

# **Eating with Friends Project: Evaluation**



**Final report  
Community Focus July 2008**

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## **Executive summary**

The Eating with Friends Project has provided tangible benefits for the broader Tasmanian community, for participants, volunteers and organisations that operate the programs. In particular the funding of a two year project officer role with some operational funds has:

- led to a better understanding of the factors that assist and hinder Eating with Friends groups to start up and continue to operate over time
- enabled an identification of three distinct models of EWF groups and clear examples of groups achieving good results in local communities
- produced an updated information manual which is available to new and existing groups (which contains detailed information about how to set up and operate a group)
- begun to build a network of EWF groups and supported groups to exchange information, work collaboratively to resolve problems.
- highlighted the benefits of the program to participants, volunteers and the organisations which run them
- reaffirmed the success of the model to stakeholders and the instrumental role of the steering committee
- identified the need for a personal approach in maintaining the momentum and enthusiasm of groups.

This project demonstrates that for a relatively small amount of targeted investment (under \$120,000) a lot can be achieved, particularly if it is used to add value to the efforts of volunteers and community groups across the State.

The research for this project has indicated that there are groups of people all across Tasmania finding, bringing together and meeting the needs of older citizens who may otherwise be quite socially isolated. This research also highlights that with access to up to date information resources and opportunities to share skills, knowledge and ideas, a lot more can be gained in the future. Groups can be supported to be sustainable in the longer term and new groups can be assisted to successfully form. However, without a focus for this activity it is likely that the roll out of new groups will be slower and some groups may struggle to be maintained over time in the face of changing expectations in relation to food safety and competing demands in small communities for volunteers.

We know from the research that it can be difficult to sustain EWF groups over time due to difficulties in having enough volunteers, the lack of a suitable venue (e.g. with a kitchen that complies with relevant standards) or a lack of transport options. Most groups do not need operating funding as they manage on support from an auspice, their own fundraising efforts, sponsorship from local communities and participant contributions but they would benefit from someone providing updated information (e.g. about food safety requirements, menu planning, insurance matters or how to seek sponsorship or other support from industry or other groups). The research has also indicated that many existing community groups may be prepared to provide a coordination role for an EWF group as part of their 'core business' if appropriate information provision and marketing can be undertaken.

For the program to continue to expand and grow in Tasmania a focal point is required. There is much more that can be done to foster this model in the future as its full capacity has not yet been realised. Future work may entail:

- developing a comprehensive promotion and marketing plan to ensure the highest level of community knowledge about the model and its benefits
- facilitating ongoing dialogue and connection between groups so they feel that they belong to a broader movement of Eating with Friends groups and can share the developing pool of expertise about how to run such groups
- documenting and continuing to research best practice examples and the outcomes of the program
- identifying and bringing to the attention of decision makers issues that may threaten the longer term operation of EWF groups.
- establishing partnerships with the Department of Education, health service providers, Community Houses and other stakeholders that may directly or indirectly benefit from the outcomes of EWF groups
- helping local EWF groups and their auspice organisations to respond to new food safety legislative requirements.

The two years of this project have laid the groundwork for future expansion and development of Eating with Friends. However, continued investment is required to gain the best outcomes for the Tasmanian community

## **1. Background the project**

### **1.1 Project aim**

The aim of this two year project has been to:

*Promote and support the development and sustainability of volunteer Eating with Friends groups throughout the State, with a particular focus on expanding the concept and groups in the north, north east and north west of Tasmania.*

Studies in Tasmania indicated that the majority of Meals on Wheels clients eat alone (77% in north-west Tasmania) most of the time. Eating alone has been shown to impact adversely on seniors' nutritional status leading to:

- a downward spiral of ill-health
- increased dependence
- increased likelihood of illness
- increased risk of falls
- increased use of health and community services
- decreased quality of life.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.2 Funding and auspice**

Eat Well Tasmania Inc. auspiced the Eating with Friends project on behalf of the project steering committee. The Department of Veterans Affairs provided a total of \$116,340 in funding to implement the project.

The Steering Committee for the project was made up of representatives from around the state including from the Tasmanian Association of Community Houses (TACH), the Community Nutrition Unit, Department of Health and Human Services, Glenorchy City Council, Department of Veterans Affairs, Eat Well Tasmania, Commonwealth Care Link, Tandara Adult Activity Centre and a member of the founding Eating with Friends group at West Moonah.

### **1.3 Project time frame**

The project commenced in 2006 and was completed in mid 2008.

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<sup>1</sup>Cobiac, L. & Syrette J.A. What is the nutritional status of older Australians? *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society of Australia*. 1995; 19, 139-145.

## 1.4 Project objectives

The original funding application detailed outcomes for the project which focused more on finding out about the benefits of the Eating with Friends program, for example:

- reducing the social isolation of older people
- encouraging older people to eat regular and varied nutritious meals
- increasing opportunities for volunteers to develop skills and confidence
- increasing the capacity of communities to respond to the needs of isolated elderly people.<sup>2</sup>

However, changes were made to project objectives in consultation with the funding body during the life of the project in recognition that:

- some of these outcomes would be difficult to measure
- other people were researching the model from a participant and volunteer perspective
- the focus of the project was less on the value of the Eating with Friends Program and more on how new Eating with Friends Groups could be developed and sustained over time.

Thus, the focus for the project and the evaluation became to assess how well the project has been able to support new and existing EWF groups and what is required in the future to ensure sustainability. The revised project objectives were:

- increasing the number of Eating with Friends group in the State by at least 10 (particularly in the north, north east and north west)
- promoting Eating with Friends core values<sup>3</sup> and supporting Eating with Friends groups to adopt these values
- raising the profile of Eating with Friends
- developing an understanding of the factors that help or hinder Eating with Friends groups to operate effectively
- investigating the models of support that enhance the sustainability of EWF groups and promote them.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.5 Staffing

A Project Officer position supported the project for 20 hours per week. This position was based in the north of the State in order to try to 'kick start' interest in the program in the north, north west and eastern areas of the State. Over the life of the project two people were employed in the project officer position with the first one leaving about half way through the project to go overseas.

One of the initial roles of the Project Officer was to map the existing Eating with Friends Groups and identify barriers and enablers to these groups functioning

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<sup>2</sup> Wallace, B. A Nutritional Assessment Tool for the Independently Living Elderly. Hobart: Community Nutrition Unit, DHHS, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Eating with Friends Project Evaluation Plan Draft 20 November 2006

effectively. This was done using meetings with the groups, interviews with key stakeholders and analysis of available data and other information.

## 1.6 Who does Eating with Friends cater for?

Most participants of EWF groups (81%) are older citizens aged 60 and over. However, some groups cater for a mix of ages and some link older and younger citizens through schools based programs. In total the programs cater for approximately 612 participants and harness the skills of 123 volunteers.<sup>5</sup> A small proportion of participants are Veterans or wives of Veterans (estimates are that there are approximately 1-2 per EWF group which means approximately 23-46 participants statewide at any one time). This is difficult to accurately gauge due to the fact that participants are not asked about this background, no data is kept on participants and the membership of groups changes over time. This model of operation is appropriate given the nature of the participant group and the informality of groups.

