



**SOCIAL
SPOONS**
café meals project



Improving social connectedness within the Inner South Community Health Service community

Case Manager Focus Group | Evaluation Report

Project name

Social Spoons café meals project

Program

Community Support & Indigenous Access

Date of report

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Authors name

Liza Wallis, Community Dietitian & Social Spoons Key Worker

Acknowledgements

Kath Baggaley, Coordinator Allied and Better Health

The Social Spoons working group

Dr Claire Palermo and BND students, Dietetics Dept, Monash University

OBJECTIVES & RATIONALE

The purpose for facilitating this focus group was to determine whether *the current structure for Social Spoons is the most beneficial to the ISCHS client and Social Spoons member.*

There were two major reasons for completing this work:

- i) To ensure our Social Spoons model complied with Public Health best practice from a key stakeholder consultation perspective;
- ii) To document experiences with this new model to feed back to the Victorian Social Café Meals Project (SCMP) network.



PRAHRAN CENTRE

240 Malvern Road
Prahran, 3181
P. 9525 1300 | F. 9521 2474

SOUTHPORT CENTRE

341 Coventry Street
South Melbourne, 3205
P. 9690 9144 | F. 9696 7228
P.O. Box 103,
South Melbourne 3205

ST KILDA CENTRES

18 Mitford Street
St Kilda, 3182
P. 9534 0981 | F. 9525 3180
P.O. Box 112 Elwood 3184
10 Inkerman Street
P. 9534 8166 | F. 9525 4492

CORPORATE CENTRE

P.O. Box 103
South Melbourne 3205
ABN 74 711 038 580
ACN 136 368 771

BACKGROUND

What is Social Spoons?

Social Spoons is a café meals project run by Inner South Community Health Service (ISCHS) in Melbourne, Australia. Social Spoons provides its members with a café stamp card, similar to a coffee loyalty card, to access subsidised café meals at supportive and welcoming cafés in their local area. Members of Social Spoons are people living within our Inner South community who are hoping to increase their involvement in general community life. The meal subsidy is an incentive to encourage our members to dine with others and link them into existing programs and health services to promote better health and social connectedness amongst our broader community.

How did Social Spoons evolve?

The Social Café Meals Project is an initiative that is being facilitated in eight areas across Victoria, the first of which commenced over a decade ago. Two years ago, key staff from each of these projects came together to form the Victorian SCMP Network. This network has met quarterly since then. It was the anecdotal successes of these existing programs that inspired ISCHS to commence a Social Café Meals Project of its own. As part of extensive, best-practice stakeholder consultation and planning over an 18-month period, the project officer attended these Victorian SCMP network meetings (Hughes & Margetts, 2011). Throughout this process, it became evident that although the projects all assumed the same name, “SCMP”, they were in fact quite different. For example, Doutta Galla CHS have two separate SCMP’s, one for Meals on Wheels recipients and one for homeless people in the City of Melbourne. Both programs operate quite differently to meet the differing needs of their target group. Different again, the North Yarra CHS program has a constant membership of approximately 100 members, some of which have been on the program since it started over 10 years ago. Unsurprisingly, there is a very large waiting list.

ISCHS’ café meals project Model

Based on consultation with all the SCMP Coordinators, ISCHS developed a very unique model for its SCMP (“Social Spoons”). While the existing SCMPs all endeavored to improve food security, Social Spoons aims to *improve **social connectedness** within the Inner South community by creating supportive environments, strengthening community relationships and developing personal skills*. Therefore, our all members meet social isolation criteria. Also, by having a six-month membership period, Social Spoons can offer the program to new members twice a year and by having a small cohort of members during each six-month cycle, the Social Spoons program can provide ‘Key Workers’ for each member. The key workers can take members to the cafés and link them into local socially inclusive activities based on each member’s personal interests.

This is a much more intensive model and has presented some interesting opportunities for evaluation, prior to being adopted by the other SCMP's throughout Victoria. One of these concerns was that given the eligibility criteria for Social Spoons, many of our members had significant mental and physical health demands. As a result, eight of our twelve pilot program members were already receiving case management. This held the potential to cause confusion for the member, doubling up for the care providers (SS Key Worker and Case Manager) and unnecessary communication channels.



