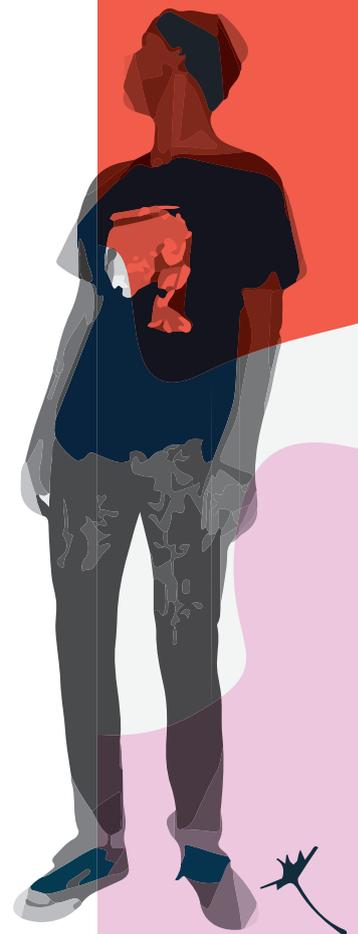
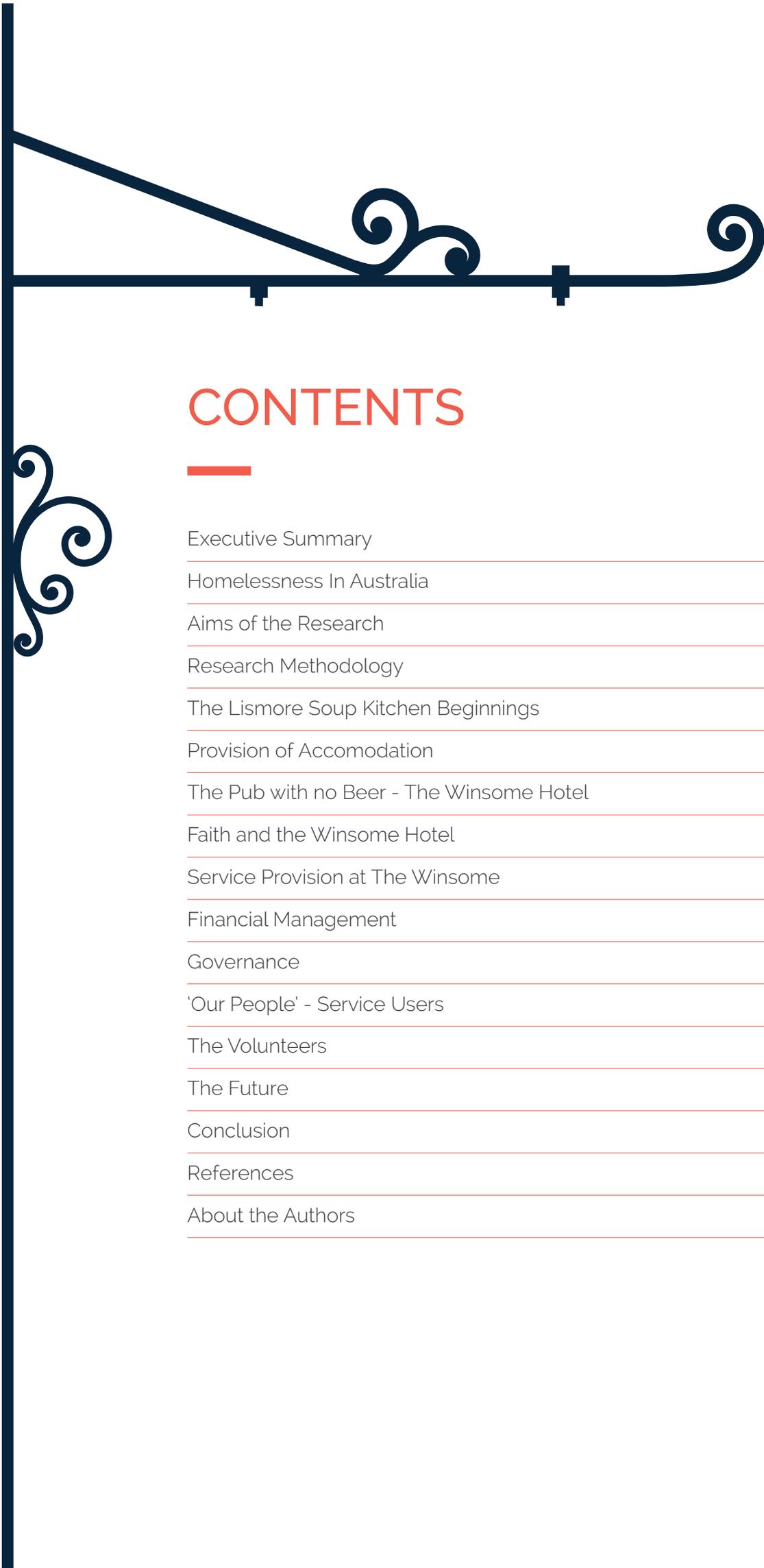

HOPE, JOY & COMMUNITY

THE LISMORE SOUP
KITCHEN AT THE
WINSOME HOTEL



Barbara Rugendyke | John McKinnon | Gregory P. Smith



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The Winsome
Artist: Cathy Allen

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Established thirty years ago this year, the Lismore Soup Kitchen at the Winsome Hotel fills a vital role in the Lismore region.

In 2019, it served over 80 hot meals every day, a staggering 30,000 meals a year, as well as take away food, to marginalised and disadvantaged people. This, along with provision of an array of essential support services, including medical, counselling, interest and support groups and informal, non-denominational Sunday church services. Accommodation for men is available at the Winsome and also for a small number of people, both men and women, at Mazzer House. The Hotel has accommodated 164 people in the past decade.

The research reported here presents the outcomes of a survey of over one hundred individuals, of volunteers and of those who visit the Winsome to access services. It is informed by in depth interviews with forty members of the Winsome community, both service users and volunteers, and with other stakeholders.

For many, the opportunity to attend the Lismore Soup Kitchen has proved life saving and life changing. One third of those who access services there are rough sleepers and others, because of health issues, age, prolonged unemployment, or the limitations posed by temporary or poor standard accommodation, rely on the provision of food and other services. Many of those surveyed said they simply would not survive without the support they find there.

The Lismore Soup Kitchen operates through the goodwill of volunteers and a core group of active team leaders. These volunteers are primarily older people, drawn from all walks of life. Many have themselves in the past either used the services provided by the Lismore Soup Kitchen, or other services elsewhere, and wish to 'give back' to support others who are experiencing a difficult time in life.

The distinction between volunteers and service users is sometimes difficult to draw; many of the people who belong to the community which has grown at the Winsome both volunteer and access services there.

The current site of the Lismore Soup Kitchen was purchased a decade ago with grants and with loans from both a bank and private investors, proving to be a commercially viable social impact investment for the latter. The wider community, through generous financial donations from its supporters and through in kind donations of food, expertise and other goods, enables ongoing operations. The Lismore Soup Kitchen should be able to operate on a financially sustainable basis into the future to provide continued support and services for those in its community. More importantly, no monetary sum can adequately measure the impact on the lives of the many who belong to this community of care.

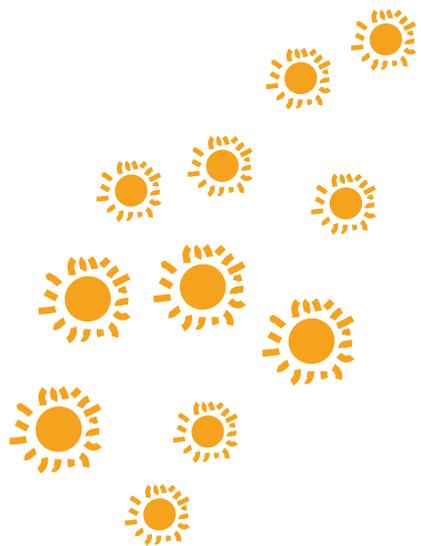
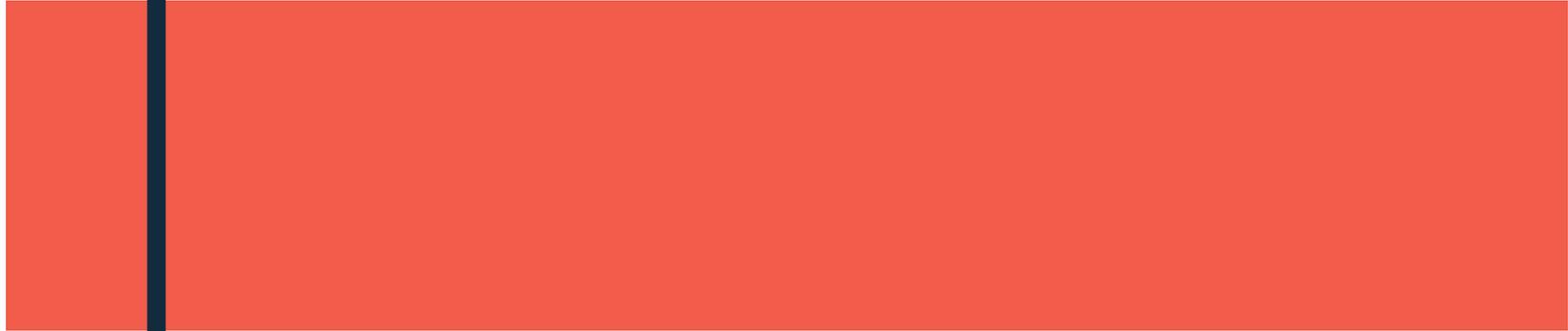
What is abundantly clear, is that the Lismore Soup Kitchen at the Winsome Hotel provides a welcoming place, as well as sustenance and support for those who enter its doors. Far more than that, as reading this report will reveal, it offers an accepting and nurturing community for its people, a place to belong, which fosters well-being and inspires positivity about the future – it epitomises love in action.

The Winsome Hotel is indeed a place of hope, joy and community.

Barbara Rugendyke

John McKinnon

Gregory P. Smith



HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA

Homelessness in Australia is a complex social problem, with multifarious causes and largely inadequate policy responses. Increasingly, homelessness has become the focus of research efforts, as researchers, policy makers and service providers seek to understand more fully the causes and consequences of homelessness and to explore and develop appropriate policy and practical responses to this growing phenomenon (Chamberlain et al., 2014).

Growing attention has been given to appropriate service provision to support the needs of vulnerable people who are unable to afford or access housing through the market place (Johnstone et al., 2016; Herault and Johnson, 2016). Focus has been on housing provision, tenancy support (Zaretsky and Flatau, 2015), access to food, laundry facilities and bathrooms (McKay and McKenzie, 2017) and supply of other support services.

