

RURAL HEALTH INNOVATION SPRINT REPORT: HOW YOUNG PEOPLE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the week of 15th to 19th November 2021, the inaugural Rural Health Innovation Sprint (RHIS) took place in Bendigo, regional Victoria. Seven students from a diverse range of disciplines at La Trobe University collaborated to innovate solutions to address food insecurity in Bendigo. Over the course of five days, the students:

- Interviewed professionals across various fields and people with lived experiences.
- Defined the purpose and aims of a project.
- Engaged in discussion and debate regarding possible prototypes, then presented these ideas to key leaders within the community.
- Designed a prototype within 24 hours.
- Tested the prototype as a real café pop-up in the Bendigo mall.
- Showcased the mechanisms and outcomes of the innovation sprint to a range of stakeholders.

The first step of the process was focused on understanding the challenge. The team took away some key lessons:

- Food insecurity can happen to anyone at any time.
- This is a big issue that needs to be addressed, but not many people know about it.
- Food relief alone is not going to solve the problem. While food relief provides a short-term solution, it does not address the underlying problems.
- Food insecurity is a complex issue, influenced by factors including finances, mental health, employment, housing, social connections, nutrition literacy, and cooking skills.
- Seeking help for food relief needs to be destigmatised.

After thorough discussion, we decided to narrow our target demographic to young people, aged 15–25 years old as this is a key transition period and holds many opportunities for intervention.

The team defined the project aims as:

- To increase the feelings of enjoyment, satisfaction, and confidence by enabling people to have reliable sources of nutritious and whole foods.
- To enable young people to develop the strategies, skills, and social connections to ensure they never go without nutritious food or be forced to choose between food and other expenses.
- To normalise the act of seeking and accepting help by creating a safe, welcoming social environment that improves young people's quality of life and wellbeing.
- To empower young people to actively increase and further develop their capability to be resilient when faced with life's challenges.

Food security is everyone's responsibility. It is not an individual challenge but rather a public issue.

In alignment with these project aims, the team designed and tested the prototype of Farmer Jo's Community Café (FoJo's Café). This project idea was the combination of three key ideas developed through the innovation sprint:

- **Food hampers with testers:** Customers receive a free sample of healthy meals to choose from. For each meal, a free food hamper is provided with easy-to-follow visual instructions and the ingredients required to replicate the meal at home. People could take this hamper for themselves or for a friend that is having a hard time.
- **Pay-it-forward:** People could purchase a coffee for themselves or for somebody else. These pay-it-forward drinks and meals would be displayed on a board for any customer to take.
- **Odd jobs:** The café would include a job board that would provide people the opportunity to contribute to the sustainability of the café. This might include tasks such as wiping down tables, washing dishes or working in the community garden.



The key principles underlying the project design were **community** and **reciprocity**. There is no way to solve this challenge without creating a sense of community that people can engage with. This sense of community needs to stretch beyond those who are experiencing financial hardship and include a broad range of individuals. In order to succeed, it is necessary for a range of people and organisations to be engaged in the challenge. This might include local government, businesses, as well as members of the community.

In order to remove the stigma associated with food relief, people need to have the opportunity to contribute in some way, whether by donating money, time, or resources. This opportunity, however, needs to be done in such a way to avoid a sense of obligation as many experiencing difficult times may feel unable to contribute. Our prototype emphasised this concept of opportunity over obligation.

Continue reading to gain a richer understanding of the team, the work we undertook, and our outcomes of the project.



MEET THE TEAM

Dr. Brad Hodge approached academics and staff from La Trobe University for recommendations of the most highly skilled and motivated students from various disciplines. After contacting more than 50 nominees, 20 applicants responded to the prompt, 'Imagine that you have spent the last 12 months working in a highly productive team. How would your team members describe you at the end of that time?' Dr. Brad Hodge and the City of Greater Bendigo selected the final team of seven students with the greatest diversity in the unique contributions that they would make to the Rural Health Innovation Sprint. Throughout this process, Healthy Greater Bendigo Executive Officer, Amy Brown, highlighted the "interdisciplinary nature of work, [...] how complex social problems require a 'whole of society' effort with a variety of perspectives to create lasting change."