Throughout the six month pilot, the role of the 'key workers' evolved based on consultation with the Social Spoons members, the members' Case Manager and the Social Spoons key workers. In order to document these conversations, this Case Manager focus group was facilitated.

CONTEXT & SETTING

This focus group is just one aspect of formal evaluation of the Social Spoons café meals project. In addition, there have been:

- In-depth interviews – with both café staff and SCMP members (across Inner South CHS and Inner East CHS)
- Pre and Post social inclusion quantitative data collection (validated social inclusion questions)
- Pre and Post 24 hour food recall data collection
- Subsidised meal utilization data analysis
- Case studies of Social Spoons members
- Reflective pieces from Consumer Representatives on Social Spoons working group

This extensive evaluation is currently being compiled into a report to summarise the learning and recommendations for Social Spoons (and other SCMP's throughout Victoria) beyond the initial 6-month pilot phase.

DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Data for this evaluation was collected as a focus group facilitated on Wednesday 22nd February in the Conference Room at Southport. This focus group involved five ISCHS case-managers from across the Mental Health, Community Support and PHaMS teams. In addition, a case manager from St Kilda Junction Clinic (Community Mental Health Service) was unable to attend the focus group however submitted written responses to the questions asked. Consent was obtained for the focus group to be recorded for analysis purposes.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited base on their availability to attend. 100% of Case Managers, both internal and external, with clients involved in our Social Spoons pilot program were invited to attend. Only one case manager was unable to attend and did not complete written responses.

Methodology

The following questions were asked based on best-practice in evaluation methodology (Liamputtong, 2010):

Focus Group Questions	Prompts
Have you had any feedback from your clients about Social Spoons?	<i>Increased confidence in accessing services? More community participation? Dietary changes? Have you seen any benefits to your clients since joining Social Spoons as a result of the project?</i>
Have you noticed any changes?	
What's working well?	<i>Are the café's suitable? Are the Social Spoons working group members (key workers) accessible to you?</i>
Which parts haven't worked so well?	<i>Is the cost a barrier? Transport issues?</i>
Any suggestions for the next round of membership (April – September, 2012)?	<i>Can you suggest a better structure? Is the structure where we have a key worker role and your case management role beneficial? Have your clients been confused by the different roles? Different cafes? Longer/shorter than 6 month membership? A peer-mentor role for 'graduates'?</i>
Would you consider referring other Socially isolated clients to Social Spoons?	<i>If not, why not?</i>

RESULTS

The focus group was recorded and transcribed. In relation to the objective for this focus group, *to determine whether the current structure for Social Spoons is the most beneficial to the ISCHS client and Social Spoons member*, this data was then coded, categorised and themed as outlined in Appendix 1 (p 14). The following four themes emerged:

1. The role of the Social Spoons key worker is beneficial to meeting program objectives of social inclusion, provided communication is adequate with the members' Case Manager.
2. Social Spoons is a successful tool for enabling clients engaged in Case Management to achieve their social and physical health goals.
3. The selection and recruitment process of partner cafés needs to consider additional barriers experienced by clients engaged in case management.
4. Social Spoons members need to remain connected to the program beyond their 6-month membership.

The following text describes each of these four themes and presents key quotes from the focus group transcription.

THEME 1: The role of the Social Spoons key worker is beneficial to meeting program objectives of social inclusion, provided communication is adequate with the members' Case Manager.

Participating case managers believed that there were many benefits of this current model that were reliant on the Social Spoons member having a Key Worker in addition to their Case Manager. One benefit was the peripheral support from an additional worker, whereby their clients are exposed to different aspects of ISCHS.

“My clients almost describe a sense of community within the Inner South community so having a broader sense of what the health service offers too. Not even just in a health related way. I guess just the inclusiveness of our approach.”

Other benefits included the support from peers on the Social Spoons working group to engage in community life. Case managers believed that this has already resulted in a reduction in worker-dependence and were appreciative of the fact that their client being involved in Social Spoons did not contribute any additional workload for them.