**Table 1: age profile of EWF participants**

Age group	Number	% of groups (n=22)
School aged children/older people	2	9.1%
30-40s	1	4.5%
60-70s	11	50.0%
70s-80s	6	27.3%
80s and older	1	4.5%
All ages	1	4.5%
Not known	3 <sup>6</sup>	-
Total	25	-

The number of participants per group session varies from the smallest (1-5 participants) to very large gatherings of between 50 and 75 participants at EWF groups.

**Table 2: number of participants attending EWF groups**

Number of participants <sup>7</sup>	Number	% of groups (n=23)
1-5	1	4.3%
6-10	1	4.3%
11-15	6	26.1%
16-20	4	17.4%
21-25	1	4.3%
26-50	8	34.8%
51-75	2	8.7%
75+	0	0%
No response /not known	2	-
Total	25	

<sup>5</sup> As of early 2008.

<sup>6</sup> The number of participants for these three groups was not able to be ascertained as the groups were in abeyance at the time of the research.

<sup>7</sup> Number of participants at the most recent group meeting.

Most groups appear to target those who maybe socially isolated and/or those aged over 55 years living in their community. Some groups target those living alone and others encourage couples to come along. However, a small number of groups target younger people or particular cultural communities (Greek community), clients of a particular service (e.g. City Mission) or people associated with an organisation (e.g. The Defence Force).

**Table 3: target group of EWF groups**

Target group	Number	% of groups (n=25)
Anyone /anyone in need in our community	15	60%
Those who are socially isolated or living alone/housebound	10	40%
Defence force families	1	4%
Those over 55 years	7	28%
Young people	1	4%
Clients of our organisation	1	4%

Note: many provided more than one response to this question as they use a few criteria for recruitment.

### 1.7 Who runs EWF groups?

The EWF groups operate under a number of different organisational structures including: schools, Community Houses, Department of Health and Human Services (e.g. Multi-purpose Centres, Community Health Centres), churches, service clubs (RSL, Bowls Club) and community service organisations (e.g. City Mission). In some instances Local Government is supporting a Precinct group to offer the program (e.g. Glenorchy City Council).

**Table 4: What type of organisational structure does the group operate under?**

Organizational structure	Number	% of groups (n=24)
State Government	4	16.6%
School	2	8.3%
Incorporated independent org.	2	8.3%
Auspiced by a Non-government organisation	11	45.8%
Local government auspice	3	12.5%
Part of a church group	2	8.3%
Not known or not operating	1	-

### 1.8 How are the groups funded?

The majority of EWF groups do not receive any external funding to run their groups. The operational costs are met through the groups own fundraising, participant contributions for meals or the support of the auspice organisation. A small number of groups have received one-off health promotion funding and some receive small amounts of support from a service club.



**Table 5: funding source for EWF groups**

Source of funds	Number	% of groups (n=25)
Own fundraising	5	20%
Own organisation/auspice	5	20%
Health promotion funding	2	8%
Service club	2	8%
Participant contributions	2	8%
HACC	1	4%
None/not needed	10	40%

## **2. Evaluation methodology**

The funding submission contained a budget for an external evaluation of the program. The external evaluator provided the following services to the project:

- advice on evaluation questions
- input to the development of evaluation tools
- assistance with the analysis of data
- provision of a final evaluation report on the project.

The evaluation focused on key aspects of the project:

- What makes EWF groups work well?
- What is required to make them sustainable in the longer term?
- What is the range of models currently operating across the State?
- What are the outcomes for participants?
- What other benefits are there from the program (e.g. to volunteers, to other organisations, to the local community?)

The tools used for evaluation included:

- surveys of group coordinators
- a count of the number of Action Kits and other information resources disseminated to interested groups
- volunteer interviews
- participant interviews
- observation of groups in action
- analysis of media articles about EWF groups
- case studies of new groups
- a workshop with the project Steering Committee
- interviews with the Project Officer.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1 Achievement of project objectives**

**Objective 1: To increase the number of EWF groups in the State by at least 10, particularly in the north and north-west, as a means of reducing social isolation and developing friendships amongst older Tasmanians and other target groups as appropriate.**

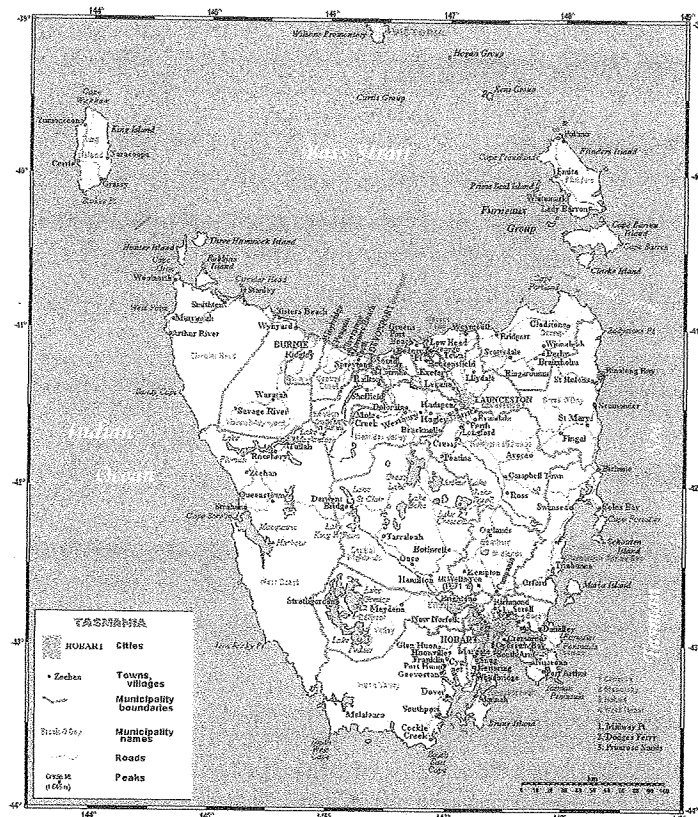
At the time of this report there were 23 EWF groups operating across Tasmania. It is important to note that the majority of EWF groups have been operating for some time (e.g. one third have been operating for six years or more). The earliest group to be established was in West Moonah in 1990. In the years 2003 and 2004 there was a significant amount of activity with seven new groups established. During 2006 to 2008 over the life of this project a total of five new groups have been established in the following areas:

- Flinders Island
- Rosebery
- Burnie
- Kings Meadows, Launceston
- Sheffield.

Potential groups that are still in consideration include:

- St Marys
- Campbell Town
- Kingston.

Interstate developments include a group in Toowoomba, QLD who have formed a steering committee, received funding and are in the process of employing a project officer for their region.



While the project has supported new groups to form in Tasmania it has also worked with existing groups to assist them to address issues impacting upon their ongoing sustainability (e.g. lack of volunteers, transport difficulties). It is one thing to establish a group but another to maintain it over a prolonged period of time. Three of the 'older' groups ceased to operate over the life of the project due to such factors as having no-one to coordinate the group at the local level, a lack of volunteers and a lack of a suitable venue.

Over the two years of the project the Project Officer provided information about the EWF concept to a total of 70 enquiries. Of these, 16 sought specific information about starting up a group, four of those have established groups, and three are still under consideration. In some instances there is evidence that a group may form a year or more after the initial information is provided to interested parties.