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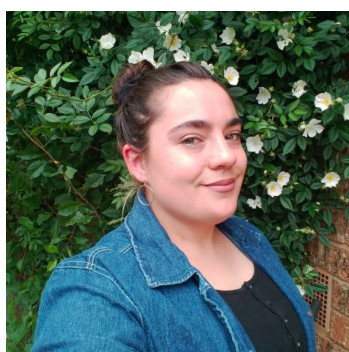
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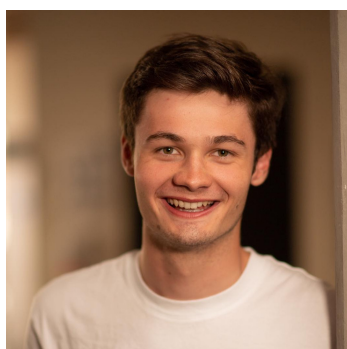
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THE PROCESS

DAY 1 – UNDERSTAND

The main purpose of the first day was to develop a shared understanding of the challenge by taking the time to listen to experts in the field and people with lived experience of food insecurity.

The RHIS brought together a diverse group of key stakeholders to provide the team with a holistic understanding of food security in the Greater Bendigo region. After these industry representatives presented on their field of expertise and engaged in a Q&A session, the RHIS team identified the following priorities for action:

- Systems change.
- Housing.
- Community connection, social networks, and reciprocity.
- Education and early intervention.
- Employment and skill-building opportunities.
- Emergency food relief assistance.

Improvements to these areas must first be made to create a food secure society in Bendigo. There is no way to solve this challenge without fostering a sense of community that people can engage with. This needs to be extended beyond those who are experiencing financial hardship or personal crises, to include a broader scope of citizens. In order to minimise stigma, recipients of food relief must also have opportunities to contribute, whether it be through financial or practical assistance.

Expert Insights

"Crisis moments can happen to anyone, at any time." – Caitlin Rogers (Program Coordinator at Haven; Home, Safe).

"Putting the responsibility on the individual does not change the world, rather society creates the environment for individuals to respond." – Amy Brown (Executive Officer at Healthy Greater Bendigo).

"People think they are undeserving of the food support because there is, and always will be, someone worse off." – Sam Kane (Youth Ambassador at Bendigo Foodshare).