“A lot of our clients have gotten into this (Social Spoons) because their recovery goals have included increasing independence. Because it really all ties into that. The peripheral support again. Getting out there and that type of thing.”

The involvement of peer workers was valued by case managers and appeared to be integral to the success of the program in terms of shifting this worker-dependence. Participating case managers believed that recommendations for participating in community groups that are given to their clients from peers have *“so much more weight than anything we ever provide... ever”*. The peer recommendation is coming from someone who has been to the groups as a client and is willing to take the Social Spoons member with them.

“My client found this out through the peer worker and they kind of organized the art group and I wasn’t involved in that. I actually found that that was a really positive thing for him and that... I just think hearing it from someone new. And... I think we can be saying the same things over and over again.”

Case managers also indicated that Social Spoons has enabled service promotion for the Mental Health team and has challenged existing social stigmas associated with seeking mental health services. By having a Key Worker, their clients are exposed to many other areas of service delivery within ISHCS. This could potentially have implications to improving service access and acceptance of internal referrals.

“Sometimes it’s been nice too for other clients who I’m the key worker for. Oh you work in the mental health team....oh da da da da da ... it was interesting having those sorts of conversations...it was quite normalized.”

Interestingly, 80% of participating case managers had met their clients at one or more of the partner cafés. This had been an extremely positive experience for the case managers where they felt that their clients were *“driving it a little bit”*. The clients were able to introduce their Case Managers to the café staff by name and show that the café staff knew their names in return. The sense of independence felt by the clients is something that many case managers have been working with their clients on for some time.

“You’re actually sitting somewhere that they’re feeling independent and they’re independent. And it’s great isn’t it too at the end of it you go up and you each pay for yourselves.”

Participating case managers also presented a limitation of the current model whereby some clients felt confused about the different roles of the Social Spoons key worker compared to the Case Manager.

“At times my client kind of indicated that there was a little.... Almost felt like there was a bit of a competing agenda at times. The key worker was being really um... encouraging of other community groups and bits and pieces that might be going on... and the client almost felt like... that’s the sort of stuff that I talk about with my case manager. Not to say that it wasn’t useful information. I think she just felt a bit confused about what was what.”

Discussion about ways to improve this confusion indicated that effective communication between case managers and Social Spoons key workers is integral. Also, it is very important for the roles to be clearly defined to members.

“Give general information to people (SS members) particularly at the group sort of meetings. And if there was specific things that maybe the key worker was wondering about for that individual maybe having a chat to the case manager about that.”

For Social Spoons members with a case manager, clear guidelines need to exist indicating that the Case Manager works with the member to assist in goal setting while the Social Spoons key worker simply provides options for current socially inclusive groups in the local area. These guidelines will not only relieve confusion for the Social Spoons member but will also honor the Case Managers’ expertise in goal setting.

“Basically using a ladder system... the goal might be sitting at a café on your own for 20 minutes... and then you just look at the steps that you might need to take to get there...just have to have sat by yourself at a café by yourself.... Popping in for a coffee then building up to having a full meal at a café.”

THEME 2: Social Spoons is a successful tool for enabling clients engaged in Case Management to achieve their social and physical health goals.

Case managers presented a range of achievements that they’ve seen amongst their clients as a direct result of being involved in Social Spoons. These achievements included strategies that could ultimately improve their physical health such as improved dietary quality, increased meal frequency and more cooking at home inspired by the healthy menu options seen in the cafés.

“One of my clients has started cooking for himself at home since doing the program.”

The case managers also revealed achievements that have the potential to improve the social and emotional health of participating clients. Such achievements included greater social connection, increased self-confidence and attendance at new community groups.

“I don’t know if it’s necessarily community participation but I think it’s flowed onto them wanting to join other groups as well. I think probably having those peer interactions. If oh, I can go here for that art group or there for that art group. Just getting a bigger range of information from more people. And getting more confidence to go to those groups.”

A common barrier for case managed clients of ISCHS to achieve their optimal health is financial limitations. One case manager has used Social Spoons as a tool to encourage more economical decision making to ultimately improve the dietary quality for her client.

