing.

"They've [FC] have been great, I don't know what I would do without them. I have to eat healthy now since my heart attack, my mum's old, and I'm living with her, it helps me look after her and cook for her as well."

The FC not only helped him access fresh food but also helped him learn about the benefits of eating fresh food. He noted the convenient, but healthy pre-made meals were particularly helpful.

Supporting Health and Family

A single father of two young adult sons faced a significant challenge after a heart attack limited his ability to work full-time. Working reduced hours to maintain his health, he valued his family's wellbeing but struggled to afford enough healthy food for his family.

"These food boxes help me and my boys eat well, especially now that I need to improve my diet."

While he had strong sentiment towards the FC produce boxes, he expressed a wish for staple items like milk and bread to be included in the boxes.

His appreciation for the affordable healthy and fresh produce the FC provides is evident and demonstrates how the program is able to address food security and nutrition among its beneficiaries.

Addressing Food Insecurity and Exploring New Cuisines

A local woman in her middle years, living with a disability and her two teenage children and carers, has seen a positive change in her life thanks to FC. She had been experiencing food insecurity for some time but was not aware that this was something there was support for. After speaking with WCC, they identified that she could benefit from food relief and referred her to FC. Since receiving food boxes in 2022, she has been able to provide nourishing meals for her family, which has been vital given their previous food insecurity.

The variety of produce has also inspired her to explore new cuisines and cooking methods. As she prepares to move outside the catchment area next year, she hopes to continue receiving the boxes.

Grateful for the support from FC, she feels fortunate to access resources that enhance her family's health and wellbeing. The food boxes have not only addressed their food insecurity but also

Quality of produce and discovering new ingredients in multigenerational households

A grandmother in her 60s, living with her daughter and grandson, has been using FC food boxes for about a year. After using other food relief services for some time, her daughter was pointed to FC and has been using the service ever since. She noted that the quality is much better, and it's cheaper than other food relief options she had encountered. She appreciates the convenience of not having to travel to the supermarket, which addresses accessibility issues.

When she encounters items she's unsure about, (notably Okra) or has too much excess, she shares this with family and friends, but has admittedly learnt more about new vegetables. She noted the desire to see more ability to alter the contents of the produce boxes, with the ability to include refrigerated items.

Her experience demonstrates how the FC supports multi-generational households and promotes healthy eating among older adults and families experiencing food insecurity.

Connecting cultures through fresh produce

Two Melbourne Polytechnic students, both Syrian students living in local student accommodation, had both purchased boxes and been beneficiaries of FC's food relief, noted how fresh the produce was, and enjoyed trying the new and exciting fruits they had not seen before, such as lychees.

The experiences of these students show the FC's connection to the Melbourne Polytechnic campus, and how the FC supports food security among a cohort of largely international students.

Convenience and trying new ingredients

A middle-aged woman who lives alone shared her appreciation for the convenience of FC's delivery service, which saves her the trouble of grocery shopping. She enjoys the variety in the produce boxes and reflected on how they've encouraged her to try new ingredients.

"I'd never bought dates before, but now I've learned how to use them in my cooking. They're really versatile."

Her experience highlights how the FC not only helps with food access but also inspires individuals to expand their cooking skills and experiment with new ingredients.

Exploring New Recipes and Reducing Waste

An educator of the Melbourne Polytechnic campus who attended the community lunch appreciated how the produce boxes she purchases helps with her exploration of new recipes.

"The boxes always have things I wouldn't normally buy, but I love learning how to cook them. I made a fennel and orange salad recently and that's a first for me."

She also noted the affordability of the boxes, and how they've helped her reduce food wastage and enjoys the convenience of delivery.

Keeping food on the table

A single mother of four girls shared how she discovered FC through emergency accommodation services. She has accessed the food relief four times and has both purchased food boxes. Faced with challenging circumstances, struggling to find food for her children, she noted how the food relief allows her to focus on finding work, instead of worrying where the children's next meal will come from.

"These food boxes have been crucial for keeping food on the table for my children, It's so fresh and easy."

She noted that while some items in the boxes were new to her, she's open to trying them. This story highlights FC's role in addressing food insecurity for vulnerable families while also introducing them to a variety of fresh, nutritious options.

Nourishing family and building healthy habits

A grandmother, who lives with her daughter and grandchildren, spoke about how much she enjoys the variety of fresh produce in the FC boxes and how it supports her in caring for her family.