**Table 6: when were EWF groups established?**

Year	Number of groups	% of groups (n=24)
1990	1	4.2%
2000	1	4.2%
2001	2	8.3%
2002	4	16.6%
2003	5	20.8%
2004	2	8.3%
2005	2	8.3%
2006	4	8.3%
2007	1	4.2%
2008	0	0%
Not known	1	-

## **Objective 2: To promote the EWF core values and support new and existing groups in their adoption.**

The EWF core values are about:

- addressing social isolation and poor nutrition among older people
- working with communities and volunteer groups to provide regular group meals to older, isolated Tasmanians and other target groups.
- provision of low cost, nutritious meals
- encouraging a culture of inclusiveness
- drawing upon and using community resources
- responding to local community needs
- ensuring appropriate access (e.g. transport, disability access venues, meals for people with specific dietary needs).

The project has put this objective into action by drawing the attention of groups to the EWF core values through a regular newsletter, provision of other written information (e.g. manuals, menu ideas) and through phone and face to face visits by the Project Officer to the groups.

It is important to note that EWF groups are *not run* by the EWF program – all groups are run by locally based groups usually operating under an auspice organisation. Thus, the EWF project can encourage, support and inform groups but cannot direct them in any way. The project has attempted to encourage groups to operate within these core values by engaging groups in a feeling of ‘belonging’ to a network and adopting a supportive and informative approach. From the research phase of the project it is clear that most groups are operating within the EWF core values in that:

- the majority target more isolated older people and their primary purpose is to overcome social isolation (80.9%) followed by addressing nutrition issues (14.3%)
- people are assisted to access the groups by provision of transport through volunteers using car pools and community transport services
- the majority of groups operate with volunteer labour
- most groups were established as a response to a perceived local community need
- social interaction and provision of good food are the two key outcomes for participants
- the menus are changed regularly (71.4% of groups)
- most groups cater for people with specific dietary requirements (75%)
- the majority charge less than \$10 for meals (60%).

**Table 7: why EWF groups were established**

<b>Why group established</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of groups (n=21)</b>
Social isolation	17	80.9%
Keep people at home longer	1	4.8%
Nutrition deprivation/poor eating habits	3	14.3%
No response/not known	4	-

Coordinators use a range of methods to plan menus and food provision within their group. One group has the catering done by the venue (e.g. a yacht club). However, for others it appears to involve a mix of consultation with participants and consulting written materials such as menu plans, recipe books or asking for input from someone like a nutritionist. The groups that go out for meals (5) did not have to plan menus.

**Table 8: how food decisions are made**

How food/menu planning undertaken	Number	% of groups (n=25)
Consult about food preferences	9	36%
Committee/coordinator designs menu	9	36%
Gain nutrition input	8	32%
Use recipe books	4	16%
Other	12	48%

**'Other' responses included:**

- Eat out/their choice (5)
- Volunteers take it in turn to cook (2)
- Use a variety of interesting foods (1)
- Balance nutritional value and availability of foods (3)
- Yacht club provides the food (1).

Most groups indicated that they do change their menu on a regular basis.

**Table 9: do groups change the menu regularly?**

Response to the question	Number	% of groups (n=21)
Yes	15	71.4%
No	1	4.8%
Not known/not applicable	4	-

Most groups indicated that they can cater for specific dietary requirements if they are requested.

**Table 10: can groups cater for groups with specific dietary requirements?**

Response to the question	Number	% of groups (n=20)
Yes	15	75%
No	2	10%
Not known/not applicable	5 <sup>8</sup>	-

<sup>8</sup> These five groups are the ones who go out for meals – they allow participants to choose in line with own preferences or requirements.

In the majority of EWF groups the participants pay for their meals. In only one group there appeared to be no charge. The groups that go out for a meal have a range of charges depending on the venue and what participants have to eat. Fifteen of the groups or 60% charge \$10 or under for the meals.

**Table 11: charges for meals at EWF groups**

Charge rate	Number
Less than \$5	3 <sup>9</sup>
\$5	5
\$7	3
\$8	1
\$10	3
\$12/12.50	1
\$14	1
\$15-20	1 <sup>7</sup>
Range of prices	4 <sup>7</sup>
Yes do charge but not specified	2
No charge	1
Total	25

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<sup>9</sup> Interesting to note that these are the three groups that are not currently operating.

**Objective 3: To raise the profile of EWF groups through the use of promotional strategies which enhance understanding about the concept and encourage its adoption.**

The project has used a number of means to promote EWF concepts across the State including:

- visits by the Project Officer to each existing EWF group
- written information sent to Neighbourhood Houses, Local Councils, Primary Health Care Coordinators in the Department of Health and Human Services, Community Health facilities across the State
- information sent to peak bodies (e.g. Local Government Association of Tasmania newsletter, Tasmanian Association of Community Houses -TACH newsletter)
- promotion via the Eat Well Tasmania mailing lists and website, a link on the Glenorchy City Council Website and GPAtlas.
- Promotional articles in The Advocate, TAS Affairs, Eating Matter and the LGAT magazine.
- presentations by the Project Officer at meetings and conferences (e.g. HACC service providers forums, Adult Day Centre Conference)
- a series of community forums held in 2008 around the State to launch the revised EWF manual.<sup>10</sup> The forums generated two newspaper articles, one in The Mercury and one in The Advocate. Southern Cross Television also covered the Hobart forum and ran a story on the evening news.
- A monthly newsletter
- Development of brochures and posters and updating the Action Kit and Display Kit and purchasing a retractable banner. The tools are all in complementary styles and colours to present a professional yet approachable display. A photographer was employed to photograph the different models of EWF groups and there is now a pool of usable, current photographs.

The project has, where possible, adopted a very 'hands on' approach to promotion to ensure that the concept is fully understood by those who are keen to establish a group.

It was not possible within the scope of this evaluation to assess the level of public awareness of the Eating with Friends concept across Tasmania.

The research phase of the project has demonstrated that word of mouth appears to be the most important method of promoting a group and recruiting participants at the local level, particularly in small rural communities. Participants appear to respond well to personal invitations from a friend or service provider. Health services were a particularly important referral source as were local community organisations like Community Houses and church groups.

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<sup>10</sup> Community forums were held in Bicheno, Hobart and Sheffield in May 2008.

**Table 12: promotional methods used by groups**

Promotional method	Number	% of groups (n=25)
Word of mouth	10	40%
Via health services	7	28%
Local Council	1	4%
Community groups/orgs	4	16%
Flyers/brochures, newsletters	5	20%
Other	11	44%

**‘Other’ responses included:**

- Church
- Defence force
- Casework contacts
- RSL meetings
- Newsletter/school newsletter (2)
- Local radio
- Personal invitations (3).

When asked what were the most successful recruitment methods coordinators indicated that referral by health professionals (10) is the most successful followed by word of mouth (8) and then use of local newspapers and newsletters.

Some participants attend other programs at a Community House or are part of a church group.



## **Objective 4: To develop an understanding of the factors which enable or act as barriers in the operation of EWF groups.**

This part of the project formed the bulk of work within the project. Over the first year of the project much of the Project Officer time was devoted to visiting each existing group to interview the Coordinators and Volunteers and gain feedback from participants. The result of this work was a comprehensive analysis of each group in terms of organisational structure, participants, length of operation, how menu planning is undertaken and threats to the ongoing sustainability of the group.