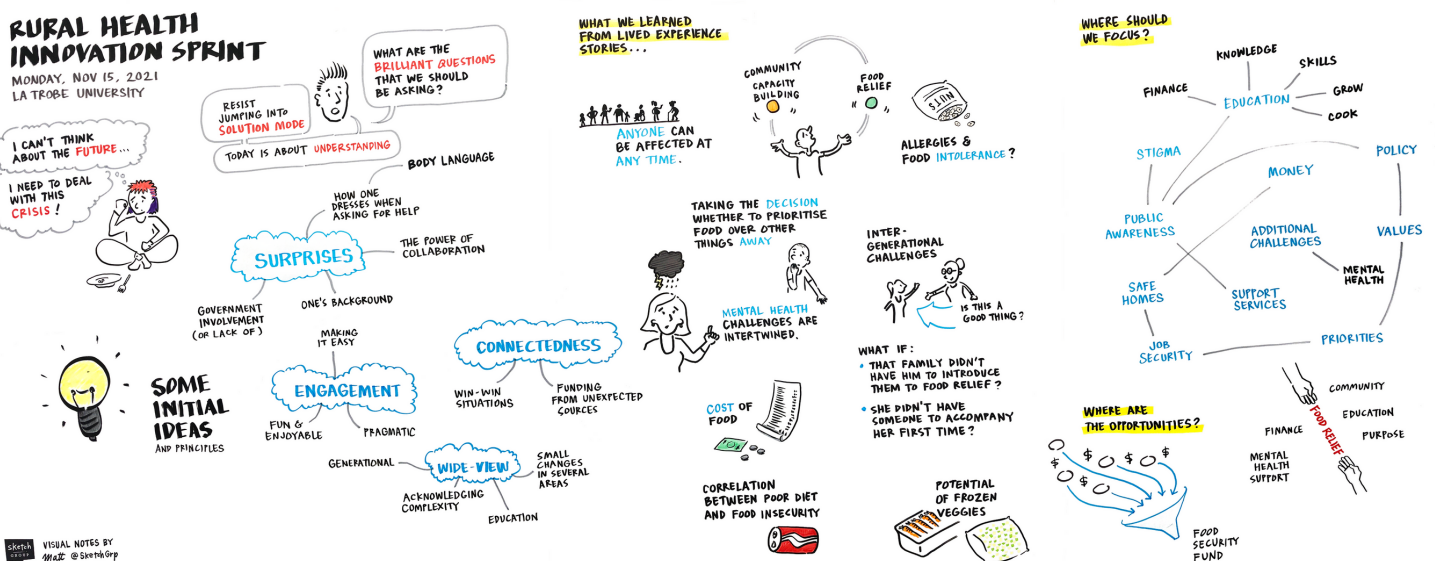
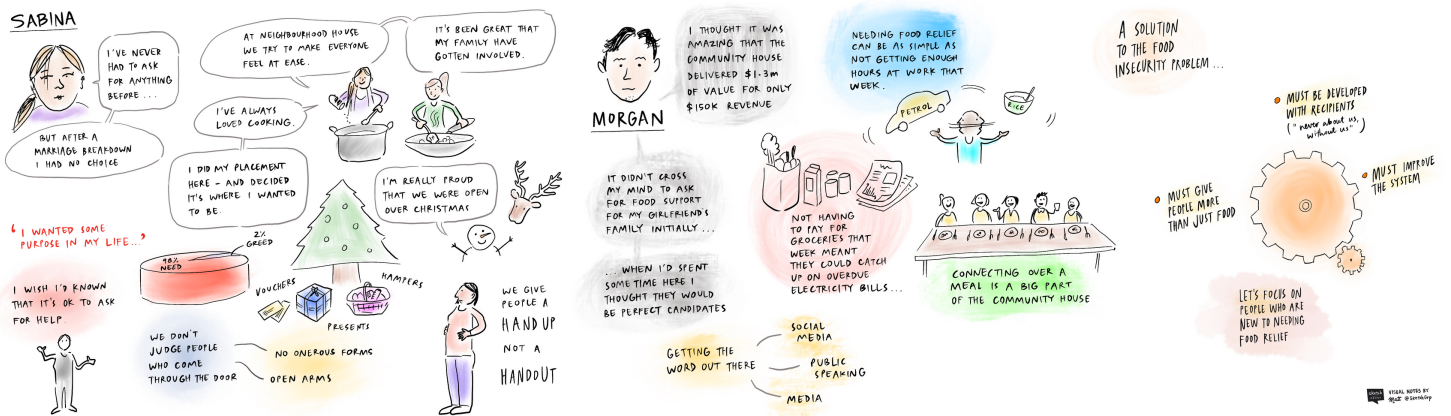
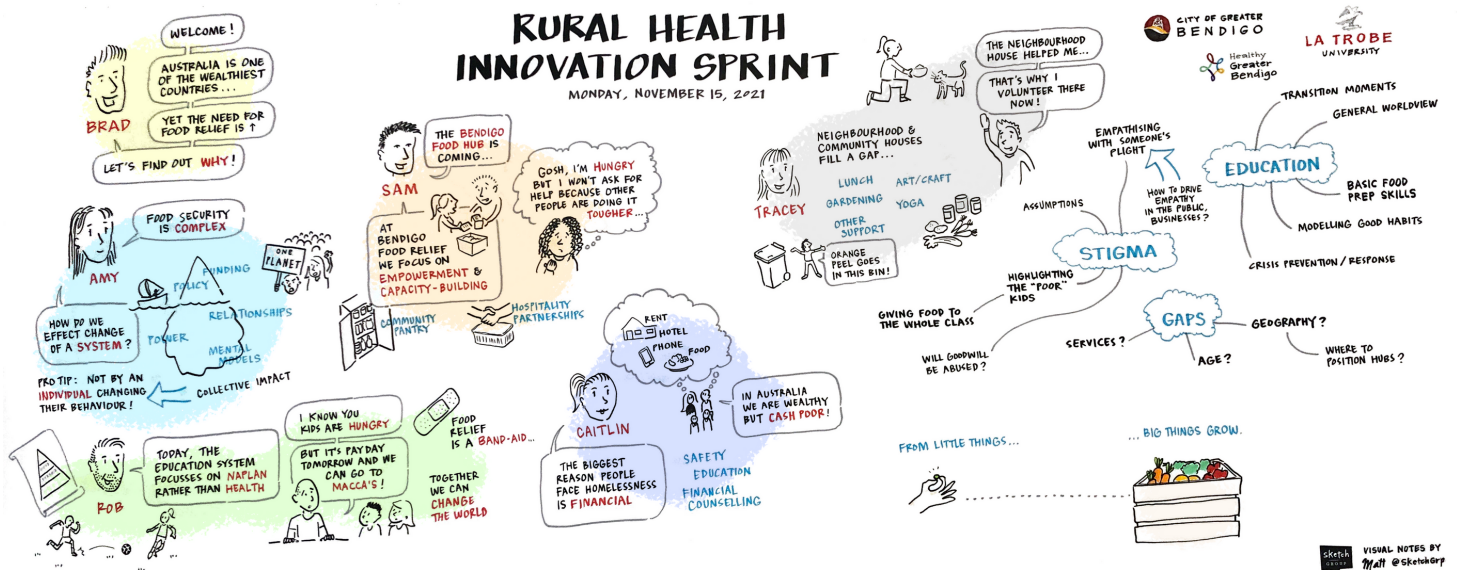
Following these discussions with industry representatives, the RHIS team consulted with community members at the Eaglehawk Community House who had a lived experience of food insecurity.