"It's such a good helping hand, I can feed my family and look after my grandchildren. I never throw out anything. Everything gets used!"

She also noted how the boxes have helped her grandchildren get excited about fruit, while previously not enjoying it, now she notes that whenever a produce box arrives the fruit always goes quickly.

3.2.1. Unintended outcomes

This section is based on interviews with FC staff and stakeholders and aims to address the following evaluation question:

2b) Have there been any unintended or unexpected outcomes (either positive or negative)?

FC staff observed that, due to FC's early stages and the trialling of various activities, the process so far has been a learning experience, with most outcomes being unexpected. However, the following were specifically noted as secondary benefits that were not anticipated initially:

- **Improving English language skills.** As highlighted in the market case study above, the weekly market, as well as other FC events and activities allow students and community members from non-English speaking backgrounds to practice English language and numeracy skills at the market.
- **Interest and support for FC.** FC staff reflected that the level of interest and support for FC has been somewhat unexpected, particularly from other organisations wanting to support FC and community members interested in volunteering. This was further confirmed through interviews with stakeholders expressing interest in supporting FC in various capacities.

"I've been surprised about the people that are interested in volunteering in the different aspects of this. And again, I think it's often mostly people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and it's often about just that opportunity to practice English and to be doing something purposeful and to connect." (WCC/FC staff)

3.3. Sustainability and future opportunities

3.3.1. Sustainability and scalability of the Food Collective

This section is based on interviews with FC staff and stakeholders, and review of FC documents. It aims to address the following evaluation question:

3a) To what extent is FC sustainable?

3b) In what ways is the impact of the FC scalable?

Since inception, FC has trialled multiple activities and programs at different scales. Considerations moving forward will be around what aspects of the FC should be focused on and what can be sustainable and scalable. Table 5 below presents FC components and considerations for sustainability and scalability.

Table 5: Sustainability and scalability of the Whittlesea Food Collective

Program/activity	Sustainability	Scalability
Café and catering	The café and catering enterprises are likely to be self-sustaining.	Opportunities to expand the café and catering enterprises could include: - Marketing and promotion of the services. - Providing take-home meals for staff and students, as well as surrounding organisations. - Hosting events and meetings. - Expanding catering offering, focusing on schools (FC have just become connected to a new school in Wollert through DPV Health to potentially supply healthy canteen food). This could be offered alongside wholesaling service. - Partnering and replicating the enterprises at other campuses or schools.
Training	Training and pathway opportunities would not be sustainable without further funding.	All trainees so far have been Melbourne Polytechnic students. Consider how to reach people beyond the campus, potentially through other support programs or network connections.
Market	- The market is currently not sustainable on its own without additional resources. Increasing focus on retailing through food boxes and wholesaling with profits directed to the market could support ongoing delivery. - Connecting with more farmers and wholesale markets to acquire affordable, quality produce, and developing the farm would likely contribute to sustainability.	- Continue delivering pop-up markets to reach different communities, with consideration of resources and capacity. - Potential to expand reach and impact through wholesaling produce –FC have the capacity and infrastructure to purchase, store and transport large amounts of produce and distribute to other services and organisations for them to distribute within their communities.

Grocery service	Grocery service is currently in the early implementation phase. FC have been undertaking research and trials with other food hubs and have received funding to expand this offering. Considerations will include how to make it affordable for schools and organisations while generating revenue to ensure it is sustainable.	FC aim to connect with organisations, schools and early years centres in the region. Lessons from early implementation and trials could support more targeted marketing and promotion to increase reach and use of the service.
Food boxes	A current challenge to sustainability of food boxes is being able to purchase produce locally at a reasonable price point for community. Developing the farm, connecting with more farmers and wholesaling markets to source quality, affordable produce will help support ongoing delivery.	- The current cohort ordering food boxes are generally those that are health conscious, and those that had received or are receiving food relief support. Consider how to reach households that don't have a car, are not students or don't leave their homes, potentially through partnering and promotion through other support services and programs. - Increasing promotion and engagement with businesses and organisations will aim to expand reach.
Food relief	The Hardship Help program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) along with other government grants, philanthropic grants and community donations.	Food relief is currently only reaching around 5,000 of approximately 25,000 residents in the City of Whittlesea that are considered food insecure. Connecting with other support services that may have access to different parts of the community, as well as wholesaling to other community-based organisations and support services could reach more people.
Farm	Development of the farm has been delayed but will be a future focus of FC. There is strong commitment among funders and partners that should support sustainably, with a further \$1 million in funding recently being received from the federal government to support its development.	