The Project Officers were able to provide support and information to groups while on these visits as well as collect data for this research component. Many of the groups had been operating for some years at the time of the Project Officer visits so those involved were used to operating without outside support or assistance. However it was possible to identify the key issues that enable groups to operate effectively as well as the barriers and likely threats to the sustainability of EWF groups.

### **3.1.1 Key factors that impact on the sustainability of EWF groups**

#### **Having access to transport resources**

The most commonly used method for getting participants to an EWF group is to operate a car pool. Often the car pool is run by volunteers using their own cars. In total volunteers appear to transport participants in over half of the groups (up to 60% of groups). Some groups hire a bus to transport participants (24% of groups) and others rely on Community Transport (16%). In a small number of cases a taxi pool is used. Some participants are able to drive themselves to the group or a family member does so.

**Table 13: how do participants get to EWF groups?**

<b>Method of transport</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>% of groups (n=25)</b>
Community Transport	4	16%
Car pool (volunteers or participants)	10	40%
Taxi pool	1	4%
Own/family vehicle	5	20%
Hire a bus	6	24%
Volunteers do transport	5	20%
Other transport	1 <sup>11</sup>	4%

Transport difficulties represent a major risk for EWF groups as this can be harder to sustain over time and it places a heavy load on volunteers to provide transport, prepare the meals and provide the social contact for the EWF group.

<sup>11</sup> Note more than one response was possible to this question as there may be a number of ways for participants to get to a group.

### **The level of support provided by an auspice organisation**

In the majority of cases the auspice organisations provides a number of different forms of support to the EWF group: a venue, office space for a coordinator, telephone costs, provision of training and, in some cases, paid coordination of the program. Insurance cover was a particularly important aspect of what is provided by an auspice organisation with seven groups specifying this as an important aspect of support. Those organisations with a strong auspice that was able to actively support the program by provision of transport, a venue and providing someone to coordinate the program were identified as being much more sustainable in the longer term.

**Table 14: support provided by auspice**

Type of support provided	Number	% of groups (n=25)
A venue	10	40%
Transport	4	16%
Funding	4	16%
Organisational support	15	60%
Make referrals to EWF	6	24%
Insurance cover	7	28%
Help with administrative costs	2	8%
Advertising/promotion	3	12%
Other	11	44%

Other roles performed by the auspice included:

- taking bookings (1)
- managing finances (2)
- providing Food Safety training (2)
- training volunteers(2)
- co-ordinating the program (3)
- providing office space for coordinator (1).

An important role of an auspice was this provision of training for volunteers. Without this assistance most volunteers would not be able to afford to access any training. While the majority of existing groups do not provide any training for volunteers the nine groups (36%) that have done so have often been supported by an auspice in their access to the training.

### **Level of local ownership and support**

The EWF groups that appear to have a very long term sustainable future have a high level of local community ownership and support. This is demonstrated by local businesses donating food, providing funding, or coming to the lunch themselves as participants. In some instances groups have commenced through the work of a local identity (e.g. at Bicheno a local chef did the cooking for the first year of the project before it moved to the local RSL and volunteers began to prepare the meals).

In most cases the group only exist because of the work of a key local identity who 'drives' the program and helps to coordinate other volunteer effort in the community. Groups that cease to function have often lost their key 'driver'. Similarly a barrier to some groups forming (e.g. in the Huon Valley) has been a lack of someone to set up and coordinate the program.

Support from service providers is also crucial to the success of the program with referrals from health services and councils making up one third of participant referrals.

**Table 15: promotional methods used by groups**

Promotional method	Number	% of groups (n=25)
Word of mouth	10	40%
Via health services	7	28%
Local Council	1	4%
Community groups/orgs	4	16%
Flyers/brochures, newsletters	5	20%
Other	11	44%

**‘Other’ referral sources:**

- Church (1)
- Defence Force (1)
- casework contacts (1)
- RSL meetings (2)
- newsletter/school newsletter (2)
- local radio (1)
- personal invitations (3).

### 3.1.2 Models of Eating with Friends groups

Finding a model that suits the local community and the available resources is important to the success of an EWF group. There are three distinct models of EWF programs now operating across Tasmania.

#### 1. The Community Based Model

Volunteers coordinate the group and plan, shop, cook, serve and clean up after the meals.

- **Advantages:** great community involvement, shared responsibility, team spirit, volunteers enjoy each others company, local ownership and lots of fun!
- **Disadvantages:** difficulties in recruiting and keeping volunteers.

**Example 1. Beaconsfield Eating With Friends has been based at the Multi-purpose Health Centre since 2006 but have been operating since 2003. The Health Centre provides a venue and office support, and the EWF group hires a bus from the Health Centre to transport participants. The group is promoted by local radio, word of mouth and through health professionals. They have a core group of 8 – 9 regular volunteers and can cater for 35 – 40 participants most of whom are in their 70’s. Meals cost \$6. Transport is provided to participants who need it. The group is meeting community needs by:**

- providing social opportunities and something different
- providing a meal that can just be enjoyed without work for the participants.

## 2. The School Based Model

Healthy meals are planned by students and they cook, serve and clean up. Older members of the community are invited to attend.

**Advantages:** Friendships and trust are established between young and older community members, community building, skill and career pathway development for young people, local ownership, may help to address the shortage of volunteers by providing a pool of younger 'volunteers', introduces younger community members to concept of volunteering, fun.

**Disadvantages:** may be dependent on particular school staff to organise, might exclude older volunteers. Only operates during school terms.

**Example 2. Sorell District School EWF was established in 2001. The group is auspiced by the school and it provides the venue, subsidises the cost of ingredients and provides the Food Studies students who cook the meals monthly during school terms. The Food studies teacher purchases supplies but coordinates the students to plan, cook, serve and clean up the meals. Students are trained in all aspects of food handling.**

**Local elderly resident participants are recruited by word of mouth and the school office takes RSVP's. A yearly calendar of dates is provided to participants.**

**Sorell EWF can cater for up to 40 participants who are mostly between 70 and 80 years old. Meals cost \$7 for a three course meal.**

**The group is meeting community needs by:**

- offering a comfortable setting for socialising and meeting new people
- offering a nutritious, low cost meal
- providing the opportunity for younger and older generations to interact.

## 3. The Eating Out Model

This model is coordinated by a local paid or voluntary coordinator. The group goes to a venue for lunch and/or entertainment. Meals are prepared by the venue. It may be a regular venue or one ongoing site (e.g. Lindisfarne Yacht Club). A choice of meals is usually available from a set menu.

**Advantages:** Volunteers focus on coordination. Larger groups can be catered for. Participants can get to know a larger group of people, the model can support local business, can allow other smaller EWF to 'visit' for lunch, enhances community spirit and provides fun activities. It can provide choice of venues if the group goes to different places each time (e.g. can be combined with a bus trip).

**Disadvantages:** The larger groups may be intimidating to some participants or feel 'institutional'. In a large group those with hearing difficulties may find it harder to hear each other. Some may prefer a familiar, consistent environment. Cost may be higher if going to commercial venues. Meals can lack nutritional value as they are drawn from a set menu which is not decided by the group.