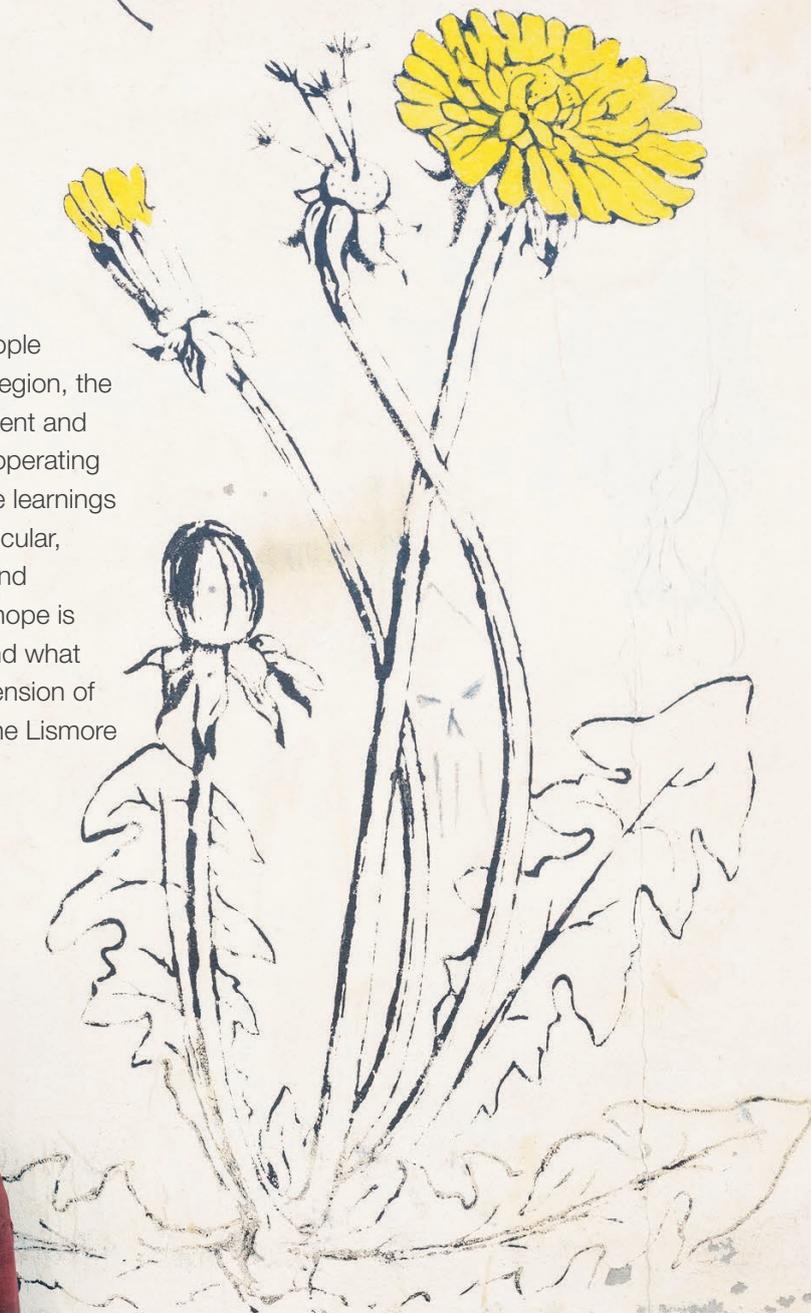
Causes of homelessness are multidimensional; the homeless are not passive victims of those circumstances, and should not be denied the possibility of agency (Somerville, 2013). This is graphically illustrated through the lived experiences of one of the researchers who assisted to conduct the study reported here, who was himself homeless for a prolonged period. Those experiences, documented in Smith and Henderson (2018), are important in informing this applied research, with its specific aim of examining the effectiveness of provision of food and other services by one organisation, as one example of service provision to meet the needs of homeless and vulnerable people in one town, Lismore, in Northern New South Wales, Australia.

Homelessness in Australia increased 13.7 per cent in 5 years (Homelessness Australia, 2019). From among the states and territories, the largest increase between 2011 and 2016 in the number of people reporting as homeless occurred in New South Wales, with the homeless rate increasing from 40.8 to 50.4 persons per 10,000 (Dobson and Montoya, 2018). Twenty per cent of rough sleepers in the state of New South Wales live in the Northern Rivers region (Burke, 2017). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, on Census night in 2016, 1,494 people in the Northern Rivers region were homeless. This number had increased by 194 persons since the 2011 Census. In 2016, this represented 51.5 persons per 10,000 of the population (NCOSS, 2019). At the same time, nearly as many people – 1,370 – were found to be living in marginal housing, including in caravan parks (ibid.).



AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

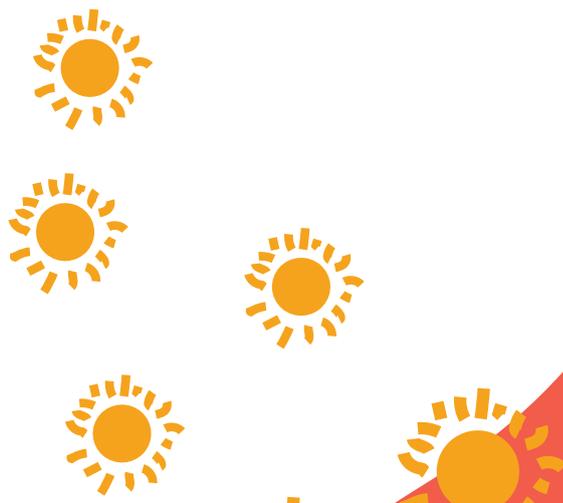
Within the context of the growing body of research about homelessness and the growing number of people experiencing homelessness in the Northern Rivers Region, the broad aim of the research reported here is to document and evaluate the activities of the Lismore Soup Kitchen, operating from the Winsome Hotel in Lismore, in order to share learnings from its operations and to assess its viability. In particular, the focus of this research is to examine the impact and sustainability of the Soup Kitchen's operations. The hope is that this research, through describing what works and what doesn't at the Lismore Soup Kitchen, will inform extension of effective services to homeless persons both within the Lismore area and to other communities.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted between November 2018 and February 2020 and included distribution of two surveys, one to volunteers at the Lismore Soup Kitchen and another to the people who visit the site to access one or more of the services available to them. Survey participants were invited to participate in an individual interview. In depth interviews were conducted with many volunteers and with those accessing services, including residents living at the Winsome Hotel, the present day location of the Lismore Soup Kitchen. Three focus groups were held with service users. In addition, a number of key stakeholders were interviewed, including members of the Lismore Soup Kitchen's management committee and service providers who visit the site. One of the researchers also spent significant amounts of time at the Winsome, observing activities there and engaging in informal conversations with other participants, thus gaining rich data.

This report contains a number of vignettes, recounting personal stories of members of the Winsome community. Any personal stories included here have been used with permission of the individuals concerned and pseudonyms have been used, although in a few cases individuals wished to 'own' their stories and requested that their real names be used. Original quotes where individuals are potentially identifiable have been used with permission, and where photographs containing images of people have been used, permission has been obtained to do so. The research project was approved by Southern Cross University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

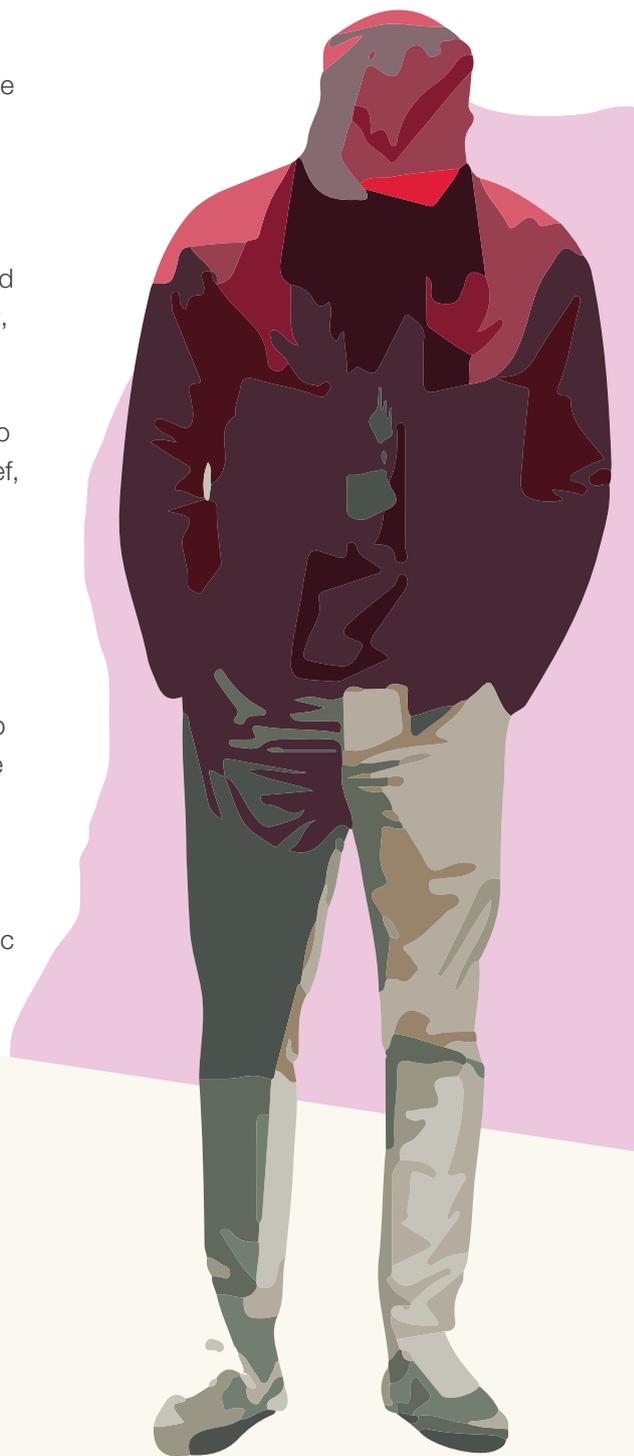


THE LISMORE SOUP KITCHEN - BEGINNINGS

The Lismore Soup Kitchen commenced operation in 1990 under that name, and was incorporated in 1992. The service was started by Don Ferguson, who “really felt called by God ... to cook an evening meal, take it to the basement of the Church of Christ which is in Keen Street here in Lismore ... and he invited people on the streets to come and share a meal” (volunteer, 22/11/2018). In February 1991, the Lismore Soup Kitchen’s operations moved to the Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) building in Lismore, on invitation of the then local Police Chief, Charlie Jurd (Anon., 2019). At that time, a main meal was cooked and served at night, three days a week and about seven or eight people came for a meal. A Winsome volunteer whose work for the Lismore Soup Kitchen dates back to its earliest days recalled that “many of the people who came also had drug and alcohol problems and wanted to detox and share their grief, so we helped them through that” (volunteer, 23/11/2018).

Today, Mieke Bell is President of the Lismore Soup Kitchen (LSK) and Ridley Bell the Treasurer. Their involvement dates from those early days, when they heard about the service through the local media. They simply walked in to the PCYC off the street, a few months after the commencement of the service, and said they would like to join the group of volunteers. The Bells were involved in a house church at Clunes at the time; the church group decided to open the service on a fourth night of the week, with church members cooking and preparing the meal at their homes, for delivery to, and distribution from, the PCYC.

The kitchen there was adequate, but not big, allowing only for a domestic table with eight chairs. If more people arrived, a second sitting was held. However, the size of the premises could mean that people were waiting out in the rain. It became clear that the service needed its own site. As well, the LSK had no security of tenure; if the PCYC needed the kitchen, the Soup Kitchen volunteers would have to relocate and barbeque food downstairs. Not long after beginning to volunteer at the Lismore Soup Kitchen, the Bell’s purchased an old paint warehouse in Union Street in South Lismore and the organisation was relocated there in August, 1992, after completion of internal renovations. Here the LSK could operate on a rent free basis and with security of tenure.



Once settled there, table tennis tables and pool tables were purchased, because “We wanted to set it up more as a drop in centre, or a place for people who didn’t have anywhere else to be during the day and gradually the service increased from the evening meal to lunch as well” (volunteer, 22/11/2018). A fireplace was installed as “We really wanted to create a sense of a sense of home, a sense of belonging, a sense of community and that is what happened in that building” (ibid.). Known as Merriwa (an Aboriginal word interviewees advised meant ‘a good place’), the warehouse was open daily for twelve hours each day, every day in the year, until August 2001 (Anon. 2019). As well as providing two meals each day, people were able to access counselling services, visit a doctor, or attend interest groups, including a Bible Study (ibid.). The volunteers were very busy working long days to serve the two meals each day.

In August 2001, the warehouse burnt down. A regular, who often attended the Soup Kitchen at night, under the influence of alcohol, broke in on a cold night and, forgetting there was a fireplace, built a little fire on the timber floor. In no time the premises burnt down; thankfully for the Soup Kitchen team, the visitor escaped unscathed.

By this time, there were thirty to forty people regularly attending for the evening meal and the band of volunteers had increased to cater for the number. A meeting with the volunteers, held the morning after the fire, resulted in agreement that it was essential to continue this very important service in the community. The Lismore City Council provided the free use of a gangers hut, located in Norco Lane directly behind the Lismore railway station. The shed belonged to the Railway Department, NSW Rail, and was being leased by Lismore Council at the time. The Lismore Soup Kitchen operated from the Shed from 2001 until October 2009 before it moved to its current premises at the Winsome Hotel.

Today, the Lismore Soup Kitchen is described on its website as a ‘Pub with no Beer, Providing a service to the disadvantaged community ... hot lunches daily, transitional housing for marginalised men and caring through community’. Its further aims are detailed on its website at: <https://www.winsome.org.au/>

The Lismore Soup Kitchen team also provides breakfast at a venue “in town”, at the Red Dove Café at the Uniting Church. It was too difficult to provide all meals a day from the one venue, as there were time clashes in the kitchen, so over time the system has developed to the current day practice with a dedicated group of regular volunteers providing breakfast at the Red Dove. A hot meal is provided at the Winsome Hotel in the middle of the day, and sandwiches are distributed at the Winsome to provide food to take away for consumption later in the day.



