

## **A WHOLE NEW WORLD:**

### **How Holland Park Meals on Wheels is showing resilience in the face of adversity.**

Tasks have multiplied, but so have spirits. Holland Park Meals on Wheels is operating at level “full-speed-ahead” as we've taken on 44 new clients, two new runs to cover the suburbs and altered procedures to align with the government requirements for stopping COVID in its tracks.

It is no secret that our organisation depends on volunteers for providing our service to the vulnerable members of society. A daily meal and friendly check in is all the more valuable to our clients as right now their social interaction is at an all-time low. Seventy percent of our regular volunteers fall into the “at-risk” category, presenting us with a need to temporarily stand down some volunteers for their own health. This has meant many phone difficult phone calls, as some of our volunteers have been with us for over 40 years. While we know that good-bye is only for now and not forever, it is still difficult for both parties.

Only one thing could save us now; the insurmountable influx of volunteers that have excitedly filled these spots. We are so appreciative of your time and energy, the keep-calm-and-carry-on attitude.

Lessening cash handling has increased our EFTPOS phone calls, keeping the phones buzzing all day long. Our well-being phone calls have possibly been the most difficult task of all, leaving me wishing I could fix all the problems and feeling a little bit (completely) exhausted. Alongside procedural change, this has spiked afternoon napping and chocolate intake.

We are now all but sprayed down at the door with disinfectant and locked down to a select few allowed through the door (at first, I thought we may all be rocking the white HAZMAT suits in the near future). We are practicing social distancing, standing on our “x-marks-the-spots” and Latin dancing to and fro the plating up line: “rissoles... mash... gravy... peas...”

Delivery volunteers no longer come inside, only to the garage, where a procession of eskies are released one-by-one in an effort to avoid close contact. The cars pull out and proceed en-route to bring some connectedness to the suburbs. The volunteers travel far and wide; up steep driveways and millions of steps to place a meal on a wheelie-walker or front porch table. Only to take a few steps back and engage in the only conversation a lot of our clients have every day. They are used to inviting the volunteers in for a more casual encounter, but are ever-so grateful to still receive a visitor even for a quick minute.

We have always been very diligent in our sanitation and cleanliness, but the current state has increased the handwashing to every second task you perform. Our eskies were always cleaned and sanitised, but the process now takes hours rather than half of one and leaves your fingers gasping for moisturiser. Honestly, considering the wrinkly state of our fingers, you wouldn't guess those of us working here are under 65.

Following all this change, we have become accustomed to the new norm. Not only surviving, but thriving; our resilience is one for the books. I look around my team and hear singing from the kitchen, giggling from the garage (oops that's me) and phone calls from grateful clients. You would certainly not have thought we were facing adversity. My co-workers play a team game, and with our captain (manager) dishing out only support and encouragement, we were never going to lose.

A personal thank you to each of the other nine staff members I serve with. You've made the challenges of COVID an adventure. Even on the days that my brain was so full that I thought I might burst, another person would pick up my pieces and I can only hope that I've returned that favour.