**Example 3. Clarence Eating With Friends was established in 2003. It offers catered meals at the Lindisfarne Yacht Club every 6 weeks on a Friday. Entertainment is also provided.**

**This EWF is supported by the Clarence Volunteer Service/Clarence Council. The Council assists with supporting the volunteers, meeting administration costs, and computer/office space.**

**The group is promoted through referrals from community services, leaflets and personal invitations. They have a core group of 8 - 10 volunteers and can cater for 80 – 100 participants who are mainly between 70 and 80 yrs old. Meals cost around \$14. There is also a trade table and raffles for fundraising. Some transport is provided for those who require it. The group is meeting community needs by:**

- **providing a cheap and nutritious meal**
- **providing social occasions to make new friendships and the opportunity to catch up with old friends.**

A key to success for an EWF group appears to be finding the model that best suits the available resources and the needs of participants and that is initiated by that community.

#### **Number of volunteers involved in the program**

Most groups operate on a volunteer model. However, two groups operate without any volunteers and instead have paid staff running the program. Ten groups or 40% of the groups operate with less than five volunteers and 12 groups or 48% have more than five volunteers involved in their program. It is estimated that there are currently over 123 volunteers involved in Eating with Friends groups around the State with an average of five volunteers per group.

**Table 16: number of volunteers involved in EWF groups**

<b>Number of volunteers <sup>12</sup></b>	<b>No of responses</b>	<b>% of groups (n=24)</b>
None/not applicable	2	8.3%
1	1	4.2%
2	2	8.3%
3	5	20.8%
4	2	8.3%
5	0	0%
6	3	12.5%
7	2	8.3%
8	3	12.5%
9	1	4.2%
10	1	4.2%
10+	2	8.3%
Not known	1	-
Total	25	-

<sup>12</sup> Note- where a range was provided (e.g.8-10) the lower figure has been taken as the figure to count to provide a conservative estimate of the number of volunteers.

A lack of volunteers is a significant threat to some EWF groups. A lack of volunteers can impact negatively on a group and place further 'load' on the others in the group.

### **Expectations about being 'trained'**

Most groups have formed because local people want to do something to help older more isolated community members. There is a strong negative reaction to the suggestion that people need to be 'trained', especially by older community members who consider that they have been cooking all their lives, and often doing voluntary work all their lives. "Information" is a much better term for use with this age group in particular. Volunteers are also often fiercely resistant to paperwork and having to complete forms so this may act as a disincentive during a volunteer recruitment process unless handled carefully. This would need to be considered in the context of funding expectations that require extensive reporting.

These views about training may present a challenge for the Steering Committee and local auspice organisations as there will be a need to help EWF groups to demonstrate they are meeting food safety legislation requirements. In October 2008 new food safety legislation will be adopted which has implications for the way EWF group coordinators and volunteers manage food safety issues.

### **Having a dedicated coordinator**

As part of the project 22 group Coordinators were interviewed by the EWF Project Officer. 44% of Coordinators were paid employees of community organisations. Volunteers made up 32% of coordinators. Other groups were coordinated by an employee of a Local Government body (4%) and State Government employees (8%).<sup>13</sup> The majority (20 out of 22) were female but there were two male Coordinators.

The majority of coordinators performed a variety of roles with the EWF group, including recruiting participants, being the contact point for the group and the 'hands on' work of helping to prepare meals and/or assisting with transport.

**Table 17: role of Coordinator**

Function/role	Number	% of Coordinators (n=25)
Recruit participants for the group	21	84%
Contact point for group	21	84%
Help to prepare meals	14	56%
Help with transport	15	60%
Provide social support to participants	20	80%
Fundraising	11	44%
Other	7	28%

*Note more than one response possible*

Other roles which were mentioned include:

- organise bus trips/outings
- provide education about nutrition

<sup>13</sup> Three groups did not have a coordinator at the time of this research.

- organise venues
- administration
- motivate and inspire
- train others
- take referrals
- liaise with the committee.

The majority of those coordinating EWF groups have been doing so for quite some time – over half (12 or 54.5%) have been Coordinator for between two and five years and 15 or 68.2% have been coordinating for two or more years. Three have been coordinating for more than five years. This may pose a risk for longer term sustainability unless effective ‘succession planning’ is taking place.

**Table 18: length of time as Coordinator**

Length of time as coordinator	Number	% of coordinators (n=22)
Less than 6 months	1	4.5%
6 months to one year	4	18.2%
1-2 years	2	9.1%
2-5 years	12	54.5%
5 or more years	3	13.6%
Total	22	-
Not known	3	-

### Loss of participants

A range of reasons were provided for why participants stop coming to an EWF group with the main ones being ill health or death, followed by people moving into an aged care facility. In total ill health, death or movement into an aged care facility made up 21 out of 39 or 54% of responses. Transport difficulties were an issue raised as were issues about the way the group operates or its composition.

**Table 19: reasons for participants to stop coming to EWF**

Reason for not continuing in an EWF group	Number of responses
Ill health	12
Death	4
Work commitments	1
Cost	1
Too many demands /other things on	2
Group too large	1
Moved into aged care	5
Move out of the area	3
Disagreements with others in group/did not get on with others	2
Not what they wanted	2
Transport difficulties	4
Did not like venue	1
Did not like the food	1
Total responses	39

### Participant interview

#### 60-70 year old woman who lives alone in a rural area

“My neighbour suggested that I come along. I was new to the area and they took me along. I like the food and the company but it is probably not lively enough for me. Also everyone has their own place and you can't rock the boat so I am thinking that this is not quite right for me – I might branch out into other things. They are good groups for helping people to get out and meet people though.”

Coordinators were asked if they had the capacity to follow up participants who drop out of EWF groups to see why they dropped out. Just over half of the groups (11 out of 20 or 55%) do have the capacity to follow up participants who drop out to find out why they have stopped coming along. Most of these do so by phone. Eight Coordinators indicated that they did *not* have the capacity to do so. The main reason given was a lack of time.

**Table 20: capacity to follow up participants who drop out**

Are they able to follow up those who 'drop out' ?	Number	% of groups (n=20)
Yes	11	55%
No	8	40%
Not applicable	1	5%
Not specified/known	5	-



**Objective 5: To investigate models of support which enhance the sustainability of EWF groups and promote them.**

Information about what type of support may enhance the sustainability of EWF groups was gathered during the first phase of the project and this information was used to inform the latter stages of the project.

The most commonly cited support that groups would like was the provision of a newsletter that provided specific information about running an EWF group (e.g. menu ideas, sources of funding, ideas for improving a group or possible activities). Quite a few would like an updated manual and menus. Information provided on a website was also seen as useful. 28% of those interviewed said that they would like regular gatherings of coordinators and volunteers involved in EWF groups so they could meet others, share ideas and experiences.

**Table 21: support requested by groups**

Type of support	Number of times mentioned <sup>14</sup>	Percentage of groups (n=25)
Provision of a newsletter	15	60%
Information on website	7	28%
Regular gatherings of vols/coordinators	7	28%
Action Kit/Manual	13	52%
Mentoring support	4	16%
Providing updated menus/menu ideas	9	36%
Web based forum	2	8%
Statewide promotion (e.g. newspapers)	2	8%
Provide equipment (e.g. commercial stove)	1	4%
Cash for volunteer costs	1	4%
Transport assistance	1	4%

In the majority of groups surveyed (71.4%) the Coordinators said that they would be interested in mentoring other people to start groups.

