From welfare to community – shifting the narrative around food insecurity on campus

Ben Smith, Flinders University

Food insecurity is prevalent in tertiary student populations in Australia, and emergency financial and food aid has been provided over some time to students at Flinders University within a welfare model. Given continued evidence of need, a review of current services and options for future improvements was undertaken by a Dietetics and Nutrition student on placement.

We envisaged an expansion of existing services continuing within a welfare model. The review, however, noted the internal stigma students reported, accessing assistance in this way. The review proposed instead a community marketplace, in partnership with a community provider, where free and low-cost food are provided with no assessment or vetting, along with cooking demonstrations and other community engagement activities.

The community market has run now for 18 months. Students report it makes a significant difference to their lives: “last week was terrible – I didn’t get any shifts – the bag of rice I got from you a couple weeks ago is still keeping me going”

“It makes a difference – absolutely - to getting through each week”

In addition, students are contributing by volunteering with running the markets each week and sharing excess food with each other. Thus, the market has become an empowering rather than stigmatising experience.

This presentation documents the implementation and evaluation of the market and explores significant learning along the way.

References


Learning outcomes

- Identify alternative narratives to the traditional service delivery and welfare approaches that may be applicable in their own institutions.
- Develop a broader understanding of food insecurity and the impact it has on student wellbeing and success.
- Be prompted to explore further the value of partnering with students as co-researchers and co-providers on campus.

Presenter

Ben Smith, Flinders University

Ben has worked with the Oasis Wellbeing Centre on Campus at Flinders University for the last 3 years, assisting a transition to a holistic approach to student wellbeing. Prior to that he has worked as a Student Counsellor, and spent time in the youth health sector. Ben has an ongoing interest in mental health promotion, and creating campus environments that promote thriving and growth.