**Talk and Tucker**

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This standalone health service is located some 260 km round trip from the nearest regional centre, making many support services inaccessible due to distance. Due to 12 completed suicides in an 18-month period, there was an identified need in the community for an intervention program that addressed social isolation, mental illness and could be delivered on a limited budget. The implementation of the ‘Talk and Tucker’ program addressed social isolation and mental illness by encouraging new friendships, redefining a sense of self and identity, and building confidence and self-esteem. The program looked at the critical perspective focusing on social inclusion and its ability to develop a sense of future. It involved participants in designing a menu, preparing the ingredients, cooking and dining together in a supportive environment.

The core vulnerable group had indicated a lived mental health experience and demonstrated high levels of depression and anxiety, and some had in-completed suicide. All participants lived alone with no indication of any social support networks and limited or no family contact. This program was delivered over a six-month period involving 12 participants and cost as little as $400 for ingredients. The program was delivered by the family support worker and supported by different staff and volunteers each time.

Participants were informed on what constituted healthy eating and meal planning on a budget. To minimise costs the preparation and cooking took place at the service with simple menus. Participants learnt how to prepare and cook a meal, then enjoyed sharing stories around the dinner table. Volumes of conversation flowed through each stage of the program with a lot of incidental teaching regarding healthy choices, both mentally and physically, and it was evident that friendships were flourishing. The last session involved organising a Christmas dinner for staff; participants were excited to present what they had cooked and waited excitedly for positive feedback. It was during this last session that some participants decided they would gather to share a Christmas dinner rather than being alone again. Words could not describe how proud these people were to be involved, share stories about their lives and feel included. To date, all stay in touch and socialise together. Many participants had previously lead extraordinary lives, yet became disconnected from life due to lived mental health experiences. To see participants build friendships and reengage with society was rewarding for both staff and participants.