**Table 22: interest in mentoring other groups**

	Number	% of groups (n=21)
Yes	15	71.4%
No	6	28.6%
No response	1	-

Two of those who said they would be interested in mentoring others said they could only provide this by phone due to their location. For most it was also time dependent.

<sup>14</sup> Note: more than one response possible.

Time was also a major factor for those who said they could not be involved in mentoring.

The majority of Coordinators thought that their group would be sustainable in the longer term. Less than 10% thought that there were some risks to the longer term sustainability of their group.

**Table 23: do Coordinators think groups are sustainable in the longer term?**

Sustainable in longer term?	Number	% of all groups (n=22)
Yes	20	90.9%
No/possibly	2	9.1%
Unknown	3	-

Coordinators were asked if they and members of their group identify with Eating with Friends and feel part of a network. Just over half said that they *did not* feel part of a network at the moment. Less than one third of groups did feel part of a network. Some did not know of the existence of a manual or a Project Officer prior to contact being made for this project. The way that the program has evolved over time means that most groups have operated as independent and often isolated groups. There has been little contact in the past between groups. However, many Coordinators and Volunteers expressed an interest in being involved in the future in sharing ideas, attending joint information sessions and meeting people involved in other groups. There is great potential to foster a feeling of belonging without impacting negatively on the independence of groups. This may have a positive impact on sustainability in the longer term.

At one of the community forums groups were able to talk about how they could share resources and support each other (e.g. in the north east). After another forum (e.g. in the north-west) a phone call was received by the Project Officer asking about potential council funding that had been discussed at the forum as an attendee had returned to their Community Health Centre inspired to start a group.

**Table 24: do those involved in EWF groups feel part of a network?**

Feel part of a network?	Number	% of groups (n=20)
Yes	6	30%
No	14	70%
Unknown	5	-

Out of the 14 Coordinators who said that they did not feel part of a network seven said that they could see some benefits to being part of one (e.g. new ideas, training and information sharing possibilities).

The most commonly identified threats to the sustainability of EWF groups were a lack of volunteers (45.5% of groups), followed by a lack of coordinator/staffing changes in the auspice organisation and then a lack of participants. Lack of transport was the fourth most commonly identified issue followed by lack of suitable venue and lack of support from key personnel.

For example, the Okines groups at Dodges Ferry in the south of the State closes up for winter as its venue is not well heated. A suitable venue would enable this group to

operate all year round. The St Johns group had not been able to operate due to of the ill health of the Coordinator in 2007 but have restarted in 2008.

**Table 25: likely threats to the EWF groups**

<b>Threat to sustainability</b>	<b>Number of groups</b>	<b>% of all groups (n=22)</b>
Lack of support from key personnel	2	9.1%
Lack of volunteers	10	45.5%
Venue availability	2	9.1%
Lack of transport	3	13.6%
Lack of chef	1	4.5%
Lack of participants	4	18.2%
No coordinator /staff changes	4	18.2%
Limited capacity in venue	1	4.5%

The project responded to the research findings by:

- the production and distribution of a newsletter to all EWF groups (commenced early in 2008)
- discussion of mentoring possibilities between new and older existing groups and a list of available groups and contact details distributed at the forums and available on the website
- the decision to update the EWF manual and promote the manual through a series of community forums held around the State in regional areas (May 2008)
- a recognition of the barriers posed by issues like transport regulations, a lack of volunteers in some communities and new food safety regulations.

The project provided updates on food safety information through the new EWF Manual, the newsletter, and discussions between the Project Officer and individual coordinators. Groups were encouraged to share resources on matters like transport and to seek local industry and council support to assist with transport problems.

## **Objective 6: To collect feedback from participants of EWF groups about the perceived benefits to them of involvement in the EWF groups**

Due to the nature of EWF groups (e.g. very informal structures with changing membership and no formal record of participants) it was not possible to survey all participants across groups. Information was collected by the Project Officer on her visit to each group by way of interviews with participants and interviews with Coordinators and Volunteers. The evaluator also spoke to participants during the EWF forums at Bicheno, Hobart and Sheffield. Those involved were conscious that EWF participants do not wish to feel 'studied' or as if they have a problem. Even describing participants as 'socially isolated' puts a welfare tag on the groups that may be counter-productive.

The interviews with Coordinators indicated that the most commonly observed benefit for participants was the social interaction gained from being part of EWF. In 68% of groups this was identified as a key benefit to participants. This was followed by the opportunity to try new foods, to have a good meal or not have to cook for oneself. For some participants it provided opportunities to develop friendships and a reason to go out. The inter-generational groups (e.g. schools programs) provided an opportunity to mix with younger people and to build relationships between older and younger community members.

### **84 year old woman who lives alone in a rural area.**

"I have been coming to the EWF group for a couple of years now. The Coordinator rang and asked me if I would like to come and offered transport to get there which made a big difference to me. We get a nutritious nice meal and everyone is very friendly. When I come to EWF I have company. I can cook my own meals but it's nicer to have some company. I'd be lonely if I did not come to EWF. It makes a nice break from being at home by myself."

Other positive outcomes noted by coordinators were:

- increased motivation
- participants using the skills they learnt at EWF at home to cook a meal
- improved communication skills from mixing with others
- more confidence
- more sharing of tasks in the group
- being more accepting of other age groups in the community.

**Table 26: what do participants get out of coming to the group?**

<b>Benefit for participants</b>	<b>Number<sup>15</sup></b>	<b>% of groups (n=25)</b>
Social interaction	17	68%
Good food/try new food	10	40%
Friendship	9	36%
Entertainment /fun	2	8%
Something to look forward to	3	12%
A reason to go out /motivation	3	12%
Nutrition information	2	8%
Not having to cook	3	12%
Mixing with younger people	1	4%
Improved mobility	1	4%

*“I would not see anyone from week to week to have a joke with and a sing song if it were not for the Eating with Friends Group..” (92 year old woman, rural area)*

*“Coming to the Eating with Friends Group gives me something to do.. I get to have a good meal, a bit of a laugh... I always feel much happier when I go home at the end of the lunch..” (83 year old woman, rural area)*

*“This is the first time I have been out to a social event in years.... it has taken a while to get here but it was worth it.... I live alone in an isolated area and would not see anyone else for days at a time.... I am glad I came...” (woman in her early 60’s, rural area).*

<sup>15</sup> Note: more than one response possible to this question.

**Objective 7: To develop a profile of EWF volunteers and collect feedback from volunteers about why they are involved in the EWF programs.**

The research phase of the project gained the views of volunteers involved in 24 groups around the State. From the research we know that most volunteers were recruited via word of mouth and the majority were involved in other community work in their local area. It is estimated that there are currently over 123 volunteers involved in Eating with Friends groups around the State with an average of five volunteers per group.

**Profile 1 – volunteer rural community**

N is a woman aged between 61-70 years who used to work in disability and aged care and is now retired. She was looking for something to do in her retirement and saw an advertisement in the local newspaper. N has been volunteering with Eating with Friends for 1-2 years now and helps to prepare meals and talks with participants (social support role).