“And also for her (SS member) I was able to use um...the money thing as she never has money and she likes to get a coffee from 7/11 for \$2 and I said for 50 cents more you can have a coffee and something else you know so it was given me a... an opportunity to get her thinking about doing things in an alternative way. Looking for the quality of what she’s getting.”

THEME 3: The selection and recruitment process of partner cafés needs to consider additional barriers experienced by clients engaged in case management.

As previously identified through the in-depth interviews conducted by six final year student dietitians during their eight-week community placement, “the café staff’s role and qualities along with members perceptions contribute to the environment of the participating cafés and are integral to facilitate members’ use of the program and its success” (Allen *et al*, 2011, p16). Interestingly, this theme emerged again throughout the case manager’s focus group. Participants believed the current model needs to further consider café selection criteria to ensure the partner cafés cater to some additional barriers experienced by Social Spoons members engaged in case management services.

One consideration that case managers felt was key to the success of this current model was the **geographical location** of partner cafes. They believe that the location can encourage opportunistic participation in community life.

“One day I took my client into the library. She’s got a small child. But going into the library I mean she hadn’t been for months. She was able to get on the computer and do a few things... Because it was next door (Café Bruce) and opportunistic.”

For one case manager, they saw Social Spoons as a tool for challenging the engrained daily behaviours of their client, provided the cafés were selected in locations to promote this lifestyle switch.

“On the way to an appointment or to run errands she (SS member) will eat. Have that as part of it. So it can be enriched her day and you know...she’s going that change of lifestyle beginning to happen.”

Case managers confirmed the assumption that Social Spoons has the potential to encourage clients to utilize new public transport routes and expand current areas of familiarity, provided partner cafés are situated in strategic locations.

“My clients gone to the St Kilda one and he does struggle to use public transport to go to the ones in South Melbourne. I think just in terms of the distance from his home. He prefers to go somewhere local.”

“She (SS member) was used to coming here and the market. And I think Zappa, it sounds like a small distance but I think it did stretch her out. Even though it’s the same suburb. I think it did expand her exposure to the area.”

Another key consideration for clients engaged in case management services is that these members are more likely to experience periods of physical and emotional illness and as a result are inconsistently able to engage in the program. Hence, the presence of **supportive café staff** to accommodate this flexibility is crucial.

“My clients’ really enjoyed using the card but um... has also had a lot of time unwell. Her appetite isn’t big enough to take a full serve at Bunyip for instance and he (café owner) said oh, we do half serves and she said oh fantastic. So that’s about learning that your dollar can go further.”

The social interaction within the café environment relies heavily on the nature and capacity of staff. Case managers acknowledged that staff in the partner cafés were all adequately aware of Social Spoons and therefore adapted their behaviours to encourage interaction with program members.

“My client described both those (staff) at Bunyip and Zappa as reaching out to her. She doesn’t have to do all the work to try to interact with them. Both those guys are pretty social which is good. Makes it less intimidating. It’s broken down barriers of going into cafés”

Another concern case managers had with partner cafés was their ability to accommodate Social Spoons members over the weekends. *“The weekends are often the hardest when all the other services are closed.”* Therefore, the trading hours and potential for a **quiet café environment over the weekends** needs to be considered for future café recruitment. Obviously this is the time that many cafés generate good business and therefore, the importance of having a greater number of cafés to offer increased variety is an important consideration.

“My client (is) not wanting to come here (to the cafes) on the weekends when it’s really busy. If she comes on the weekends she can’t interact with the staff.”

Theme 4: Social Spoons members need to remain connected to the program beyond their 6-month membership.

Case managers highlighted the need for Social Spoons café meals project to offer and ongoing connection to the program, beyond the 6-month official membership period. They felt that by maintaining engagement in the program, the achievements made throughout their membership time are more likely to be sustainable into the long-term future.