One of these stories involved a woman who moved to Bendigo following her marriage breakdown. Lacking employment opportunities and social support networks in her new community, this individual was thrust into a crisis of food insecurity. Despite her feelings of shame and inadequacy, she was assisted to reach out for support at the Eaglehawk Community House and received a free, customised food box, fit with all the essentials. This positive interaction with a food relief and support service led this individual to regularly engage with the community, assisting others and ensuring they never have to feel the same sense of shame when seeking help.

Another story described how one instance of receiving help can often be enough to put someone back on the right track. After grappling with reduced hours of employment as a result of COVID-19, the family received food assistance so that they did not have to forego a quality meal to pay off other expenses.

As a result of these discussions, the team reflected on the way that social stigma and a lack of awareness act as barriers to people accessing support for food security, which led to the following important questions:

- What would have happened if people did not have someone to accompany and introduce them to support?
- What would the world look like if everyone could readily seek and accept support?
- What if people did not wait until the height of their crisis to reach out for help?



Visual illustration of discussions on Day 1 of the Rural Health Sprint,
produced by Matthew Magain at [Sketch Group](#).

DAY 2 – DEFINE

On the second day, the team reflected on the expert insights and personal stories of food insecurity to examine the reasons why people might go without food. This 'Define' process involved the development of a timeline, detailing the key factors and priorities that might contribute to the likelihood of experiencing food insecurity. This timeline highlighted the fact that the greatest opportunities for intervention are situated around the critical transitions throughout the lifespan where people would most likely encounter a crisis moment requiring food relief.

The team chose the 15-25-year-old demographic as the target population for the intervention. We know that self-development and skill-building are critical among this demographic as they transition from adolescence to adulthood, navigating their independence and the social stigmata that influence their attitudes towards others.



At this point, the RHIS team identified a set of aims for our project, considering factors such as happiness and engagement, retention, and task success.

Project Aims

- To increase feelings of enjoyment, satisfaction, and confidence by enabling people to have reliable sources of nutritious and whole foods.
- To enable young people to develop the strategies, skills, and social connections to ensure they never need to go without nutritious food or choose between food and other expenses.
- To normalise the act of seeking and accepting help by creating a safe, welcoming social environment that improves young people's quality of life and wellbeing.
- To empower young people to actively increase and further develop their capability to be resilient when faced with life's challenges.

Through conversations with Sam Kane from Bendigo Foodshare and Tracey Clarke from the Eaglehawk Community House, the team realised that these objectives could not possibly be achieved without tackling the shame and depersonalisation that society has conditioned us to feel when accessing support.