As one volunteer explained:

...in the old days (when we were in Union Street), we used to go for 12 hour days, and when we came here... when we wised up, because we found it too much for the volunteers, we started just doing hot lunches and sandwiches. ... we were doing breakfast, lunch and tea. Breakfast became too much, so we took the breakfast out and took it to another venue, because the cooks doing breakfast would clash with the cooks doing lunch. (23/11/2018)



PROVISION OF ACCOMMODATION

Nearly twenty years ago, NSW Health held a competition on the theme of 'healthy communities'; community nurses who were visiting the LSK to do outreach at the time suggested that the organisation met the criteria and should enter the competition for the Community Health Award. As one interviewee described this:

We decided as an organisation that if we were to win the prize, which was actually \$50,000, that we would put it towards buying a house, for medium to long term accommodation, have people go in, have them pay rent, so they could pay the house off, and then once the house was paid off the money from the rent would come into our pot of money. (volunteer, 22/11/2018)

To the delight of the LSK volunteers, they won the competition – \$15,000 for the regional award and \$50,000 for the state award. This enabled purchase of a house in 1998, for \$114,000, with the organisation acquiring a bank loan to pay the balance. The loan was paid off over time and the house later became collateral for an important future purchase. The house was eventually named Mazzer House, in memory of Sister Margaret Mazzer, of Lismore St Mary's Presentation Convent; the sister had dedicated her life to serving Lismore's homeless (Turnbull, 2007).

Initially there were six to seven residents in the house at any one time, described as "quite disadvantaged people", many of whom (estimated to be three quarters of residents over time) have suffered from mental health issues. Many have been long term residents who stay on in the house, which has provided a home for mixed gender, single tenants. Residents pay \$100 a week for their room at Mazzer House and the rent has not been adjusted over time.

There is no in house management, but one of the long-term volunteers and a member of the Lismore Soup Kitchen Inc. Committee, who commenced work in the organisation in its beginning months, holds meetings with the residents and checks that all is working well at the house. Another member of the Committee sometimes attends these meetings as well.

As space becomes available, new residents are usually recommended by one of the LSK volunteers or somebody who knows of a person who needs accommodation. The potential new tenant attends a meeting with residents, who have to agree they will accept a new person into

the house. This system seems to work well and “this has always been a house that has run well given that, you know, people with some fairly big problems are all living together, it has been amazing how that house has worked for us” (volunteer, 22/11/2018). There have been no issues of violence at the premises. The only woman living there has been a resident since the accommodation was first available at Mazzer House. The length of stay of residents is usually many years.

There are four bedrooms upstairs, and there were two bedrooms downstairs. A converted garage provided a downstairs living area as well. However, the building is in South Lismore in a flood prone area. Council heard of the provision of rooms down stairs and required that accommodation could only be provided upstairs. This was a disappointment, as fewer people could make their home there.

THE PUB WITH NO BEER – THE WINSOME HOTEL

By 2009, discussions were underway about whether the Soup Kitchen should buy another house to provide desperately needed accommodation for homeless people. The LSK had been considering purchase of the Winsome Hotel for many years and over the years it had changed hands a number of times. As one interviewee reminisced “We had been looking at the building for many years and Ridley would say, one day God is going to give us this building. It is going to be for us” (volunteer, 22/11/2018).

In 2009, a friend of the Bells heard that the Winsome Hotel was to be again on the market, contacted Ridley Bell and said you should go and talk to Dallas Bayley (the then owner) who wants to sell the Winsome. The Bells initiated discussions with the owner, who said “I like what you guys do and I’d like you to buy it and I’d like to be able to negotiate a sale with you” (volunteer, 22/11/2018). So, after discussions with the ANZ bank, the idea was put to the LSK Committee and volunteers and everyone agreed the purchase was a good idea. One volunteer reported that Council was supportive of the move to the Winsome as a tent city had begun to grow up around the tin shed near the river. A community was beginning to grow there, and there was safety for people because of the numbers of people camping, but there was no sanitation and this was causing problems.



Full financial circumstances enabling the purchase are described under Financial Management subsequently in this report.

A part alcohol licence was retained to assist to maintain the value of the property, and also to allow service of alcohol for any private functions held at the Winsome. Amazingly for the Lismore Soup Kitchen Committee, the Hotel was purchased for the organisation, and has provided a home for the Lismore Soup Kitchen and accommodation for 18 residents since 2009. As one interviewee expressed it, “I know that God has given us this place and I know He has given it to us for the people for whom His heart beats the most, the disadvantaged. I know that. I believe it” (ibid.).

At the celebration of ten years of the LSK’s operation at the Winsome, on 9 October, 2019, the Committee President referred to the Hotel as a place she loves, a “place above all of hope, of joy and of community”. Others spoke from their experiences at the Winsome on the occasion and some of the comments are presented in the following pages.



THIS PLACE CERTAINLY DOES REPRESENT HOPE – I AM A BEACON OF HOPE MYSELF, HAVING COME OUT OF A TERRIBLE LIFE AND SEEN THE LIGHT. SO, I LOOK FORWARD TO MANY YEARS TO COME HERE. I WANT TO THANK EVERYBODY HERE FOR THEIR TIRELESS WORK AND SERVICE FOR OTHERS. GOD IS GOOD EH?

As a volunteer I worked here from just after the Winsome opened. I went away for quite a few years, but I had a pull to come back to Lismore and one of the things pulling me most was coming back to this place. I love it, it has a great energy about it. If I am having a bad day and I come in here, my day is reversed, I just end up feeling fantastic.

I have been coming here for nine years now and I used to come to the Winsome before that when it was a bar. I have worked in Sydney quite a lot and worked with the homeless in shelters and managing places, but I have never seen a place like this. The peer support in this building is incredible, really amazing. And that's a lot to do with the Committee and how they allow people to be included and express themselves and to use this place in whatever way they see fit. They are just so open and generous and loving. I just feel so lucky to have landed in Lismore, and here. I just feel so lucky. Thank you so much.

I WOULD LIKE TO SAY SOMETHING ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE LIVING ON THE STREET. WITHOUT MIEKE'S HELP, THEY LET ME IN HERE, I WOULD BE STILL LIVING IN A CAR, BUT BECAUSE OF THAT I NOW HAVE A COMMISSION HOUSE AND A PLACE TO STAY. I WOULD LIKE TO THANK MIEKE AND RIDLEY AND EVERYONE ELSE WHO HAS HELPED ME OUT HERE.



**THIS PLACE HAS LIFTED ME UP SO MUCH.
THIS IS TRULY A PLACE OF HOPE.**

There's lots of people here whose life has changed for the better and it is all the work of God through this community. I have been here year in year out. At times I get fed up and take a long holiday, but I am drawn back here like a magnet ...I love the liberty and the opportunity that happens in this place, simply over a cup of coffee. The Soup Kitchen has been going for thirty years, and all the dimensions it has had over thirty years, and all the shifting and changing. It has been an exciting journey.

I HAVE BEEN COMING NINETEEN YEARS TO THE SOUP KITCHEN. WHEN I FIRST CAME I WAS FIRST VOLUNTEERING, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHEN I FIRST CAME HOW MUCH I ACTUALLY NEEDED THE SOUP KITCHEN AT THE TIME ... I JUST LOVE THIS PLACE BECAUSE YOU CAN JUST COME HERE AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUT ON A MASK. YOU CAN BE REAL HERE. THERE IS SPACE TO FEEL REAL HERE. THIS PLACE JUST MEANS SO MUCH TO ME. THANK YOU.



Mieke Bell (*right*) with volunteer Terri Selby at a celebration of ten years of Lismore Soup Kitchen operations at the Winsome Hotel, 9 October, 2019.

FAITH AND THE WINSOME HOTEL

As recounted earlier, the initial motivation for formation of the Lismore Soup Kitchen lay in one person feeling 'called by God' to take action to meet the needs of the homeless in the community. The Lismore Soup Kitchen is not in itself a faith based organisation, although many of its volunteers and current Committee members share in the Christian faith.

A church service has been operating out of the Lismore Soup Kitchen for the last 24 years. Initially, this was in the old paint warehouse known as 'Merriwa' in Union Street, Lismore.

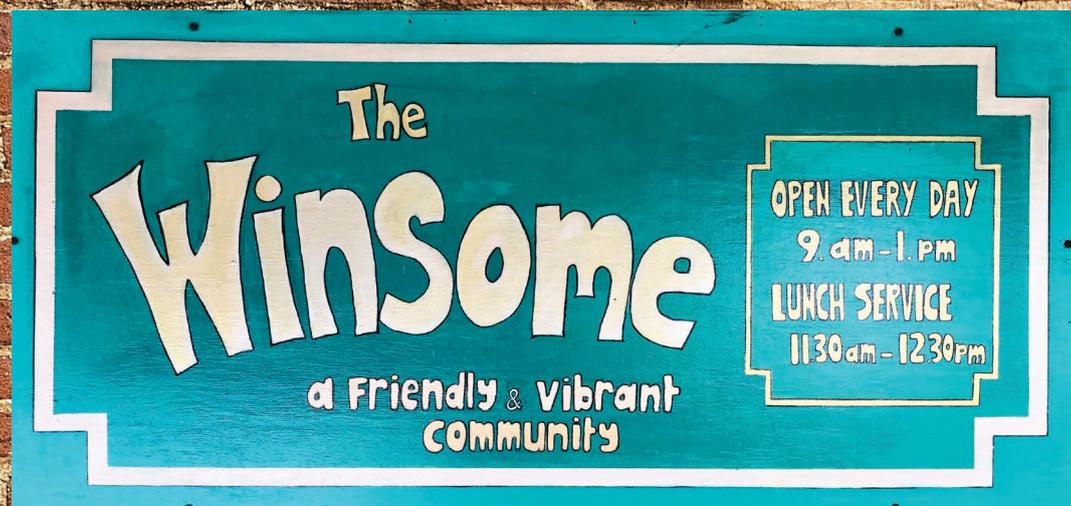
The Bells' vision extended to running a church service at the site. They knew a small group of Aboriginal Christians who attended the Uniting Church in Goonellebah, a suburb of Lismore. Their long term association with the group had grown as a result of the historical formation by the Bells of the Black Panthers Basketball Club. At one stage, the couple had coached seven teams of Aboriginal children, with all of the teams playing in the local competition. Having developed friendships with the parents of the young basketballers, the Bells visited their Church at Goonellebah one evening and invited them to run an outreach service at the Lismore Soup Kitchen at Merriwa. They did so one Sunday morning, and stayed.

They called themselves the One in Christ Fellowship and "... for quite a number of years our congregation was a great mix of indigenous and non-indigenous people and it was great. So, all of them came and stayed and we continued the church out of the Soup Kitchen" (volunteer, 22/11/2018).

Today, the services continue at the Winsome, with a dedicated core of enthusiastic members, a number of the LSK volunteers, Winsome residents and the LSK community. There is a sense of community, warmth and acceptance, and all of the community of "our people" are welcome to attend, many drifting in and through the open service.

The associate pastor of a local church, Centre Church, has been Chaplain at the Winsome Hotel since March 2018, attending the site on a regular basis on Wednesdays and Fridays each week, and as required if needed to engage with people. This formal role grew out of the fact that the Chaplain, Ian Phillips, had been connecting there for many years.

The Chaplain aims to be physically present to "engage with people and offer any support I can" (Chaplain, 23/11/2018).



Other churches in town have a history of supporting the Winsome. The Uniting Church site enables the breakfast service to operate, the Anglican Church organises the lunch on Sunday. Most churches in town respect and welcome representatives speaking about the work of the LSK and Winsome, although there is little engagement with some local churches. However, a significant number of the volunteers at the Winsome with church connections attend the service at the Winsome on Sunday.

While many of the volunteers at the Winsome hold the Christian faith, and indeed believe God has drawn them to give of their time and skills in support of the work of the Lismore Soup Kitchen, many do not. Several of those interviewed commented that, although they were not personally believers, they respected the faith of others working at the Winsome. Some reported they were not themselves Christian believers, but they choose to run the café and volunteer in the kitchen on Sunday to “give the Church people a break on that day” (volunteer, 13/5/2019).

Some regulars at the Winsome described profound healing, life-giving change and finding faith through the church at the Winsome. Many others though have experienced personal change and healing, love being part of the Winsome community, have no personal faith experience but feel all people are accepted and respected as part of the community.