Case managers suggested a range of solutions to facilitate this ongoing engagement:

1. A discount card for partner cafés - just a small discount, at no expense to ISCHS
2. An update on partner cafes – a regular newsletter for new and ALUMNI members
3. Regular café sessions – an opportunity for new members to meet ALUMNI to share experiences at cafés
4. A buddy system – organic connections at the café sessions

Comments from case managers revealed that their clients would benefit from having something to present at the café. This would work as an incentive to encourage their clients to continue using the cafés, provide them with the sense of belonging and indicate to café staff that they need to maintain inclusive behaviours.

“Could they still have something to present to the staff to show that they’ve been part of the program? To show that they’re still welcomed and need to be a little bit looked after.”

Case Managers felt that an opportunity for new and previous members of Social Spoons to connect would be very beneficial. This could assist with café utilization, attendance at community groups and feelings of confidence when entering the cafés initially.

“It would be good feedback for the new members to hear from the phase 1 members about their experiences. You’re not sure what you’re getting into. That’s pretty powerful.”

In terms of the café sessions, case managers felt the attendance at these would be improved as the program continues and attracts new members. Also, they indicated that member recruitment processes could improve this success by ensuring a variety of Social Spoons members were involved across the teams of Inner South and with a range of dependency and confidence levels.

“It’s about finding people that are at the right sort of level of not independence so much but level of wanting to engage with other members.”

Were the objectives achieved?

As with all focus groups, the discussion did not solely answer the primary objective *to determine whether the current structure for Social Spoons is the most beneficial to the ISCHS client and Social Spoons member*, but also provided incredibly valuable information about other aspects of the program.

Were there any unexpected outcomes?

Participating case managers provided rich information about the model of Social Spoons into the future, beyond the current pilot project. They gave valuable recommendations for strategies to maintain engagement with Social Spoons members beyond their 6-month meal-subsidy membership and presented some interesting considerations for future partner café recruitment.

DISCUSSION

What have we learned by carrying out this project?

Analysis of the focus group has certainly clarified that the current model for Social Spoons café meals project has been successful throughout the 6-month pilot phase. This model has enabled members to achieve personal goals together with the support of their Case Manager *and* their Social Spoons Key Worker. There has however been some confusion identified for some members where the roles of these two care providers has not been clearly defined. Some Social Spoons members have felt competing demands and unintentional pressure as a result of this current structure. As a result, it is recommended that communication channels remain strong between case managers and key workers to ensure transparency.

Many benefits were also documented as a result of this model. Such as the clients' engagement in 'mainstream' services and community, peripheral support and the powerful recommendations of community groups by consumer representatives on the Social Spoons working group.

Was the methodology appropriate?

A focus group was a suitable choice of data collection. If this evaluation had been done using quantitative data collection, the evaluation would have missed extremely valuable feedback about the future direction of Social Spoons. The timing of this focus group was also appropriate given that this feedback will influence the development of a more sustainable, embedded model for Social Spoons beyond the pilot phase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the four themes that emerged from this focus group, the recommendations are broken into two components.

Recommendations for ISCHS's "Social Spoons café meals project"

- Maintain a key worker role to support Social Spoons members in achieving their social inclusions goals, regardless of whether the member has an existing case manager.
- If the member is engaged in case management, key workers are to maintain transparent communication channels to ensure the client/member is not subject to competing agendas
- Maintain active involvement of consumer representatives in the planning and implementation of Social Spoons. If possible, increase the number of peer, volunteer or consumer representatives involved to enable all Social Spoons members the opportunity to interact and connect.
- Consider the additional barriers that clients engaged in case managers face in attending the partner cafés when recruiting new partner cafés:
 - Geographical location
 - Supportive and accommodating staff
 - Quite café environments are available on weekends
- Ensure Social Spoons member remain engaged in the program beyond the 6-month membership period by offering a discount card for partner cafés, a regular newsletter with updates of partner cafés, communal café sessions and the opportunity for a buddy system for ALUMNI to take new members to cafés.

Recommendations for other Social Café Meals Projects throughout Victoria

- A 6-month membership period is an effective method of reducing waitlists and offering an accessible and equitable program to the target group, provided strategies are in place to maintain engagement beyond the 6-month period
- The model where SCMP members have a key worker to support them in their involvement with the SCMP can be successful in enabling them to achieve their personal goals, provided communication is effective between key workers and case managers
- Café selection needs to consider additional barriers experienced by members who are engaged in case management services.