Each team member discussed what they would do if they had to decide between going without food or neglecting other priorities. This enabled a deeper understanding of the 'crisis-mode thinking' and problem-solving that a person might employ in such situation.

DAY 3 – IDEATE

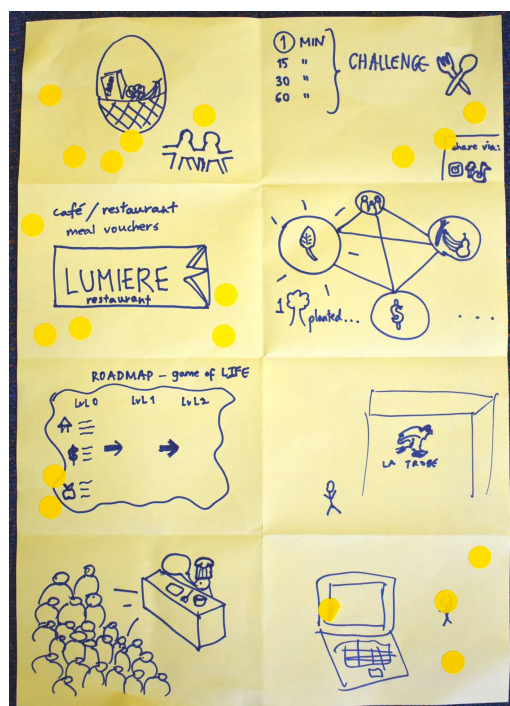
After finalising the objectives for this project, discussions centred around how we could achieve positive change in the City of Greater Bendigo. Each team member was required to conceptualise eight project ideas within 10–15 minutes. After sharing all 56 ideas, the team decided on four project designs that best met our intended goals and had the greatest potential for success. These ideas included:

- Mobile food truck service.
- Food boxes for friends.
- Sponsorship (work for food).
- Food relief café.

Once each team member had further developed these ideas within their pair, each of the four elements were then presented to the following group of industry partners and experts:

- Gerard Jose – CEO at Bendigo Community Health.
- Andrea Sloane – Director at Bendigo Health.
- Cathie Steele – Chair at Bendigo Foodshare.
- Sam Kane – Youth Ambassador at Bendigo Foodshare.
- Robert Brown – Special Education Teacher at Kalianna School.
- Vicky Mason – Director of Health and Wellbeing at City of Greater Bendigo.

This interview process enabled team members to refine their 'storytelling' skills to decide how to best pitch the concept to the community. This forum allowed experts to share their concerns, feedback and raise questions about the feasibility of these proposals. The group was able to identify gaps in individual understanding and interpretation of the idea, ultimately leading to the development of the final project design.



Each member was required to sketch eight preliminary ideas to present to the rest of the RHIS team. Following our discussions, the project ideas that best captured the team's aims would receive the greatest number of yellow stickers.

DAY 4 & 5 – FARMER JO'S COMMUNITY CAFÉ (FOJO'S CAFÉ)

For the final project idea, the team decided on a community café called FoJo's. Unlike a typical café, FoJo's involves a partnership with Bendigo Foodshare to produce all meals from rescued foods. By developing a café atmosphere and environment, FoJo's Café creates a social experience that everyone can share, regardless of their background.

We know that certain populations are more vulnerable to the impacts of social isolation, as they do not have the financial means of engaging in these social environments, including eateries and clubs. Therefore, our intention is to establish a shared sense of belonging and inclusion by encouraging community members to engage in a 'normal' and accessible social activity and setting.

Currently, society reinforces the values of 'a favour-for-a-favour', where an individual must give back after receiving help from another. This conditions people to feel guilty and undeserving of the support they receive, particularly when they are not in a position to return the favour. Our social enterprise considers the idea of opportunity versus obligation, where people are supported to give back in a way that suits them. We recognise that each person has their own individual strengths that can often make a greater impact than monetary handouts.



FoJo's Café logo created by the RHIS team for the prototype test.



The RHIS team setting up FoJo's Café in Hargreaves Mall. FoJo's logo and gardening section are displayed.