3.3.2. Considerations for future delivery

This section is based on the results of the evaluation, and aims to address the following evaluation question:

3c) What opportunities are there that FC could explore?

Based on the results of the evaluation, the following considerations are provided for future delivery of the FC:

- 1) Revisit the vision and purpose of the FC.** Delivery to date has provided valuable insights into what works well and where improvements can be made. Taking these lessons into account, along with current resources, existing infrastructure, assets, and other strengths—such as FC's strong reputation in the community and the interest and support from other organisations—it would be beneficial for FC to refine the scope of its programs and activities, with potentially a focus on WCC priority groups and sustainability before considering expansion. It will be important that if any programs and activities are discontinued that there is a defined plan to notify community members and transition these out. Some key considerations relating to current initiatives and programs include:
 - a) Focus on progressing food growing at the farm.** The farm is an integral component for other food hubs and as a key gap being the availability of local produce in the region, focusing on developing the farm would likely provide significant benefits longer-term.
 - b) Consider the best mechanism for distributing produce to community.** The weekly community market and produce boxes have demonstrated positive outcomes among attendees and recipients. However, they are currently not sustainable without the generation of revenue or additional resources. Exploring other opportunities to increase profit through distribution activities, such as wholesaling, while ensuring fair prices for farmers, wholesalers and community members, should be a key focus, with consideration of the resources and capacity required to deliver on these.
 - c) Café and catering.** The café and catering enterprises are currently working well and will likely be self-sustaining. There may be benefit in considering how to scale these to potentially support other aspects of the model, such as take-home meals, and marketing and promotion of catering to other businesses and organisations.

- 2. Identify where network partners could support and promote FC programs and services.** Developing clarity around the scope of FC programs and services will help to communicate to other stakeholders and partners where they could best support. For example, the ERN, NEPHU and City of Whittlesea could support FC through promotion of wholesaling and catering, connecting with potential partners and grant opportunities and providing evaluation capacity support where feasible.
- 3. Continue exploring the option of a social supermarket.** While this would require substantial investment, it would essentially expand the current programs and activities offered by the FC. Key factors to consider would include location, as well as ensuring access to parking, public transport, and necessary facilities.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Evaluation framework

Table 6: Evaluation framework

Evaluation area	Sub-questions	Indicators	Data sources and method
Design and delivery	a) What is the FC model and how was it developed?	Description of the FC model and the development process	- Design documents - Interviews with program staff
	b) What changes have been made to the FC model over time, and why?	Identification and description of changes made and the rationale	- Design documents - Interviews with program staff
	c) What are the similarities and differences between FC and other food hubs?	Identification of how the FC is similar or different to other models, and the considerations or implications of this	- Desktop research of other food hub models in Australia, including evaluations and research reports - Feedback from FC stakeholders and program staff
	d) What aspects of the model work well, and what could be improved?	- Identification of key lessons from other food hub models that are applicable to FC - Feedback on what works well and where improvements could be made to the FC model	- Desktop research of other food hub models in Australia, including evaluations and research reports - Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community
Outcomes	a) To what extent have the identified outcomes (as per the agreed logic model) been achieved?	Demonstrated achievement or progress towards outcomes outlined in the logic model	- Review of data collected by FC - Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community



	b) Have there been any unintended or unexpected outcomes (either positive or negative)?	• Identification of outcomes not reflected in the logic model, including why they occurred	• Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community
	c) Have any external factors influenced what has or could have been achieved?	• Description of any external or contextual factors that impacted outcomes	• Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community
Future opportunities	a) What new opportunities are there that FC could explore? b) What aspects of the model should continue / expand, and what should be discontinued? c) To what extent is FC sustainable? d) In what ways is the impact of the FC scalable?	• Described delivery / business model for the future iteration of the FC • Identification of relationships of FC, and opportunities for growth or strengthening • Identification of FC activities that have potential to reach / impact more people • Identification of barriers and enablers to sustainability	• Desktop research of other food hub models in Australia, including evaluations and research reports • Feedback from stakeholders, program staff, and community

