

Our daily bread: the role of soup kitchens in 21st century Adelaide

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and examine the continued existence and evolution of soup kitchens in Australia. Soup kitchens exist as a sub-category of the non-government and not-for-profit emergency food sector. With the rise of neoliberalism the not-for-profit or 'third' sector has taken over many of the roles of traditional government welfare. As a consequence, the third sector has been forced to become more professional in an effort to secure government contracts. Third sector organisations have also shifted their focus towards the provision of longer-term assistance. Allied with this there have been moves towards providing assistance on a conditional basis, requiring active engagement on the part of recipients. Theoretically, soup kitchens do not fit well into contemporary welfare paradigms, as they provide immediate, short-term and unconditional assistance. Consequently, such services therefore appear to be the essence of what could be considered old-fashioned charity.

This thesis explores the modern day soup kitchen from multiple perspectives, incorporating the views of coordinators, staff and volunteers, as well as attendees. The dissertation addresses the overarching research question: *what is the role of soup kitchens in 21st century Australia?* The thesis outlines the operation, place, role and structure of the modern soup kitchen, using South Australia as a model. In doing so, it provides a comprehensive definition of soup kitchens; something traditionally absent

from the literature, with the meaning ascribed to such services taken for granted by those writing on soup kitchens. The scant literature around soup kitchens finds that they:

- are run by charitable, not-for-profit or community-based organisations;
- serve pre-prepared meals (either to be consumed on the premises or to be taken away);
- provide food for free or for a nominal charge; and
- are available to the general public.

Each element of the definition of a soup kitchen distinguishes the services from other forms of charity, including other emergency food services that provide groceries (such as food pantries), or serve pre-prepared meals for a fee (including organisations such as Meals on Wheels). The definition, however, does not capture certain important attributes of soup kitchens. The formulation of a new, and more comprehensive, enunciation of what soup kitchens are, needs to be established in light of the field research. The new conceptualisation of the services more sharply emphasises the social and service linkage aspects of modern soup kitchens.

Over the period of neoliberalisation in Australia, it is clear that soup kitchens have evolved into multi-faceted services, meeting a variety of needs within the community. They have moved away from an initial focus on feeding people to more complex concerns around nutrition; community and social interaction; and as a vehicle for linking attendees with further assistance. Modern soup kitchens offer a safe and easy way for volunteers to help in

the community and interact with people they may otherwise actively avoid. Increasingly, higher demands are being placed on services, both in terms of government bureaucracy and through the (required) professionalisation of the third sector. Soup kitchens nonetheless have been remarkably resilient in the face of bureaucratic change: a testament to their simple, replicable and broadly understood service model.

DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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31/5/17

Victoria Skinner

Date

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ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
CBD	Central Business District
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program
LGA	Local Government Area
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NQF	National Quality Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training