Listed below are the foundational elements that we believe will drive the success of FoJo's Café:

Taste-testers: Customers are provided with a free sample of healthy specials to choose their preference. Once decided, the individual receives a food kit containing all the required ingredients, as well as pictorial instructions that are easy to understand. All recipes are simple to make to account for the proportion of the population with limited access to cooking facilities and equipment. Our hope is that people will develop their cooking skills and look towards creating their own delicious and healthy meals, rather than relying on calorie-dense packaged foods.

Food hampers: After choosing their favourite taste-tester meal, customers receive a free food hamper containing fresh food items donated from Bendigo Foodshare, staples and non-perishables, and other essentials including sanitary products. To normalise the act of giving and taking, the goal is that people will either accept a hamper for themselves, or gift it to a friend or neighbour to cook the taste-tester meal.

The 'Prototype' process focused on designing a model that would test the user experience of the proposed FoJo's Café. To set up a functioning pop-up café, the team needed to source goods from Bendigo Foodshare to prepare the taste-tester meals and food hampers. A safe, welcoming, central location was also required to ensure that FoJo's Café would entice enough customers to measure the human experience and success of the project proposal, all within 24 hours.

FoJo's Café in Hargreaves Mall attracted 25-30 customers in a two-hour period, with each person engaging in at least one core element of the social enterprise. This consisted of various social demographics, including individuals, families, business people, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and people with disabilities. These people were all guided through the design by the team who discussed the entire process of engaging with FoJo's Café, its key elements, and our intentions for its future development.

One family from a lower socioeconomic background was looking for ways that they could perform one random act of kindness each day, without it causing them financial strain. For example, one of the children highlighted their ambition to find a mentor or sponsor through the 'Odd jobs' programme to teach them gardening and handiwork skills, so that they could then help develop new homeless shelters in Greater Bendigo. This family encapsulated one of the target audiences that FoJo's Café would engage with.

Healthy Greater Bendigo Communications and Development Officer, Matthew Moylan, developed a survey form for team members to listen and record customers' responses following their engagement with FoJo's Café.

When asked to provide comments/suggestions about FoJo's Café, respondents said:

- "A lot of people can use the give and take concept, especially older people/retirees with skills to share."
- "I am working with NDIS people. This model would provide a space where [people with disabilities] can contribute [...] to create grass root connections."
- "At full scale, it could [work] like a mobile van."
- "More gardening section... everything else is fantastic, friendly people to chat to."

Our prototype successfully brought together different groups within society by celebrating their mutual desire to help and share. As a result, we believe that our social enterprise successfully achieved our aim of fostering a warm and welcoming community spirit.

To conclude the RHIS, the team developed a presentation to showcase the FoJo's Café concept and process whereby it was presented to a range of key stakeholders from La Trobe University, VicHealth, City of Greater Bendigo, and other industry partners. This opportunity to network with key stakeholders allowed the team to share their learning from the challenges encountered throughout the week, results from the prototype, and recommendations for the future.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOJO'S CAFÉ

To make FoJo's Café feasible in the long-term, we will need to develop a social enterprise that provides wages for some staff members on a full-time basis. The pop-up café can be open once a month to garner community spirit. From here, the café could be established in a permanent location or as a regular pop-up.

In order to ensure long-term viability, it is imperative to develop partnerships among Bendigo Foodshare, City of Greater Bendigo, an NDIS provider, local job services, local eateries, and community houses. The funding will be diversified from a range of sources including government grants, philanthropic donations, fundraising, and other grants and donations. A business coach will be engaged to develop a sustainable social enterprise model that will work towards financial independence.

The pop-up café could run once a month with plenty of media attention, with the development of a Facebook page to build momentum. As community backing mounts, FoJo's Café would transition to running once a week, then daily as a store or food van.

The FoJo's Café social enterprise is transferable to other communities beyond the City of Greater Bendigo region. With enough momentum, the FoJo's café model could be expanded throughout Victoria and Australia, with a focus on improving the food security of vulnerable populations, including those in rural and remote locations, or in areas with a large proportion of First Nations peoples.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RURAL HEALTH INNOVATION SPRINT

Given the success of the first event, we intend to develop a suite of design sprints that involve university students, school students and professionals in engaging with key health challenges across Bendigo.