Appendix 2: Food Collective Program Logic Model

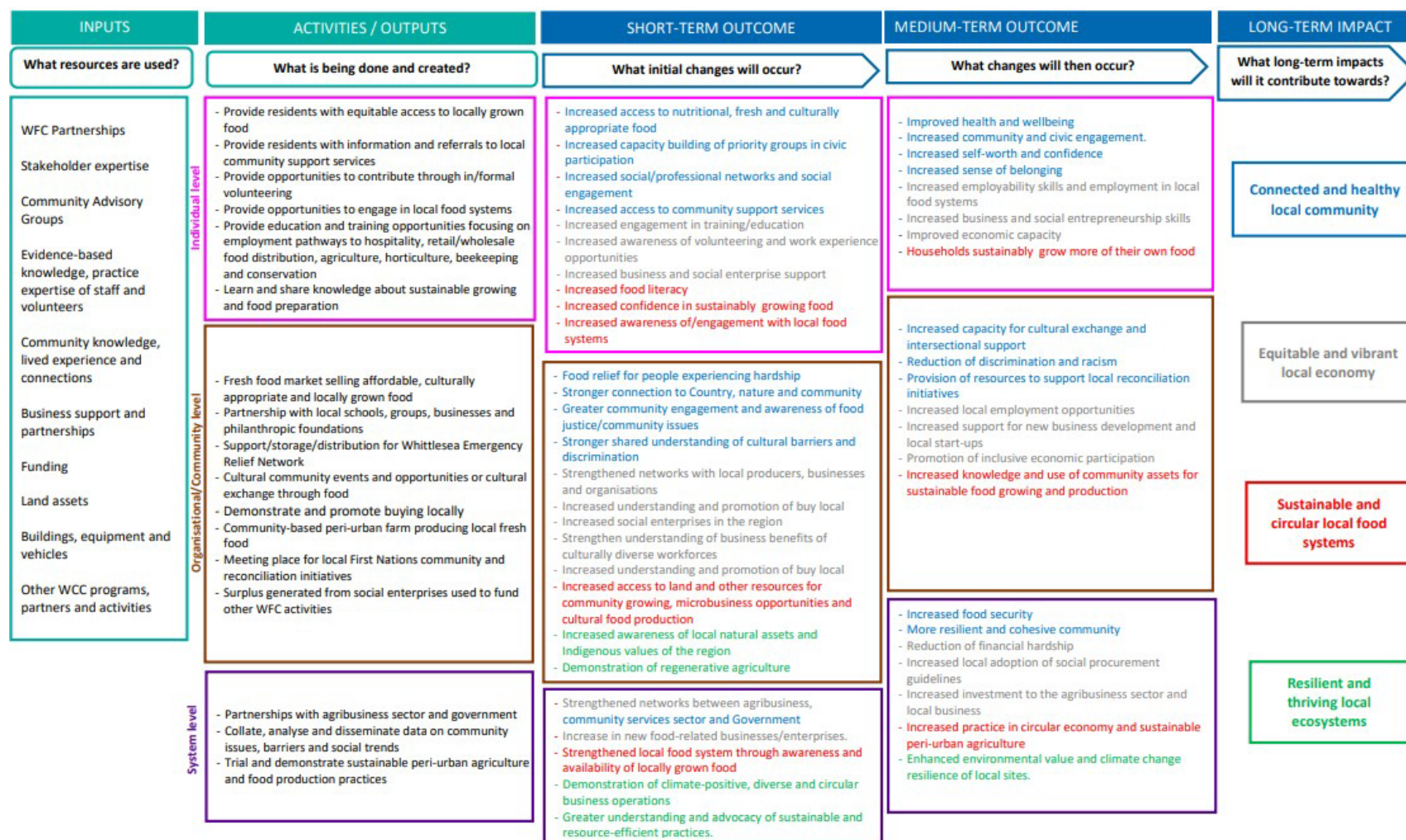


Figure 2: Food Collective Program Logic Model



Appendix 3: Comparison of VicHealth-funded Food Hubs

Table 7: Comparison of VicHealth-funded Food Hubs

Food Hub and location	Market	Co-location	Café/ catering	Farm	Community events / workshops	Training / careers	Wholesale	Food relief / produce boxes
Ubuntu Food Hub (Cardina Shire)	Host a market every Saturday at the farm selling farm grown produce	X	X	The hub is located at farm, includes a community garden and a market garden. It's aim is to bridge the inter-generational and cultural gap within their community, through adopting the farming model	The hub offer working groups, festivals and cultural events. There is little info about their events	The hub offers capacity building and employment programs. Focused on providing opportunities to the African community.	X	Ubuntu Food Hub Cardina Shire
Common Ground Project Food Hub (Surf Coast Shire)	The Food Hub Produce Market operates Wednesday to Sunday 8-3 at the farmgate	X	The cafe on site (farmgate) supports employment through the staying grounded project and uses produce sourced locally and from the farm.	Established In 2019, Common ground is a regenerative agricultural farming approach, focusing on improving diversity and ecosystem health and supporting locals struggling with food insecurity. Now with over 80 garden beds	Partnering with local experts, the hub offers workshops, cooking experiences and other events to connect and empower the community	Established in 2020, the Staying Grounded program provides training and employment pathways in farming and hospitality for people facing disadvantage in the Geelong region. They work with women from asylum seeker and immigrant communities seeking employment.	The farm is a core business stream of the social enterprise, selling produce to restaurants in Melbourne and Geelong	Common Ground Project Food Hub Surf Coast Shire

Food Hub and location	Market	Co-location	Café/ catering	Farm	Community events / workshops	Training / careers	Wholesale	Food relief / produce boxes
Acres and Acres Food Hub (Towong Shire)	Attend local farmers market and hosted farm gate events	X	X	Acres and Acres is a series of community managed farms in Corryong growing fresh produce to distribute locally.	A&A run a number of community farming and gardening workshops.. Also supporting schools and community groups.	A&A supports local producers, offering shared assets through a mobile tool library, hosts local networking events and boasts a strong volunteer base. Acting as an incubator for local small scale and growing farmers	The produce grown is sold to local businesses and consumers, paired with their delivery service.	Acres and Acres Food Hub Towong Shire
Grow Share Food Hub (Greater Bendigo Shire)	A weekly market, a collaboration with the Neighbourhood Collective Australia and Regional Victorians of Colour. And includes other locally grown produce	X	X	A farm in Strathfieldsaye is part of the project, a place where young people and others in the community can learn important skills and knowledge.	They run Café for a Day to connect young people with local chefs to learn the art of cooking, healthy eating and hospitality.	For schools, this program gets students involved in their local community by working as a team to make meals for those doing it tough. It' meets curriculum outcomes, and provides an opportunity for local community service.	X	Grow Cook Share Food Hub Greater Bendigo Shire