SERVICE PROVISION AT THE WINSOME

The Winsome provides a range of services for its community. The services have grown over time in response to what the management committee and volunteers have learnt the community needs. Currently, in addition to the chaplain, services are provided by a doctor, psychologist, counsellor, drug and alcohol counsellor, a nurse from the Lismore Liver Clinic, a women's health nurse who runs clinics at the Winsome, a podiatrist, a social worker from St Vincent's, financial counsellor, barber and hairdresser.

Wednesday is the day when many service providers are present and available on site, either on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Appointments can be made to see the doctor and other advisers through the day manager. Some advisers simply sit in the café area, people know who they are, and they can be approached as needed to either make an appointment or for an impromptu conversation. This seems to work well for people. Available services each day are advertised on a white board near the meal servery. Certainly, the researchers observed that Wednesdays are a very busy day at the Winsome, with a real 'buzz' as additional people visit to access the services, have their hair cut or styled and simply catch up with others.

As well, Centrelink, Legal Aid, Department of Fair Trading and other services have representatives visit the site. People who attend the Winsome greatly appreciate being able to approach a representative to discuss their needs in a location where they feel comfortable. Some described having to queue in town and the impersonal office style environment there which they found uncomfortable and so alien that they were unlikely to go there. A number of those interviewed said that they primarily visit the Winsome to access the services there.

Additionally, people can obtain a laundry voucher which enables them to take washing to a local laundromat. Some described visiting the Winsome for this alone, and while there they may have a cup of coffee, socialise, and perhaps pick up some of the food which is regularly put out for collection. Local supermarkets and other food retailers, including the local farmers' market, regularly supply excess food to the Winsome. What is surplus to requirements for meal provision is date stamped and, if within safe use by dates, provided to members of the Winsome community; service users and many volunteers commented on the value of this to support their livelihood needs.

The Winsome is regularly given donations from members of the public, including clothing, bed linen and blankets, toiletries and other items. These are distributed to people on need and request. However, when stocks build up, excess items are left out for people to collect if they have a need for them. Some people commented that this had provided a very useful form of support for themselves and their families over the years.

A range of group activities are advertised, including a support group called 'Winsome 4 Women Outside', for those who may have been 'inside' or have a loved one there, Tai Chi and Yoga classes, a dance group and the Healing Voices Choir. Services offered by other organisations in town are advertised by poster at the Winsome, including support for families with members having mental illness, creative activity groups and other healing groups offered by Mission Australia, a Landcare supported program 'Feel blue, Touch green' which promotes healing through caring for land through gardening and bush regeneration, and Alcoholics Anonymous, among others.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

OPERATIONS PRIOR TO THE WINSOME PURCHASE

The Winsome Hotel was purchased by the Lismore Soup Kitchen in the 2010 financial year. Prior to this time, the organisation operated with a minimal level of income and expenditure. There have never been any paid staff, with all operations carried out by volunteers. After the purchase of Mazzer House, around a third to half of the income was derived from rent from the property. The remaining income consisted of donations and proceeds from fundraising activities. The main recurrent expense was for food.

In each year there was a small but growing income (for example, from \$1,732 in 2007 to \$4,508 in 2009) from meal "donations" – the contribution from patrons towards the meal cost. Total assets over this period were approximately \$150,000, mainly comprised of Mazzer House. By this time, the debt on Mazzer House had been repaid. So, prior to the purchase of the Winsome, the LSK was a small operation in financial terms, relying on donations and fundraising for over two thirds of its small budget.



THE WINSOME PURCHASE

The Winsome Hotel was purchased in 2010 for \$1.7M. This was financed by a bank loan from the ANZ bank for \$850,000. Federal and local government grants totalled \$300,000. In order to make up the shortfall, a volunteer couple loaned a further \$300,000, secured by a second mortgage over the Winsome. A private investor loaned an additional \$250,000, secured by a first mortgage over Mazzer House. The two private loans were placed at an interest rate of Reserve Bank of Australia Cash rate plus 3% per annum.

While these private loans were offered at a market or close to market interest rate, the level of security was such that traditional financing would not have been available to cover the shortfall left by the bank loan. For the private investors, the social impact of the Winsome purchase was a key motivator in entering the arrangement. However, despite this, the investors also viewed the investment as a commercial arrangement, not a charitable one.

As a result of the purchase, the assets of the LSK rose to over \$1.9M, with liabilities of approximately \$1.44M. Expenses now included an interest expense of over \$100,000 per annum.

In 2012, the holders of the larger private loan required repayment and so the loan was transferred to a second entity controlled by the directors of the entity holding the smaller private loan. The terms remained the same. Since the time of purchase, the two private loans have received interest only while the ANZ loan has been repaid down to \$299,000 (as of 17 February 2020). Over that time all interest and capital repayments have been met.

In addition, it is noteworthy that a number of local churches also provided some financial support towards the purchase. One commentator reported great enthusiasm by local churches about the venture, recalling that their church gave the largest single donation it had given to an organisation, an amount of \$5000. While not a significant contribution in terms of the total purchase price, this indicates local enthusiastic support of the work of the Lismore Soup Kitchen. Ownership of Mazzer House assisted to provide collateral security to support the purchase as a first mortgage for one of the private loans.

The largest expense after interest is food. Donations of food are provided by a number of local businesses including major supermarkets; these donations are determined by the availability of excess food at the businesses, not the needs of the LSK in preparing particular meals. Hence significant costs are incurred in purchasing food each day. This was \$80,000 in the most recent year. On average, 81 lunchtime meals per day were served in 2019 (to July 23).

The income and expenditure for the period 2016-2018 are summarised in the following table.



TABLE 1. LISMORE SOUP KITCHEN INCOME AND EXPENDITURE, 2016-2018

	2016	2017	2018
RENTAL INCOME (MAZZER HOUSE)	39,771	31,555	17,298*
RENTAL INCOME (WINSOME)	112,451	108,917	110,067
DONATIONS AND FUNDRAISING	166,894	256,438	167,810
OTHER INCOME**	22,769	42,632	36,400
INTEREST EXPENSE	78,456	71,546	65,799
OTHER EXPENSES	207,849	235,647	207,588
SURPLUS	55,759	132,348	58,187

* Mazzer House income reduced in 2018 due to changed council regulations regarding occupancy levels.

** Other income includes café revenue and meal donations which remain relatively insignificant.

*** Surpluses, largely from donations, are used to pay down capital loans, maintenance, or for new initiatives.

OPERATIONAL AND FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

Following the Winsome purchase, the scale of the operations increased significantly. Rental income from the Winsome itself has averaged just over \$100,000 p.a. (rents have not changed since the purchase and so the income reflects only occupancy changes). Initially, combined rental income from the two properties covered interest 1.15 times but, after 2012, rental income from the Winsome alone covered the interest expense.

By 2018, the interest expense fell to 60% of Winsome rental income.

Adding repairs and maintenance to interest brings property related costs close to, but still under, the Winsome rental income each year. In interview, residents of the Winsome suggested that rental amounts at the Winsome and Mazzer House could be increased slightly to increase income, without sacrificing affordability for residents.

Viewed this way, the ongoing costs of purchase are able to be financed purely from generated income, although little is left from the rental income for capital repayment. Therefore, aside from capital repayment considerations, the sustainability of the operations of the LSK remained similar pre-and-post purchase of the Winsome, despite the significant growth in scale.

From 2015 onwards, a café has operated out of the Winsome bar and this has generated additional income, reaching \$16,000 in 2018.

Since 2011, earned income has averaged 99% of operational expenses (including repairs and maintenance). Excluding all property related expenses, this average rises to 116%.

What these numbers demonstrate is that, without financing costs and capital loan repayments, the Winsome is very close to financial sustainability without the need for donations, grants or fundraising. Significant financial donations over recent years have, however, allowed for rapid repayment of the ANZ loan. With continued donations and pay out of the loans, the Winsome could achieve ongoing financial sustainability. There would also be capacity for the Winsome to attract grant income to cover special projects, new initiatives, and some recurrent costs.

As described elsewhere, the Winsome is staffed solely by volunteers. A conservative estimate of the value of the rostered kitchen, café and day manager volunteers is provided in the following table.

TABLE 2. DAILY COST OF VOLUNTEER TIME, LISMORE SOUP KITCHEN

	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS	HOURS ROSTERED ON EACH DAY	HOURLY RATE*	NOTIONAL DAILY COST
KITCHEN	6	5	\$19.49	\$585
CAFÉ	1	5	\$19.49	\$97
DAY MANAGERS	2	4	\$19.49	\$156
TOTAL				\$838

* minimum hourly rate for hospitality staff, no casual loading.

This excludes the volunteer hours spent on management, night management and committee duties. While this heavy reliance on volunteers and the high notional cost may seemingly detract from the sustainability, the voluntary nature of the staffing and the consequent seamlessness between staff and users of the services is a key factor in the effectiveness of the Lismore Soup Kitchen. Future sustainability will depend, in part, on the continuing goodwill and commitment of many volunteers, otherwise paid management would be required. Current volunteers seem determined to ensure the work of the LSK and Winsome continues.



SAVINGS IN COSTS TO THE COMMUNITY

As described above, residents and other users of the Winsome have diverse backgrounds. Certainly, some are on parole or otherwise exiting the criminal justice system. Others find the Winsome an alternative to hazardous living arrangements. At the Winsome, people are able to access medical, legal and social security services that otherwise they might not access. For people in all of these categories and others, the services provided by the LSK potentially result in large savings to both the public finances of the state as well as the local community in general. Unfortunately, it proved difficult for the researchers to access reliable data to establish the impact on local crime, recidivism, health emergencies or emergency accommodation needs. However, for context, in 2013-14, according to the Productivity Commission, it cost \$292 per day to keep a prisoner in Australian gaols (<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/how-much-does-it-cost-to-keep-people-in-australian-jails>). In Victoria, the cost of homelessness has been estimated at over \$25,000 per year per person including health crime costs (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-16/cheaper-to-provide-homes-for-homeless-rather-sleep-rough/8354284>).

So, while the researchers have not been able to collect direct data, it is reasonable to assume that the operations of the LSK save the combined levels of government somewhere between \$0.5M and \$5M per year, at no cost to any level of government. Additionally, it is of course impossible to quantify financially the enormous benefit the Winsome brings to the people who belong there – the benefits of social inclusion, friendship, a sense of belonging, quite apart from the quantifiable meals provided or numbers of people accommodated there.



GOVERNANCE

The Lismore Soup Kitchen is structured as an incorporated Association in NSW. As such, it has a management committee in accordance with its constitution. To date, this committee has been elected by members and is essentially a hands on working committee, actively managing the operations of the LSK.

For many of those interviewed, however, the relative informality of the operations of the Winsome are what makes it work well. That is not to suggest that daily operations don't follow clearly understood procedures which work – rather, that informality allows flexibility and responsiveness to needs as they arise, particularly allowing staff to discuss and respond to individual needs of members of its community, rather than responding on the basis of application of rigid rules. It will be important to maintain a balance between focus on governance and policies and ensuring that the ability to respond in a caring, flexible manner is not diminished by any future change.

'OUR PEOPLE' – SERVICE USERS

Vignettes in the text boxes included here are used with permission from those whose lives they represent. Although each individual's life circumstances are unique, those described here are representative of the many stories shared with the researchers, which recounted commonalities in circumstances. The vast majority describe one or more of histories of childhood disadvantage, abuse, subsequent addiction issues, physical or mental health challenges, accidents leading to disability, family breakdown, or inability to make ends meet on benefits available to them in the face of sustained unemployment. The majority describe periods of homelessness or 'sleeping rough' or living in very poor quality housing (boarding houses or rough shared accommodation).

Findings from the survey of residents, aggregated from 69 responses, are presented in the following pages.



AGE AND GENDER

Of 69 survey respondents who used the services of the Lismore Hotel or Winsome Soup Kitchen, 47 were men, the remainder women; one identified as both male and 'other'.

The age distribution of service users was skewed towards the older age groups, with the majority, 85.5 percent being over fifty years of age. Over a third of the people, 27 of the total respondents were over 65.

Fewer younger people responded to the survey, with only one under 20, one in the 21-30 age group, and twelve in the 31-40 age group. One person was unsure of their age, and ticked both 31-40 and 41-50 year old age categories. There are observably fewer younger people attending the site each day. In general conversations with people, some observed there were more older people because of difficulties obtaining employment as people age. One commented "once you are over 45, it is just impossible to get work in this town". Another commented "the young people all go over to Byron and hang out there, or at the Gold Coast". (focus group, 23/7/2019).