She also helps with some fundraising by cooking for a trade table. N likes the age group and thinks that older people miss out on a lot. She is also involved with other volunteer work. She feels that she can volunteer as she has the time and her own transport. N thinks their EWF group works well because the staff involved ‘put their heart and soul into it’ and it is a compatible group. As a volunteer she enjoys the company of being involved in EWF.

The most commonly used recruitment method for volunteers was word of mouth, followed by advertisements in local newspapers or newsletters.

**Table 27: recruitment method for volunteers**

Recruitment method	Number <sup>16</sup>	% of groups (n=25)
Word of mouth	11	44%
Committee members	1	4%
Advertise in newsletters	5	20%
RSL club	1	4%
Volunteering Tasmania /Volunteer service	2	8%
Neighbourhood House	1	4%
Church community	2	8%
Precincts (Glenorchy)	1	4%
School	1	4%
Total	25	-

<sup>16</sup> Note: more than one response possible

### Profile 3- volunteer urban community

J is a female volunteer aged between 61 and 70 years who has been involved for just under a year. She got involved after her husband died. J helps in a number of roles including preparing meals, social support, deciding on the menu and setting up the room. This is the only group she is involved in as a volunteer and feels that she is able to do so because she is retired, is able to drive and lives close by. J really likes seeing everyone come together and thinks that the group has benefits socially and nutritionally for those who come along. She thinks that the main threat to her group in the future might be a lack of volunteers.

The majority of volunteers appear to be involved in EWF groups because they like being with people, particularly older people and want to give something back to their community.

Many volunteers in EWF groups do not currently receive any training. Nearly 60% of groups are not providing any training to volunteers. Of the 36% who have provided some training this has been in the following areas:

- first aid
- nutrition issues
- dementia training
- cooking skills
- planning events
- basic volunteer training
- safe handling of food
- Occupational Health and Safety.

**Table 28: is training provided to volunteers?**

Training provided?	Number	% of groups (n=22)
Yes	9	40.9%
No	13	59.1%
Not applicable /no known	3	-
Total	25	-

As noted earlier the concept of training is problematic for many older EWF volunteers who have been involved in their communities for many years. Information provision (e.g. about new food safety legislation) is much more appealing to this group.

### **Profile 2 – Volunteer rural community**

M is younger than 50 years and is female. She became involved in EWF because of other community involvements but is relatively new to the role (less than 6 months). She helps with all aspects of the group – preparing meals, transport, social support and fundraising. M says she gets on well with the people in the group and likes to see them smile and laugh. She is involved in several other community activities (e.g. RSL and Bowls Club) and has the time to be involved in EWF even though she has other responsibilities (e.g. children, pets). M likes to see all these isolated people forget their aches and pains and have some fun time together. She thinks the group will keep going while people like her are prepared to put the time in to run it.

## **3.2 Benefits arising from the project for EWF Coordinators and Volunteers**

It is clear that EWF groups offer a range of benefits for those who run them as paid or volunteer staff. These include:

- a feeling of contributing to their community and a sense of purpose
- joy at watching older people enjoy themselves
- getting to know other volunteers and feeling part of a team
- making use of practical skills (e.g. cooking or driving, getting local businesses to donate items, organising skills) and having these skills recognised
- learning from the older people (e.g. “I get to learn all about the old recipes for things..”)

For paid Coordinators running an EWF allows them to meet the mandate of their agency in a cost effective and efficient way by bringing a number of ‘clients’ together at the one time. It also provides a service that cannot be provided by paid or one to one workers- the social contact is over and above other health and community services provided by these organisations.

## **3.3 Benefits gained from the project for the Project Officer and Steering Committee members**

**For the Steering Committee members** the project has enabled:

- research to be completed about what works to support EWF groups and what the future threats to sustainability might be
- the project officer role to be ‘trialed’ to assess its benefits
- opportunities to work collaboratively with other organisations on a joint project and to share information, resources and ideas
- the Steering Committee's membership to be expanded to include representation from the north and north-west of the state.
- the committee to gain clear insight into the need for a Project Officer role to ensure strong growth and sustainability of the EWF project
- future priorities for the project to be identified ( e.g. succession planning, a newsletter, information strategies, advocacy role and networking of groups)



- the development of resources through the project
- critical contact and support to groups, particularly those recently established, which will mean a greater likelihood that they will be sustained
- a focus for the committee which has resulted in the Steering Committee reviewing EWF objectives and developing a statement of values
- additions to the experience of the Steering Committee in managing projects, lobbying government, and in building support.

**For the Project Officer** the project has meant:

*“An opportunity to work with older people. I have mostly worked with teenagers. There are many comparable factors particularly around issues of connectedness, inclusion and value in society. My favourite model of EWF was the school model because of the potential community capacity building opportunities and its preventative approach”.*

*“EWF gave me an opportunity to understand the needs of older people and the importance of not treating them as a captive audience and telling them how they should live their lives. The EWF groups are not targeted to welfare recipients although they may include many people who have additional needs and require support.”*

*“Learning about an incredibly successful volunteer program that has far reaching benefits and flow on effects now and in the future of Tasmania and potentially nationwide. Having worked as a coordinator of volunteers I understand the importance of developing sustainability and the EWF model has done this very well so far.”*

*“Working with a professional and dedicated Steering Committee that has required significant reporting and input to the Project Officer’s work. It has been a pleasure to work with this group and the high expectations have added to my skill set and given me valuable insight into a diversity of organisations”.*

### **3.4 Factors that assisted the project to meet its objectives**

#### **Enthusiasm and commitment of the SC members to the project**

The Project Steering Committee brought a wealth of history and expertise to this project that was invaluable. Their understanding of the EWF model (some were involved in establishing the first program) enabled the project officer and others joining the committee to ‘hit the ground running’. The Committee members also had links to existing groups which was valuable to the Project Officer making contact. The Committee worked very collaboratively as a group which also assisted to ensure smooth project implementation.

#### **Skills brought to the project by the project staff**

Over the project the one part-time paid position was filled by two people – the first for the first eleven months and then the final ten months (allowing for recruitment time) of the project completed by her replacement. Both Project Officers brought particular skills to the project. In the latter part of the project the Project Officer was able to

meet and greet all groups, describe the different models clearly, produce a new manual, hold regional forums and generate promotional coverage which was a considerable amount of work for one part-time position. This achievement is a direct result of the skill of the person recruited.

#### **Willingness of local communities to welcome a Project Officer and work with the project**

Throughout the State EWF groups welcomed the Project Officer and were keen to engage with the project and contribute to mapping what is available.

#### **Having a good resource manual**

The resource manual was updated during this project and is now a more 'user friendly' and up to date resource. This was made possible by the contribution of the Committee members, and the fact that there was an existing manual to work from. It was also enhanced by being able to respond to the research findings of this project and also the Healthy Eating for Healthy Ageing in Rural Tasmania Report, June 2007 (University of Tasmania) which identified group dynamics as an issue in the sustainability of groups. The Project Officer consequently included a new section on group dynamics and communication skills for coordinators.

#### **Linkage to Eat Well Tasmania**

Eat Well Tasmania provided a valuable auspice for this project and through its networks was able to support the project to gain up to date information about matters like food safety, menu planning resources and to promote the program through its website and data base. It also provided the project with a reputable and professional basis from which to promote the objectives of the project.