CONCLUSION

Social Spoons café meals project has successfully engaged socially isolated community members and has the potential to reduce significant health inequities experiences by these individuals. The thorough stakeholder consultation and planning methodology enabled the Social Spoons working group at ISCHS to develop a well-informed model of program delivery. Case managers of ISCHS who have clients involved in Social Spoons café meals project have confirmed that this current model, where Social Spoons members may have both a Case Manager and a Social Spoons key work, is successful. Case managers have indicated that the role of the Social Spoons key worker is beneficial to meeting program objectives of social inclusion, provided communication is adequate with the members' Case Manager. They have also indicated that Social Spoons is a successful tool for enabling clients engaged in Case Management to achieve their social and physical health goals. Another finding from this evaluation has suggested that the selection and recruitment process of partner cafés needs to consider additional barriers experienced by clients engaged in case management. And finally, case managers believe that Social Spoons members need to remain connected to the program beyond their 6-month membership period. These results will influence the future development of Inner South's Social Spoons café meals project and could have implications to the models of delivery for Social Café Meals Projects throughout Victoria.

REFERENCES

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Thematic analysis

This table outlines the thematic analysis of the focus group transcription according to Qualitative data analysis methodology described in Liamputtong (2010).

Theme 1: The role of the Social Spoons key worker is beneficial to meeting program objectives of social inclusion, provided communication is adequate with the members' Case Manager.		
Categories	Code words	
Role confusion	Goal setting Promoting activities Key worker relationship Competing agendas	Pressure to achieve Peer relationship Case manager relationship
Peripheral support	External environment Independence Other workers Mainstream services	Additional interactions Someone new Increased opportunity
Peer relationships	Powerful recommendations Meaningful referrals	Support attending groups Increased opportunity
Reduced dependence	Less reliance on case manager New interactions	Wider Inner South community Confidence
Work load	Additional time Time demands Increased communication	Extra communication channels No extra time demands
Theme 2: Social Spoons is a successful tool for enabling clients engaged in Case Management to achieve their social and physical health goals.		
Categories	Code words	
Social Inclusion Benefits	Confidence Cohesiveness Staff knowing names Recognising new staff Introducing friends and workers to café staff	Meeting other SS members Peer relationship Attendance at local groups Frequency attending cafés Challenging existing lifestyle
Public Transport Usage	Stretching beyond local area Familiarity with area	Travel beyond local area Incentive to travel
Interaction with mainstream community	Someone different New names New interactions External relationships	Peer relationships Confidence Independence Incentive to connect

Interaction with wider ISCHS community	Interaction with other workers Interaction with clients from other teams Someone different	Peer relationships Volunteer program New names New interactions Referrals to other staff
Nutrition	Cooking more Dietitian access Information Advice Nutritious meals	Inspiration Interest in food Healthy Eating Low food intake
Food Security	Frequency of meals Quality of nutrition	Access to services Access to food
Confidence/Independence	Himself Herself Learning contemporary café food names Familiarity with menu items	Paying for own meals Not Emergency Food Relief
Theme 3: The selection and recruitment process of partner cafés needs to consider additional barriers experienced by clients engaged in case management.		
Categories	Code words	
Geographical location	Familiarity with local area Unwillingness to travel	Opportunistic use of local services
Trading hours	Open on weekends Mixture of daytime and night	Public holiday hours
Weekend business	Quiet spaces for weekend usage Intimidating on the weekends	Other services are closed on weekends Potential to fill a large gap
Theme 4: Social Spoons members need to remain connected to the program beyond their 6-month membership.		
Categories	Code words	
Membership mentality	Identification Cohesiveness	Privileged rights Community
Ongoing engagement	Avoiding disengagement Maintaining relationships	Maintaining café usage Remaining connected
Sustainable changes	Supporting café usage Inspiring café usage	Maintaining relationships Remaining connected
Capacity to connect with other members	Café sessions Member selection process	Mixture independence levels amongst members