When choosing the next design sprint focus area, it would be beneficial to choose a topic where the end user is easily accessible. We found it challenging to find people with lived experience of food insecurity that were available and comfortable engaging with us as a team. We were unable to capture the full scope of food insecurity, having only spoken to a select few people with lived experience. A solution to this could be to explore settings where community members could organically share their story of food security with us.

Group dynamics are critical to fostering teamwork, especially for a design sprint that requires a high degree of focus and contribution from all team members. While this group consisted of highly mature and competent individuals with the motivation to learn new skills, it should be noted that future sprint team members may encompass a more diverse set of characteristics to contribute in team environments. Different approaches to the facilitation style and support offered throughout the sprint would be needed to guide the team to ensure their success.



REFLECTIONS

Team Impact

All students strengthened their networks and received offers of work. These included the connection to involvement in the Zonta Club, offers of future support from the CEO of VicHealth, and employment with the La Trobe Outreach team.

“ The safe environment encapsulating the design sprint allowed us to work on our own individual insecurities and challenges. The amount of personal growth that every team member experienced after five days is something that I had never considered possible. If every young person was able to have a similar opportunity for personal development through a design sprint, or intersectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration, the future of our society would be in safe hands.

Team Member

CONCLUSION

Many of today's social problems require innovative and collaborative solutions. The trial run of the RHIS shows how much momentum can be derived from a truly cooperative effort to tackle meaningful challenges. The sprint team developed their understanding in such a way that brought the broader community along with them to ensure lasting impact.

With existing and emerging community leaders, the Rural Health Innovation Sprint creates ongoing opportunities for young people to develop rich solutions together in order to change the world.



FEEDBACK COMMENTS

Community Feedback and Suggestions from FoJo's Café Prototype Survey Form

Could this be more sustainable? i.e., Co-op café model.
Good initiative.

Could support individuals with intellectual disability and women.

Room to make impact.

I have a little farm and I think [the community garden is] a great contribution.

How could we make this happen? Life can go very badly, very quickly.

Keep doing it. We are all about inclusion at the moment.

More gardening section... everything else is fantastic, friendly people to chat to.

Lots of opportunities to connect, lends itself to community connection, work and food.
At full scale, it could be mobile, like a mobile van.

Like the concept. It's awesome.
Could have coffee and include a bakery to capture the market.
The purpose is getting together and contributing to the social, economic aspect of life.

Veggie garden is a good idea.
People need space, potting soil, initial outlay, which could be costly for some people.

I am working with NDIS people. Some are too young for formal jobs, but so social. People like to help out after year 10. This model would provide a space where they can contribute.

Carers could come with NDIS clients to create grass root connections.

The Café is in a good, accessible, central space.

I am retired and learning how to cook healthy without wasting veggies. I did not get any new ideas, but 'broke the ice' to start learning.

Great idea. Don't get old.

Awesome idea.

Need people standing on the fringe outside the café to shepherd people in.

I learnt about community innovation and food.
I would like there to be succulent plants to give to people. People love to grow them.

Brilliant concept. Introduce it to churches and link to night shelters. A lot of people can use the give and take concept, especially with older/retired skills to share.

Opportunities for new retirees to find purpose.

Community engagement was awesome.
Salvation Army could partner in the future. Like a coffee partnership.

Team Member Feedback and Suggestions for Design Sprints

I was able to appreciate how different team members can contribute different perspectives, approaches and values. All contributions by group members are equally important. I realised the importance of honesty and openness in ensuring the development of a safe team dynamic, and the ability to support individual members through their own challenges in the innovation process.

I have learnt that, in order to capture a meaningful and impactful project design, it is essential not to overlook the process of gaining a holistic perspective on the topic.

I really appreciated the opportunities to interview stakeholders on the first day, listening to people with lived experiences at the Eaglehawk Community House, and networking with key stakeholders on the final day. I realised that everyone has a responsibility in tackling food insecurity, whether big or small.

The sprint enabled me to build my capacities in communicating under pressure, engaging in healthy debate, and building rapport in a short period of time.



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Healthy Greater Bendigo

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Sam Kane

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Chair of the Board of Directors,
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Amy Sattler

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