Volunteers suggested that, at times, there were more younger people seeking services at the Winsome and resident there and that this varies over time.

The indigenous population in Lismore is at 5% compared to the national 2.9%. Observably, a number of indigenous people use services at the Winsome.

FREQUENCY

The largest number of services users, just over a third (24 of 69 respondents), joined in some sort of activity at the Winsome Hotel daily. A third of respondents, 23, attended more than once per week. Ten others used services at the Winsome at least once per week. Only a very few respondents, 7, visited on average once or less than once per month. Four others would visit less than weekly but more often than once per month. Some of these identified that they come to collect vouchers to do their washing, or to visit the doctor or another service when available, usually on a Wednesday. Three respondents commented 'I live here'. Another wrote 'I walk past and get drawn in occasionally'.

SERVICE USE

The vast majority of people, 59 of 69 respondents, enjoyed a cooked meal at the Winsome each day. Just over a third of respondents also collected take away food in the form of sandwiches or left over food. Local suppliers, such as stall holders from the organic markets held in Lismore, bring left over food to donate. Food beyond what is used in meal preparation is left for people to take home.

JEROME

Jerome comes to the Winsome every day. Jerome described having gone to the Lismore Soup Kitchen when it was in the old green building which burnt down a long time ago, then he went to the sheds in Union Street. Jerome is a person who faces both physical and intellectual challenges. When asked how coming to the Winsome made him feel, he said "Happy. There are good people. I have friends here". Accommodation was organised for Jerome in a Boarding House, but he left there. Jerome often sleeps at the Railway Station.

FELICITY

Felicity described coming to the LSK since it was in the old sheds at Union Street. She said, "I love, love, just love this place. It has been a life saver for me. I have come here since my son was 4 and he is 21 now. I come here every day". Felicity comes for the social life and for meals, along with her partner. She would not survive without the LSK. It has supported her and her family "We are a community and everyone is treated the same. No matter what you have done or are, you are just accepted here. They helped me find accommodation. Someone from here did up my flat. I still have no idea who it was. They even provided the teaspoons and everything."

The social life afforded by time spent at the Winsome Hotel was very important to the people, with 39 of 60 indicating that they spent time socialising there. The high importance attached to being part of the Winsome community and the connections and social life that provides for people were reflected in many qualitative comments, including:

Gives me a reason to go out.

Being part of something, something or someone.

Enjoy others company.

Lifts me up when I am down, gives me somewhere to go.

Helps a lonely person (me), gives me a day out.

A place to go and mix with others without condition.

Multiple comments referred to the Winsome as affording opportunity to make good friends, socialise and belong to a caring community. As one focus group participant stated: “Being here is like being in some weird kind of trust bubble” (resident, 23/7/2019).

Just over a third of survey respondents made appointments to visit the doctor who attends the Winsome each Wednesday. Many commented on the value of being able to visit the doctor there. The Winsome also runs a liver clinic, and services are provided by a counsellor and a psychologist. Ten, or nearly 15 per cent of respondents, used the services of the counsellor. One Winsome resident commented that he had gone to doctors for years with a problem and never been treated with respect and had not been able to get the problem resolved, and: “it is a reflection of the quality of the people who volunteer at the Winsome that once I visited the doctor here, my problem was sorted out almost straight away”. (resident, 23/7/2019).

Four respondents indicated that they participated in the choir, 9 respondents said they enjoyed the guitar playing and singing which occurs on Wednesdays and Fridays. Ten percent of respondents said that they attend the Sunday church services, and 9 respondents (13 percent) indicated that talking to the Chaplain on his Wednesday and Friday visits was important to them.

Twenty respondents nominated a range of other activities in which they like to engage. These included the use of other services such as visiting the representatives from Centrelink and the Department of Housing who attend the site on Wednesdays, pottery, listening to music, collecting a voucher to do washing, washing the dishes, tree planting, playing the piano, chess and a number said they simply came to enjoy a cup of coffee. One respondent indicated that they both used services and also teach yoga and tai chi on Tuesdays. Others simply said that they just like to ‘hang out’ at the Winsome, which again reflects the social importance offered by the Hotel.

BARRY

Barry, now in his 80s, said “I never expected to need to come to a place like this. I had everything before. Now I have nothing and nobody”. He visits the Winsome every day. His son had become a heroin addict, lived at the back of his home and caused problems. His daughter came to help, but also became involved with drugs. The stress of it all led to family breakdown and his wife left. As a result he had to sell his house. Although he had some limited savings after sale of his home, which helped, he could not afford to buy a new home or rent and has had health and mobility problems. He lives in accommodation belonging to the Roman Catholic Church and visits the Winsome most days for a hot meal and to collect food and for socialising. He enjoys the Church services. “Everyone can come here”, he said. “We are all community and everyone is welcome and respected, no matter who you are, or your background”.



The image shows the interior of a café. In the foreground, there is a table covered with a light-colored, textured cloth and a vase of white and yellow flowers. In the middle ground, another table with a red and white striped tablecloth is surrounded by white plastic chairs. A blue bag is on the chair. In the background, there is a bar area with a stone wall, a counter, and a sign that says "STOP NO ENTRY". A ceiling light fixture with a floral pattern is visible. The floor is made of wooden planks.

People were asked how long they stayed at the Winsome Hotel on each occasion they visited there. One hour was the most frequent response, with 23 per cent of people nominating this as their usual visit time. Only a very few, four people, said they generally stay for less than an hour, with nominated times of 10 minutes, half an hour, forty minutes and three quarters of an hour given.

The longer time spent by most reflects the high importance placed on the social life the Winsome Hotel facilitates. Four people indicated they spent up to two hours, and six people said they spend either two or two to three hours per visit at the Winsome. Twelve people said they spend over three hours, with two of these nominating up to five hours, at the Winsome. Two respondents said they stay until it closes and another commented 'as much time as I can'.

The Winsome Hotel Café



LEARNING ABOUT THE WINSOME

Nearly half of respondents who use services at the Winsome heard about the Hotel or Lismore Soup Kitchen through friends. Fifteen, or nearly 22 per cent, learnt of the opportunities there from other people who use the services or from residents at the Hotel. Only ten per cent of respondents were informed about the Winsome and the services offered there through other community organisations, and two respondents indicated they learnt about them through a church. Seventeen, or nearly 25 per cent of respondents learnt of the Winsome by other means, which included by walking past (five respondents), through local newspapers (two respondents), being taken there for a 'lunch date', being told of it by a social worker or mental health worker, through a friend who is a volunteer or through living close by. One had formerly resided at the Winsome Hotel in the early 1980s when it was a hotel.

Of the 69 survey respondents, the vast majority (61) indicated that they would invite others along to the Winsome. Only three said they would not. Some answered yes and no, with one commenting that it would depend on the person and the nature of their needs as to whether they suggested coming to the Winsome or not.

Above: The Healing Voices Choir performing at the Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the LSK at the Winsome.

RELATIONSHIPS AT THE WINSOME

Two thirds of survey respondents indicated that they enjoyed chatting casually with other service users while at the Winsome Hotel.

Just over a third of respondents said that they had established good friendships there. Nineteen people, representing 27.5 per cent of total responses to this question, engage deeply with others when at the Winsome. Only one person commented that 'people do not talk to me' and ten others said that they had little interaction with others while at the Winsome. Three people indicated that they did not feel safe at the Winsome. Some possible reasons for this were recorded, including that some find 'residents difficult', 'some people threatening', and 'there are drug dealers and dangerous threats'. One claimed that 'other volunteers and staff don't like me'.

This statement is at odds though with the findings of the focus groups and interviews where comments about all being treated equally, the culture of respect and the importance of community were emphasised.



The Winsome - outdoor living room

Other comments included: 'I don't know why women can't stay here', and 'staff members ask me to leave because my 21 month old child squeals'.

Fifty of the respondents (72.5 per cent) said that they enjoyed chatting with the volunteer workers while they are at the Winsome. Only one commented that staff and volunteers do not engage with them.

No-one indicated that they preferred not to engage at all with the staff and volunteers. Nine commented that they only engage to the extent that they need to, while 14 respondents, representing 20 per cent of responses, indicated that they would like to engage more with the staff and volunteers.

When asked if they would refer others to the Winsome, 61 of the 64 who responded to this question replied in the affirmative. Only three said no, but did not provide reasons. One commented that it would depend on the needs of the person as to whether they encouraged them to go to the Winsome.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WINSOME

There is no doubt that the Winsome plays a vital role in the lives of many of those who visit there. Exactly one third of survey respondents indicated that they would not survive without the Winsome. As one wrote: 'Can't afford rent and groceries so Winsome helps greatly, nowhere to live, it is a hot meal each day – thank you'. Almost a half of respondents (33 of 69) said that the social contact that the Winsome provides is very important to them. Of the total respondents, only 14 (20 per cent) said that they would survive OK without the Winsome. Fifteen respondents (22 per cent) said their family benefitted from the services provided by the LSK. Thirty respondents (43.5 per cent) said they feel safe at the Winsome; only 14 (20 per cent) said they leave as soon as they can.

LIVING CIRCUMSTANCES

Of the 69 survey respondents, only eight own their own home and 22, nearly a third of respondents, said they were renting a flat or bed sitter. Nine lived in shared accommodation and five with relatives. Nineteen (27.5 per cent) could be described as 'sleeping rough', recording that they slept in a van or car (eight persons), slept wherever they could (seven) or were camping (four). Eight others said their living circumstances were 'other' and of these, two indicated that they lived at the Winsome Hotel. One though recorded that they were 'homeless', another shared a room with their children in shared accommodation, and another a room with their children and mother in a boarding house; one lived in a caravan, another lived in a homeless shelter and another said they lived 'wherever I am'. Given this, at least a third of respondents could be regarded as homeless or sleeping rough.

NERIDA

With professional parents, Nerida left home early. She described a life of drug addiction, poverty and living on what she called the "dark side". Nerida tried drinking and smoking in primary school, later wagging high school in Lismore and drinking and smoking more regularly. She did well at School, despite wagging, and was accepted into University. It was there she tried drugs. After dropping out of University, she lived on the streets and in squats in Brisbane, where she was drawn into heroin use. She returned to Lismore to 'detox' and used to visit the LSK to obtain meals when it was in the old sheds in Union Street. She wouldn't have survived without it then. She is now a recovered drug addict. She did not come to the place for a decade as there were "triggers" associated with her old life, people who used or have used drugs. She could see them everywhere and didn't want to slide back into the old life. She completed tertiary studies and is now committed to engaging in projects which have environmental and social benefits for the community and are healing for people. She doesn't mind if she doesn't earn much, as she is resilient and would rather be doing something to "give back" with her time and living simply. Things and money don't buy happiness she said.



People using the services of the Winsome primarily lived nearby, with 18 (26 per cent) indicating they lived close by, a further 16 (21 per cent) recording that they lived in town, and nineteen (27.5 per cent) within 5-10 kilometres of the Hotel. It is interesting to note that a number of respondents travel from another town, with 12 (17.4 per cent) from out of town. Of these, one indicated travelling from Grafton, one from Casino, a couple from Ballina, two from Nimbin and two from Goonellabah, a suburb of Lismore.

Through interviews it became apparent that for many service users itinerancy has been a lived reality, with many drifting 'all over', 'across Australia'. One described himself as "the person you used to see wrapped up in a dressing gown, sleeping in the gutter in Kings Cross" (6/12/2019). Others indicated a current travel beat which involved towns from Grafton to the Tweed. Some commented that they knew where they could obtain meals in each place, but it was less easy to do so in towns other than Lismore.

For some, frequent relocation related to accessing work, for others from feeling unsettled and 'seeking', for others it is about maintaining anonymity. Some had move from Melbourne to escape the cold. Several said they liked the freedom of being able to move on as they choose – some living in vans described going to Evans Head to "catch a fish and have a swim and shower" when it was hot, for example. Others migrate to the Tweed Coast or further north in the winter to chase the warmth. As one local character recorded in verse:

VAGABOND MIND

*I've travelled life's mystic highways all through my youth,
And times when I head home and friends, who thought of me,
But some are dead and some are far across the sea
And still it's a roamer's life for me.*

*So I want no post to guide me – and need no friend to lean on
But with a smile I'll roam from place to place
Will ply my trade in sun or shade and whatever comes;
It's all in my vagabond mind.*

*Rem'bering certain lips I have kissed
I envy nobody as my needs are small
Caring not for the things I have missed
I'll let them pass with a careless laugh
Because there's few so free as I.*

David Sol R.I.P

LISA

The daughter of drug addicts, Lisa became alienated from her family early in life and has no family support. She moved to Melbourne. Her life has involved prostitution, drug addiction, alcohol and cigarettes. She hasn't smoked dope for some time and is now 'clean'. She has rental accommodation organised under the NDIS scheme. She is able to drive and has a car. She no longer works. The LSK provides her with social contact and food. She visits a doctor in town who does not charge her. She started to see that doctor when the doctor used to volunteer at the Winsome. She also uses the psychologist and hairdresser at the Winsome. Lisa struggles with health issues. Her child was removed from her care when he was young and she was rarely able to see him. She is alone in life. She has bad dreams that she will "end up having to camp on the riverbank. That is the lowest of the low". She has acquired a number of qualifications at TAFE and talks of completing studies in community services when she is well and being able to give back and help others.