Nourish Sunraysia (Mildura Rural)	The Nourishes Sunraysia Welcome Shop, a store opened once a week that offers diverse traditional foods grown locally through Food Next Door Farms. Volunteers also travel to cultural food stores in Melbourne to stock the shelves with familiar foods unavailable in Victorias regions	X	X	The program is in partnership with Food Next Door, who aims to connect new migrants and refugee groups to farming land to relieve the distress caused by not having access to their own land. Supporting them to re-engage with farming. The farm supplies the food store.	The run fortnightly cooking workshops to help new migrants make sense of unfamiliar foods provided in their food hampers and how to produce less waste	They have also hosted school group tours at the Hub, where students learn about food insecurity and the importance of community support. These educational efforts are vital in raising awareness and fostering a sense of community responsibility. While the Ethnic Communities Council do run careers and training workshops they are not paired with the food hub.	X	Nourish Sunraysia Mildura Rural City

Food Hub and location	Market	Co- location	Café/ catering	Farm	Community events / workshops	Training / careers	Wholesale	Food relief / produce boxes
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Wimmera Food Collective, (Horsham Rural City)	The Wimmera Food Collective is an inclusive and vibrant space providing food programs, where people can sell, buy, and celebrate local, affordable, and culturally desired fruit, vegetables, herbs, grains, and legumes.	X	WFC have a café in Horsham, as well as offering a catering service	X	X	Through the centre for Participation, they run Migrant Hospitality Pathways Program, Micro-Business Program, retail food outlets, bulk buying groups, a storage facility, food enterprise incubator/co-working space and a community kitchen		Wimmera Food Collective, Horsham Rural City
Food Collective, (Whittlesea Shire)	They run a weekly market at the Polytechnic campus selling fresh locally grown produce	The FC is the only food hub co-located with an education institution. Pairing their café and market, and food hub with the Epping campus.	The FC run a café on the Polytechnic campus and employ/train hospitality students at the school	The FC have a farm, the Wollert Community Farm that provides locally grown produce for the market, café and food boxes.	They run several workshops like demonstration gardens, volunteering opportunities and school events.	Through the FC café, polytechnic students can learn hospitality skills and gain valuable experience.	The service that sources and sells locally grown and culturally appropriate fruit, veggies and local produce to Food Hubs, organisations and businesses.	Whittlesea Food Collective, Whittlesea Shire



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