#### **Linkages to Community Houses Network, Local Government and other sectors**

Having a representative of the Tasmanian Association of Community Houses (TACH) on the Committee has been an invaluable link to establishing more EWF groups around the State. Similarly having a Local Government representative has provided insight into how best to liaise with local government across the State.

### **3.5 Barriers to project achievements**

#### **Change of Project Officer**

The change over of Project Officer mid-way through the project did not have the level of impact that it may have done – while there was a slight delay in getting underway into the 'support' phase of the project this was overcome by having such a skilled facilitator.

#### **Limited hours of the project officer**

Limited hours available for the Project Officer hampered the ability to travel to visit each EWF group or reach out to new or forming groups

#### **Time spent in research phase**

The time spent collecting research data impacted on how much work could be done to support groups in their establishment. Some practical initiatives that may support EWF groups like the newsletter and issuing of menu ideas to groups only commenced relatively late in the project (e.g. early 2008). This allowed for limited time to evaluate the impact of these strategies on groups and their functioning.

### **Location of project officer in the north of the state**

Location of Project Officer in the north of the state, while valuable for promoting EWF in the north, did pose some barriers to the project officer accessing Steering Committee members, and the line manager in the auspice organisation, Eat well Tasmania, who were mainly based in the south. Although the in-kind support is acknowledged, administratively there were several delays with accessing stationery, and computer set up and technical support as the northern office has no administration support. Staff however, were as accommodating as they possibly could be within their constraints.

### **The fact that many of the EWF existed before this project**

The fact that most EWF groups had been established for a number of years (some since 1990) meant that some did not feel that they needed any assistance from a project like this one.

### **Groups feeling 'researched out'**

Some groups felt 'researched out' as they had been the focus for quite a bit of research by nutritionists and other groups in recent years. This meant that those involved in this project did not want to go to the same participants with similar questions (e.g. what do they get out of being involved in EWF groups?).

### **Limits to the promotions budget and concerns about not setting up things that could not be ongoing**

Within the project most funds were used for the Project Officer's salary. There was an adequate amount for the promotional materials that were developed within the time frame allowed, however any future promotional strategy funding would need to be adequately financed. Future Project Officers may also need to travel more extensively as the number of groups increases. Travel costs would be expected to increase significantly with rising fuel costs and the higher need for travel.

The other limiting factor was that the Committee was reluctant to commence things that may not be continued unless ongoing funding was available for the project officer/support project. In practice this meant that the newsletter commenced late in the life of the project and a separate web identity was not established for EWF. The latter may impact on recognition of a separate identity and the capacity for anyone searching for information to find it easily.

### **Difficulties in assessing real 'demand' in communities**

It is difficult for a project such as this to assess the real level of demand for a program like EWF in any given community. Coordinators were asked if they have had to turn people away from their group as part of this research. Most groups seem able to cope with demand for the program at the local level with only one group coordinator saying that they have had to turn people away. The limitation in this instance was the capacity to provide transport. The project has mapped where there are EWF groups. This is not to say that there are not other opportunities for older people to meet socially in the communities where no EWF exists. Groups may operate that do not call themselves Eating with Friends (e.g. Bruny Island Respite Centre provides a similar model but is not called Eating with Friends).

### 3.6 Lesson learnt from the project about EWF groups and their operation

The things that have been learnt from this project are that:

- a key local organiser is essential
- groups can operate with very little funding if an auspice provides a venue and a coordinator
- community support in provision of food, transport or other resources is valuable
- partnerships between groups can be valuable in ensuring longer term sustainability (e.g. give volunteers a rest, help bring along new participants, provision of transport)
- having more than one team of volunteers can enable an EWF to be offered more frequently (increased capacity)
- a link with local health and community service providers is essential to gaining referrals for those who may benefit from the group
- joining a number of EWF groups together at regular intervals (e.g. a central hub) can lead to even greater social connection and create a sense of a special 'event'
- mentoring and information sharing opportunities may add to the longer term sustainability of groups
- transport difficulties are the biggest single barrier to more groups forming and continuing to operate over time, especially in rural areas with larger distances to cover
- groups require access to information about matters such as insurance, menu planning and legislative changes that may impact upon them
- many volunteers do not want formal training but information provision is acceptable
- there is room to develop a viable network of EWF groups around the State
- it is likely that further programs will develop over time if ongoing information about the program and 'examples' of programs in action can be provided
- it is valuable for those interested in setting up a new group to visit and be part of an EWF group to see how they work
- more resourcing for promotion work is required in the longer term as many communities, organisations do not yet know about the EWF model
- targeting youth organisations and schools would be a useful future strategy (e.g. attending School Principals Meetings)
- EWF may provide a valuable model for a Council, School and Community House to work together at the local level
- in rural area Online Access Centres and libraries may be targeted for promotion of EWF groups – to participants and volunteers (e.g. information sent out to the Home Book Service for Housebound People recipients)
- in the future the project may produce promotional materials that could be modified by groups at the local level and used for broader scale media campaigns (e.g. community service announcements on TV, at the cinema and on radio).

### **3.7 Strategies for supporting sustainability into the future**

Ongoing funding is required for:

- staffing resources to support the continued roll out of groups and maintenance of existing groups
- promotion and marketing resources.

The role of an EWF Project Officer in the future would be to:

- facilitate mentoring opportunities
- support new groups and provide a focal point for the program
- update resources
- continue promotion of the concept
- provide information to groups about issues that may impact on their sustainability (e.g. changes to legislation)
- run information sessions for Coordinators and Volunteers on specific topics
- encourage groups to belong to a network of EWF groups to assist with sharing of resources, skills and expertise
- facilitate networking and partnerships between groups
- seek funding for research or evaluation
- provide opportunities to reward and recognise EWF volunteers.

The role of a Statewide Committee would be to:

- provide 'content' support for a Project Officer
- harness resources and input from a range of interested stakeholder groups from different parts of the State
- act in an advocacy capacity to take up issues that are impacting on the operation of EWF groups with decision makers
- support the Project Officer in future updating of the resource manual
- be involved in developing promotional campaigns and tools and promoting the model
- oversight future evaluation and research.

# Appendices

## **Eating With Friends Project Research Questions and Tools**

The purpose of the research is to develop an understanding of the factors that enable or act as barriers to the operation of EWF groups.

### **Key Questions:**

What are the conditions that lead to the establishment of an EWF group?

What local community need did the EWF group hope to address? How effectively have these needs been addressed?

What are the factors that contribute to EWF groups' success? Are groups sustained, growing, inclusive, offering healthy food choices?

What are the factors that contribute to EWF groups' inability to sustain activities once established?

What are the demographics of existing EWF groups' participants?

What are the demographics of existing EWF groups' workers/volunteers?

What resources and support do groups require to sustain their activities? Are there any identified needs? E.g. newsletter, regular regional catch-ups, web based discussion forum, etc

### **Group Discussions**

As a participant:

What was your main motivation when you first attended?

Why do you continue to attend?

As a Volunteer:

What are the reasons you devote your time to this EWF group?

Are they the same reasons you first started to volunteer?

What is the best thing about this EWF group?

What could be improved about this EWF group?

How has your life been affected by being a member of this EWF group, either volunteer or participant?