USE OF OTHER SERVICES

Survey respondents were asked to indicate if they used services additional to the LSK and Winsome. For most, 42 people (nearly 61 per cent of respondents), the LSK and Winsome provided for their needs and no other services were accessed. Fifteen respondents indicated that they use other services. Four indicated they use the Red Dove for breakfast, tea or coffee, five accessed meals provided by the Five Loaves (Seventh Day Adventist), three St. Vincent's, and some of the travellers referred to using services provided by Liberation Larder in Byron Bay, Super Star in Grafton and the Kyogle Food Pantry. Other services mentioned once each included the Community Gateway Centre, Community Pantry, Neighbourhood Centre Pantry, the Women's Resource Centre, Life Line, Mental Health and Southern Cross University, the latter possibly referring to services provided by the SCU Health Clinic, or provision of emergency accommodation during a major flood in 2017.

IMPACTING LIVES

A qualitative question asked survey respondents to describe how the Lismore Soup Kitchen and Winsome Hotel had impacted their lives. Of a total of 49 written comments, 22 made reference to food, including:

*A meal is always there even if you can't give a penny.
Using the library, free vegies and fruit and take aways.*

*Being able to eat a healthy meal every day.
Without I would struggle to be able to cook such meals
and has helped financially.*

Gives me a hot meal when I have nothing else.

Not able to survive buying food without the Winsome.

*Very grateful for the beautiful food.
We are very lucky to have the Winsome helping
people who are less fortunate.*



A further 21 written comments related to the social importance associated with visiting the Winsome, revealing that social connection, belonging to a caring community, is as important to people as being able to access food. For example, the Winsome enables:

Communicating and caring and listening and watching

I care for worse off than me! And to see the improvement of some. The Winsome has done good to them.

It is a good meeting place. Have made friends and staff are very helpful.

Brought me courage and friends and fun.

A safe and respectful and inclusive place to connect.

Interestingly, as the section below about volunteers reveals, it is often difficult to distinguish between those who could be described as service users and service providers (volunteers). Many volunteers have either used the services provided by the Lismore Soup Kitchen and Winsome previously, or use them some days in the week and give back by volunteering on other days. Concern to care for others within the community was expressed by volunteers, and also by those who reside at the Winsome or use its services. People see themselves as part of the Winsome community, whether they are volunteers or visit to access food, companionship, or other services; as part of the community, they see themselves as having a role to give back and care for others, thus:

Opportunity to work/volunteer, get out of the house, socialise, make friends, get meals and help others spiritually, through their kindness and generosity they have been community.

Playing music, entertaining and supporting others, sharing my experiences, strengths and skills.

A number of respondents referred also to the spiritual impact of the Winsome, with one commenting:

*I found Jesus for the first real time in my life here.
I found real love for me here.*



Music corner

Other comments related to thankfulness for the support provided by the Winsome in assisting them to access housing, or in provision of a room (presumably residents at the Winsome), the provision of blankets and food, provision of employment and opportunity to access a doctor and other services at the Winsome. For a number, the Winsome has been life saving and life changing, with one commenting 'It has given me life' and another, 'Kept me alive'.

Survey respondents were asked how they would describe the Winsome to others. Responses were overwhelmingly positive. Superlatives used included excellent (4 comments), very good (7 comments), great (2 comments), awesome, magnificent, brilliant, amazing, caring, very helpful, valuable, a true blessing, great service to people in need, good, good stuff. A range of comments focussed on the qualities of the volunteers, including:

Very charitable, helpful and kind

Great people

Willing volunteers committed to helping anyone and therefore the community, in many various ways

Tiredless (sic) volunteers who give their all to the Winsome

They are very friendly and supportive of our family's needs and they try and support us in any way they can

Invaluable and saves community and government organisations money

All voluntary and done with a smile. The workers like to see you there every day. The work is always done and finished. Unreal!

Very dedicated

Very courteous and helpful.

Respectful, helpful, very charitable.

Great. All the ladies are really nice and handle fights or domestics really well.

MARK

Mark spent time inside, convicted of a violent crime. He was subsequently released after the conviction was proved to be wrongful. He is a long term resident at the Winsome and had previously lived at Mazzer House. A Christian, Mark likes to talk to and help people who come to the Winsome in any way he can. At one stage he lived in a local boarding house; he described it as a filthy, dirty dive, with cracked windows, \$186 for a room for a week with a shared bathroom, and that it was a hangout for dealers and pimps. He didn't want to live there.

He is concerned that dealers pass by each day and try to sell to the people who use the LSK. He totally avoids drugs, alcohol and cigarettes. He grew up rough and was assaulted as a small child. Living at the Winsome allowed him to save money and buy a car. He likes to use his car to assist others 'without wheels'. Of Koori heritage, Mark said he had no living family members at all, at least one having passed on as a result of ice addiction.



RESIDENTS AT THE WINSOME

Over time, by the end of 2019, the Winsome Hotel had offered accommodation to 164 persons; it currently accommodates 18 men upstairs. Historically, both men and women were able to access accommodation there. However tensions related to mixed accommodation ensued, so only men have been accommodated at the site for some time.

Some of the women complained that they see this as unfair and that women should have equal access to accommodation, which is in short supply in town. However, the Winsome is limited to its current site and in funding and can't on its own provide for all.

Since 2009, records have been kept related to length of stay of residents at the Winsome; length of stays have varied greatly, with the average at 215 days, or 30.7 weeks. The shortest stays were for 5 and 7 days. Some residents have stayed for up to three years. Reasons for their leaving are recorded. It is clear that for many the Winsome offers emergency accommodation during a time of need; records indicate they have moved out to join a family member, to follow seasonal work, or to join a partner. Some, with support, have been able to access housing and moved on. Some moved to other towns or interstate, often to join family. A very few were evicted for drug use, reflecting the Winsome's no drug tolerance stance, or for misbehaviour, or left for breaking parole conditions. For many, their destination is unknown. Sadly, some passed away while living there. The passing of members of the community is marked with an on-site memorial service.



TONY

One resident at the Winsome, Tony, was keen to tell his story so people would understand that “most people are just two pay cheques away from homelessness”. He said: “There is a lot of misinformation around about the homeless. Many are like me and slipped into it through a series of life circumstances beyond their control.” Earlier in life, Tony “had it all”, with a good job, a family and a home. Unfortunately, a motorcycle accident, resulting inability to work, then subsequent family breakdown, led to the need to seek accommodation. The Winsome has become home. Being at the Winsome gives him purpose. It gives him somewhere to be each day and something to do each day. Sometimes he feels uneasy about taking up a room which he feels should be for more troubled people, however he finds it impossible to survive on benefits elsewhere. He takes the view that he can give back and help others at the Winsome, for “social inclusion is vital. That is what it is all about here, to make people who are dysfunctional or in need to feel welcome and included”. Tony enjoys reading and is a political activist, engaging in a range of community organisations.



THE VOLUNTEERS

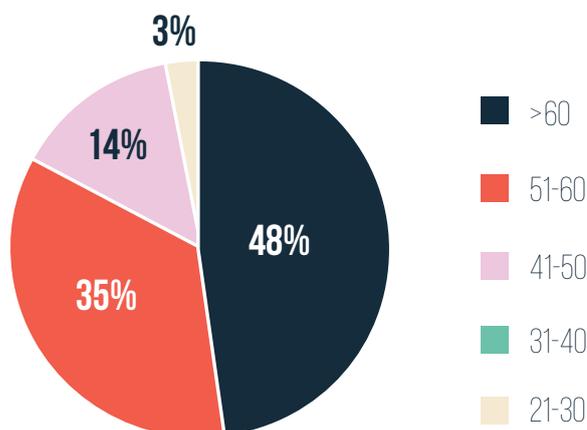
Those who volunteer to ensure the success of the Lismore Soup Kitchen and Winsome Hotel are a diverse group, with a range of socio economic backgrounds, levels of education and skill sets represented among the volunteers. Some are retired professionals, some had successful careers in academia, or worked at senior levels in public service roles, and, recognising the privileges they have enjoyed in life, are happy to contribute time to this vital service.

There are many who say it is their turn to 'give back' because they have themselves experienced a 'rough patch' in life and either used some of the services offered through the LSK and Winsome, or have used similar services elsewhere. For example, one described having been "down and out" herself, joining narcotics anonymous 33 years ago, and wanting to "give back" to assist, given that services had supported her in tough times and "given her life" (volunteer, 13/5/2019). Some of the Winsome family are simultaneously service users and volunteers. It became apparent through the responses to both surveys, and in interview discussions, that the Winsome provides a safety net in terms of provision for people experiencing multiple forms of social and economic disadvantage, sometimes complicated by health issues, while also often providing those same people with a vocation.

AGE AND GENDER OF VOLUNTEERS

Of thirty volunteers surveyed, 52% were women, 45% male and 3%, or one person, identified as 'other'. The age distribution of the volunteers is skewed towards an older age group, with nearly half of survey respondents over 60 years of age, reflecting the fact that those who are retired are most likely to have time to give. One of the volunteers interviewed is 76. Those in the 51-60 year old cohort provide 35% of volunteers, with a smaller percentage, 14% in the 41-50 year age group and only one respondent aged between 21 and 30 years.

AGE OF VOLUNTEERS



DEREK

Derek volunteers in the kitchen at the Winsome. He started to do so when his wife, who was formerly a volunteer there, went back to work five years ago now. He stepped into her role, and volunteers once each week, helping with food preparation, chopping up vegetables and doing any heavier work he can around the place. He doesn't particularly engage with the clients there as he feels that others are better at interacting with them than he is. He feels that others know the regulars there and that he is better filling his role at the sink. However, he has got to know one or two he described as 'characters' at a deeper level and enjoys learning about their lives. Derek commented it is mainly men there 'getting a feed' and many have mental health issues or drug related problems. Derek said there are many beautiful women volunteers at the Winsome and believes it is good for decent, healthy and respectful men to be working as volunteers and treating women with respect, providing a positive role model. The training at the Winsome in food hygiene and cleaning has better equipped Derek to help at home. He thinks the Winsome is a great place and that it is 'beautiful' to be part of the organisation to give back to the community in some small way.

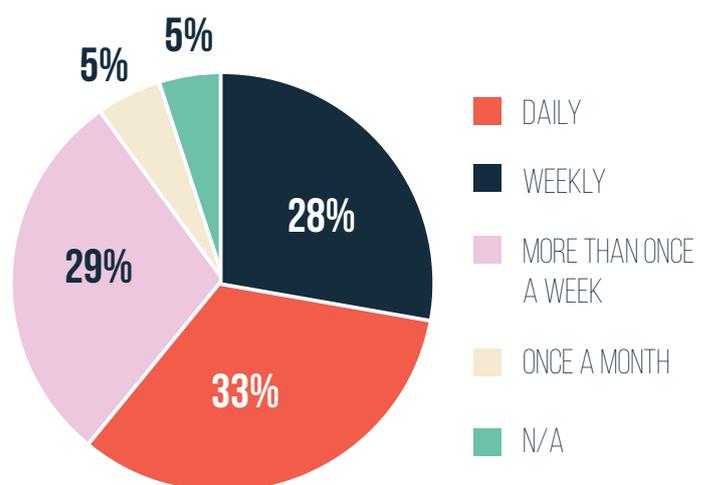
TERRI LEANNE

Leanne volunteers at the Winsome a day each week, working with a friend in the kitchen. Increasingly, she pops by and spends time just being there, feeling her very presence assists others. She thinks she has a niche at the Winsome and that her role extends far beyond service in the kitchen. Leanne had a troubled past, a life of alcohol, drug addiction and associated crime, and spent eight years in goal. She visited the Winsome for the occasional meal, back when it was a hotel. When it became the Lismore Soup Kitchen she stumbled in, skinny and hungry, and “they fed me and were kind to me”. She can’t recall how often; that part of life is a blur. After multiple suicide attempts and years of substance abuse, weighing only 60 kg, Leanne’s body was shutting down. Leanne suddenly realised “if I took another sip or puff, I would not survive”. She started to attend AA, encouraged to by her sister. She was challenged to seek the support

of a higher power at AA, and one day felt moved to walk into the Winsome Church service, where she found faith as a Christian. Dry for 18 months, Leanne feels empowered and has regained physical, emotional and spiritual strength. She is taking steps to bring to justice someone who abused her in the past, robbing her of a life she can never know. Leanne feels she makes an important contribution to others because “I get where people are at. They trust me and I trust them. They know me and my past and they can see that change is possible”. The people at the Winsome made her feel comfortable to express her views and gave her love and acceptance. The LSK provided a lifeline and Leanne has “more today, beyond my wildest dreams ... I was absolutely lost. I was gone. Everything in me had to be challenged and needed radical change. It will take me to the rest of my life to give back, to be square with the world and my God”.

