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Address food insecurity in Greater Shepparton by dining out this December

By Rosa Ritchie



Helping out: Jia O'Donoghue and Kate Pongjipsai at The Last Straw are happy to support the DineSmart fundraiser by asking customers whether they will add \$2 to their bill when they settle up. Image: Amy DePaola

Enjoying a meal with family or friends at a Greater Shepparton restaurant during December is also an opportunity to put cash towards a good cause, with several hospitality venues participating in a fundraiser for people experiencing food insecurity in the community.

The annual fundraising event, DineSmart, has raised more than \$8 million in close to 20 years, funding essential and innovative responses to homelessness across Australia.

This year the initiative in Shepparton will collect donations for the Greater Shepparton Foundation's Food Link meals program.

Seven Shepparton and Mooroopna businesses have signed up to participate so far: Little Lipari, The Milk Bar, The Last Straw, Shepparton Brewery, Lemon Tree Café, Butter Factory Café and Bill and Beat's.

During the month of December, customers will be invited to donate \$2 when dining at participating restaurants and cafes.

Jia O'Donoghue of The Last Straw said her team was happy to help out, and it was a good time of year to run the initiative.

"Our clientele have been really generous already," she said.

DineSmart is run by StreetSmart Australia, and the charity's chief executive Geoff Hills says the annual event shows restaurateurs and the public want to do their bit to help end the homelessness crisis.

"It's a great opportunity to help fund smaller homeless services on the frontline," he said.

Pandemic lockdowns, rising rental costs, the end of welfare supplements and unpredictable work have all impacted people's lives and their capacity to pay bills, put food on the table and find affordable places to live.

Non-for-profit organisations are reporting increasing demand for their services, some by as much as 300 per cent.

Greater Shepparton Foundation chief executive Cheryl Hammer says the funds from the DineSmart campaign would ensure Food Link could keep delivering meals to people in need.

"Our Food Link meals program was launched in Greater Shepparton as a short-term crisis response when COVID struck in early 2020," she said.

"But due to the level of hardship and long-term impact of COVID restrictions on our families, and others, in our community, we are still providing cooked meals to hundreds of people every month.

"Families who have never asked for help before, are now seeking support from local assistance agencies and it is clear food insecurity is not going to disappear anytime soon ... So please support wherever you can."

To view an interactive map with all participating venues or donate online, visit: streetsmartaustralia.org/dinesmart

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