FREQUENCY OF VOLUNTEER WORK

Volunteers were asked to indicate how often they performed their voluntary duties at the Winsome. For most, the contribution was at least weekly or more often, with 28 per cent indicating they assisted on a weekly basis, 29 per cent more than once a week, and 33 per cent assisting on a daily basis. Thus, the volunteers are a highly dedicated group of people, prepared to commit themselves to regular voluntary work serving others. Some travelled from other towns, such as Tabulam or Byron Bay, to work at the Winsome for a day.

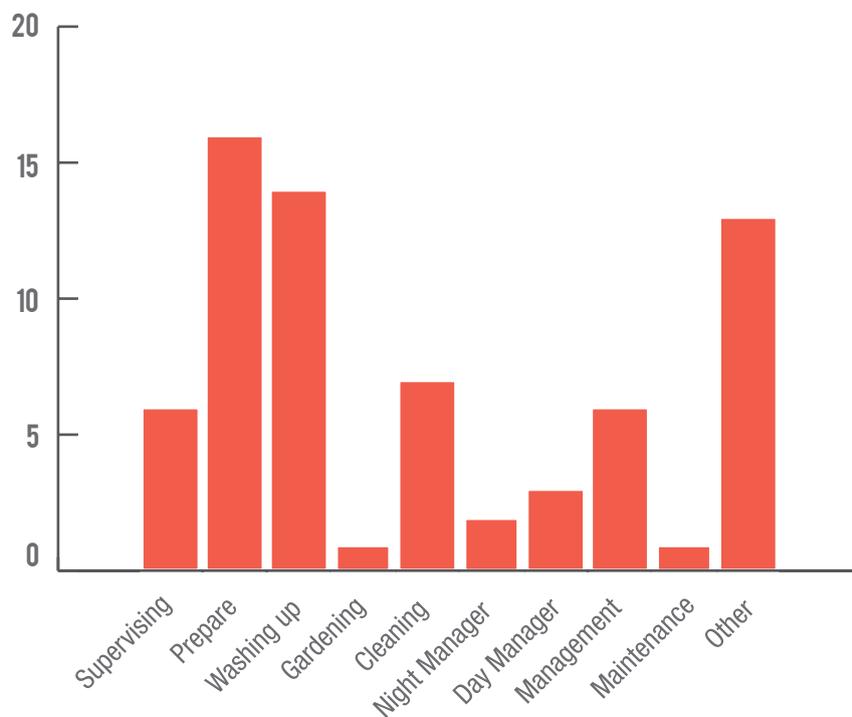


VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY AT THE WINSOME

The volunteers engage in a range of activities, the most common of which, perhaps unsurprisingly, involves preparation and cooking of food. Just over half of the volunteer survey respondents were engaged in this activity. Washing up, again related to the major function of the Lismore Soup Kitchen, also featured highly amongst responses, with nearly half of volunteers indicating they spent time washing up. Eight people indicated they were involved in supervising meal preparation. The cooks rostered on assess the donated food available, decide what will be made for the day, and, if necessary, purchase extra provisions for both the daily hot meal and for sandwich fillings.

An additional group of about 24 volunteers, organised on a roster through the Anglican Church in Lismore, work to prepare cooked meals for Sunday at the Winsome, thus providing a day off for the regular cooks. Three people are rostered on to cook each week, collecting a 2 kg bag of frozen sausages from the home of a local clergyperson, and then cooking this into a dish which is delivered to the Winsome for heating for the lunch time meal on Sunday.

ACTIVITY OF VOLUNTEERS



VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY

Management of staff and activities was the activity engaged in by five volunteers, two of whom worked as night managers, and three of whom acted as day managers. Six other persons were involved in 'management support'. Vital roles at the Winsome are those of the site manager, day and night managers and the volunteer coordinator. The latter plays an active role in training volunteers to work in the kitchen or in the café and ensuring health and safety standards are adhered to.

Day managers oversee daily operations, ensuring smooth management, and are sometimes called upon to mediate or calm down tensions if they arise. Although rare, many interviewees reported infrequent incidents of raised voices, often involving people suffering the effects of substance use, or some suffering mental health issues. Usually the day manager works to calm any disputes as they arise. On occasion, the police attend. Some longer term residents or volunteers say such incidents have become fewer over time. For one day manager of over six years:

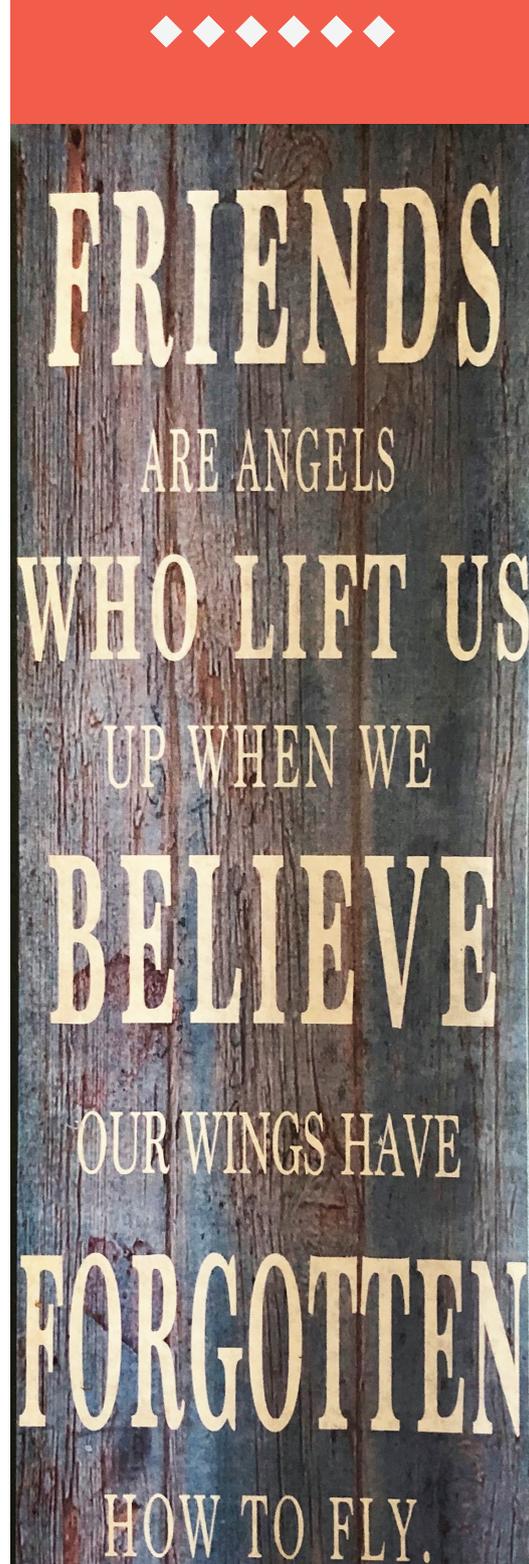
I love it. You are learning every time you work. I am still getting better at it. You never know who will come through the door and what you'll have to deal with. Sometimes there are fights, sometimes a drug overdose to deal with, sometimes there is little to deal with and you can just sit around having coffee and chatting to people. (volunteer, 4/2/2019)

The 7 or 8 day managers have regular meetings, discussing service users to attempt to ensure continuity and consistency of care.

Night managers stay at the Winsome, to ensure the safety and security of residents, by locking the premises at night time and being on site to address any issues as they arise.

Seven of the thirty survey respondents were involved in cleaning of the premises and one engages in gardening at the site. Thirteen people indicated participation in 'other' activities, often additional to others already identified. The other activities listed included: working as a student chaplain, assisting the medical team with transport, musician, chaplain, 'connector', shopping, running a dance session, 'pick ups' (presumably collecting and bringing to the Winsome people who do not have the means to travel to the site) and two said they engaged in voluntary work as a barista.

Volunteers were most commonly introduced to the work at the Winsome Hotel by friends, with 12 per cent of respondents introduced to the Winsome through their church, and ten percent through other community organisations. Nearly half of respondents heard of the Winsome and Lismore Soup Kitchen through 'other' means and listed these as: through the internet, working with the homeless who told them of the Winsome, through reading a newspaper article, through Centrelink requiring some community work, through the Kairos prison ministry, and a number said they had first visited because they were at that time themselves hungry or homeless and later decided to volunteer to support others with similar needs.

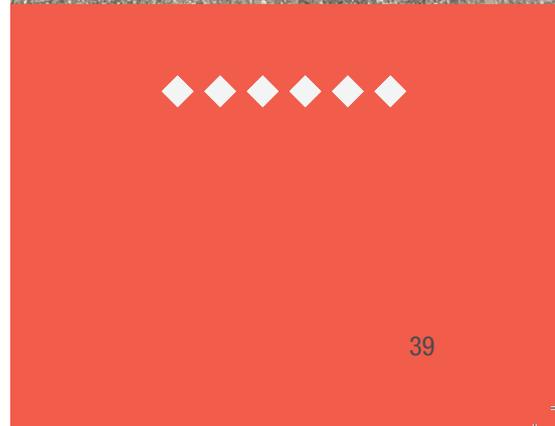
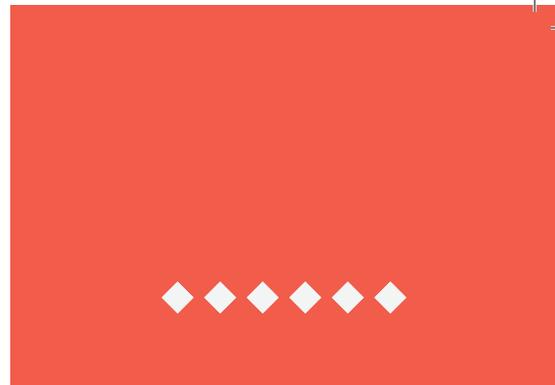
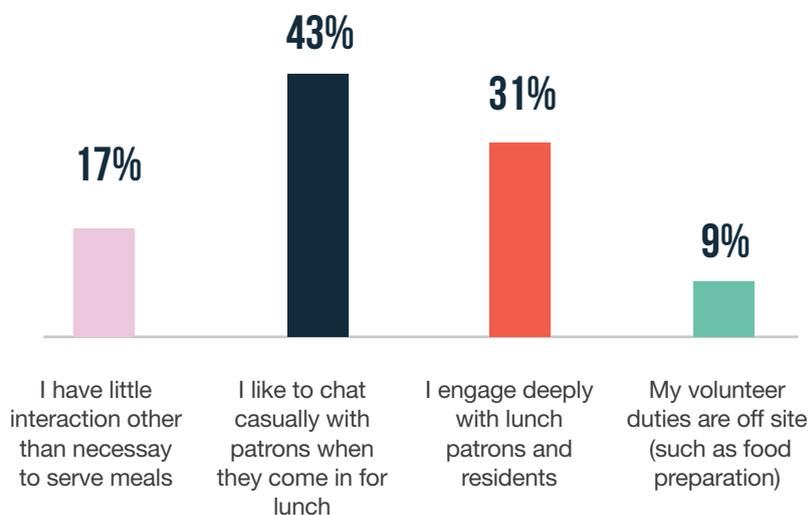


Of twenty-eight responses to a question about whether they engaged in other activities at the Winsome, 12 volunteers said they did not participate in any other activities. Eight of the volunteers attend the church services, several (3) attend the dance group, one sings in the choir and two mentioned joining the music sessions. One each of the respondents also referred to attending a men's group, a women's group and participating in fundraising activities.

The extent to which volunteers engage with those who visit the Winsome for a meal or to access services varies. Of 35 responses to this question (some respondents selected two answers), 15 indicated they like to chat casually with those who visit and 11 that they engage deeply with those they encounter. For some though, both in response to the survey and at interview, the extent of their engagement is to serve or prepare meals. For those rostered by the Anglican church to prepare the Sunday meal, voluntary duties involve off site food preparation only.

Other volunteers deliberately seek to engage with service users. Interestingly, interviews revealed that those most likely to engage deeply with those who attend the site to access services are those who have themselves experienced rough patches at times in their life, suggesting shared experience promotes empathy and connection. As one volunteer from a troubled background suggested: "They get it, I see them and they see me. It is like I am the piece in the puzzle" (17/1/2020). Another commented that the Winsome "provides a lounge room for those who do not have one" and that she felt it was important to connect with those visiting the site, making them feel welcome and respected. For that reason, the role as a barista was her most liked, providing direct contact with people, although she also works in the kitchen and assists with gardening as well. She commented "everyone is heard and everyone is treated with respect at the Winsome" (barista 13/5/2019). For another, "I think it is important that I can smile at people who come in the door and say their name. That is precious to them and to me". (barista, 7/2/2019)

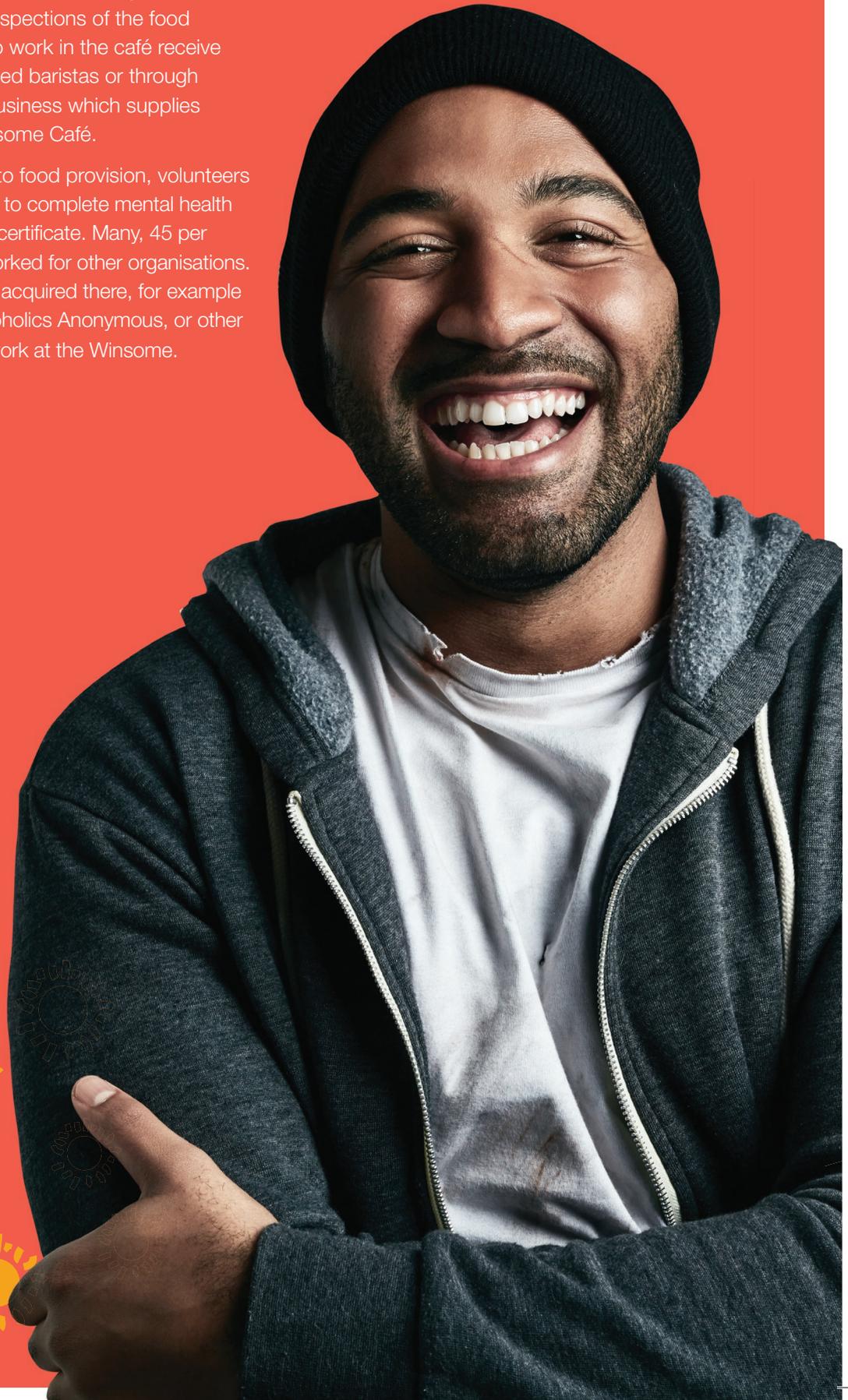
ENGAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS WITH SERVICE USERS.



TRAINING OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers receive a range of training opportunities. Those working in the kitchen describe being inducted and receiving training in food safety and handling, along with training about a range of WHS issues. Some expressed pride in the excellent record of high standards, recognised through council inspections of the food preparation areas. Those who work in the café receive barista training, either by trained baristas or through Caddies in Lismore, a local business which supplies discounted coffee to the Winsome Café.

In addition to training related to food provision, volunteers have been offered opportunity to complete mental health first aid training and a first aid certificate. Many, 45 per cent, of the volunteers also worked for other organisations. Training, knowledge and skills acquired there, for example at Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, or other services, also informed their work at the Winsome.



THE FUTURE

There is no doubt that the Lismore Soup Kitchen serves a vital role in the lives of many members of the most disadvantaged of the Lismore community and beyond.

As the local Mayor, Isaac Smith said on Homeless Day, 10 October, 2019, "I feel sorry for other towns because they do not have a Winsome Hotel". The Lismore Soup Kitchen and the Winsome Hotel ensure food security for many people impacted by multiple disadvantages and provide accommodation for some and a range of services for many.

The Lismore Soup Kitchen is much more than that though – this is truly a unique community. Many of those who give of their time to volunteer here do so because they have themselves been given a second chance in life and want to 'give back', thus providing that same chance for others. Unlike other service providers in town, the Winsome offers people the opportunity to belong to a community, open to them 365 days a year. As well, the Winsome does not require that people join in a 'programme' or make any commitments to any 'doing' to belong there.

This community provides an accepting, supportive, nurturing environment, a safe place for people to feel respected and accepted, whatever their life experiences. As one volunteer described:

The majority of people at the Winsome just don't fit into mainstream society. They just don't fit in at all. Everyone fits in at the Winsome. It is a great gift to people that they can just go there and be their eccentric selves. For some people it is the only social interaction they have. That is very important. They need someone to say their name. (volunteer 4/2/2019)

Some volunteers commented that the Winsome works because of its location in a regional centre. As one expressed it: "I think country towns, country cities, regional centres, can have a greater sense of community" (23/11/2019).

There was overwhelming support for the Winsome to continue to fill this vital role in the local community. A number of those interviewed, both residents and volunteers, expressed concern about financial viability into the future and whether the Lismore Soup Kitchen and Winsome Hotel will be able to continue, given the ageing of some key volunteers and committee members. However, as described earlier, financial sustainability is attainable if capital loans are paid off and current indications are that they will be. Most volunteers expressed little doubt that they would collectively ensure the ongoing life of the LSK. Some said simply "God will provide". Others said they were sure the right people would "step up".

CONCLUSION

The story of the Lismore Soup Kitchen is a powerful one. It speaks of a community's care and commitment to embrace and offer succour and support for the disadvantaged. It speaks of many years of dedicated service by its former and current committee members and the enthusiastic band of volunteers, past and present, who have shaped and enabled its continued operations.

The Lismore Soup Kitchen provides a lifeline for those in its community; many of those who access its life giving support of quality food, accommodation and other services would not survive without it. This is also the case for many of its volunteers, who both assist to deliver services at the Winsome Hotel and in turn rely on them to support themselves and their families.

The LSK operates with a high degree of financial sustainability and has serviced commercial debt arrangements with both a major bank and private investors. For these private investors, it has provided financially performing investment alongside significant social impact, thus providing the growing "impact investing" movement with a great example of how private capital can be invested (as opposed to granted) for social good.

The Lismore Soup Kitchen and Winsome Hotel offer a model which could well be replicated elsewhere. In addition to food and accommodation, a range of services are made available to disadvantaged and often vulnerable people. These are available where they are, in the Winsome community, rather than people having to visit a formal environment which they find, in comparison, intimidating and threatening. However, the ongoing success or replication of this model relies on the commitment and caring of volunteers, as well as on ongoing financial support.

The Winsome provides community, a safe place for people to belong, a place where people are respected no matter their life circumstances. It is a place of hope and healing – the researchers were privileged to be accepted into the community, to hear myriad stories of life changing healing of past addictions, of new beginnings and of remarkable personal transformations and empowerment. There is no doubt that the community created at the Winsome is valued immensely by its people and more broadly within the local town and region.

At heart the success of this model of care is about love – a heart for those who have less, for whom life has not offered opportunity, for those whose life choices have not served them well, for those healing from abuse in its many forms – and the unwavering belief that life is never without hope, healing and possibility. The Lismore Soup Kitchen offers hope, joy and community for its people.

Barbara Rugendyke | John McKinnon | Gregory P. Smith

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

DR JOHN MCKINNON began his career in the finance industry. After holding several positions in funds management, asset consulting and superannuation consulting, John co-founded the Australian office of Grantham Mayo van Otterloo LLC in 1995. For the subsequent ten years he was responsible for GMOA's Australian equity investments, which grew to approximately AUD 6 billion. Post 1997, John was the senior partner of the business, which, when he left in 2005, had over \$10b in total funds under management.

In 2005 John joined overseas aid and development charity TEAR Australia, where he managed first the NSW office and then TEAR's Australian operations. During this time John completed his PhD in social enterprise and development, investigating the intersection of finance and poverty alleviation.

Since 2012 John, together with his wife Sue, has managed the McKinnon Family Foundation, a private ancillary fund that focuses on support for the environment, poverty alleviation and social enterprise development. Both John and Sue are keen to maximise use of their assets, which means investing the corpus as much as possible in line with their values and the mission of the foundation.

John sits on a number of boards including The Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility and is chair of The Australia Institute.

DR BARBARA RUGENDYKE is currently an Adjunct Professor at Southern Cross University, where she served as Dean of Arts and Social Sciences from 2014 to 2019. Prior to that, Barbara was Head of School of Arts and Sciences at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, following an appointment as Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of New England.

Before taking up leadership roles, Barbara was a teaching and research academic in Human Geography at the University of New England. Her research and

publications focused on community development and sustainable development, primarily in indigenous communities in Australia and Vietnam, the work of non-government organisations in improving livelihoods, and the advocacy of NGOs with the aim of poverty reduction. Most recently, collaborative work with Anglicare North Coast on improving the circumstances of culturally and linguistically diverse women, mostly humanitarian arrivals, has been recognised in awards, locally and nationally.

Barbara recently served on a global advisory committee for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a Dutch Research Council (NWO) funded project focused on the contributions of civil society to global development. A graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Barbara has served on several Boards, including as a non-executive director of Oxfam Australia.

DR GREGORY P. SMITH is an academic and social researcher in the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Southern Cross University. His Ph.D was completed in 2016 and concerned the Forgotten Australians and historical and contemporary issues impacting that population, including social justice and challenges for their participating and engaging in community. In 2018 he published his memoir *Out of the Forest* with Penguin Random House which continues to have an impact on homelessness and other social issues.

Gregory has served on the North Coast Anglicare Board and was a foundation member of Vocieup Australia. He is currently the Chair of the Wattle Place Consultative Forum representing Forgotten Australians' in New South Wales and a consultant for several committees and organisations on the issues of homelessness and vulnerability including having a seat on the New South Wales Government Steering Committee on homelessness and vulnerability.

HOPE, JOY & COMMUNITY

THE LISMORE SOUP
KITCHEN AT THE
WINSOME HOTEL

Barbara Rugendyke | John McKinnon | Gregory P. Smith

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