

MEALS ON WHEELS ASSOCIATION OF TASMANIA INC
50TH ANNIVERSARY
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
DRAWING ROOM, MONDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2021

Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the 50th birthday of the Meals on Wheels Association of Tasmania Inc.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

And I would like to acknowledge:

- Barry Stubbs, President;
- Rebecca Free, CEO;
- Board members, Kate Beven, Katie Kelly, Madeline Sheehan, Charles Von Steiglitz, and Dianne Kelly.

May I also say that it is truly wonderful to have Meals on Wheels members here from so many parts of our island.

The history of the Meals on Wheels in Tasmania is fascinating. Hobart Meals on Wheels was started by Edith Cuthbert in 1955. It was the first of its type in Tasmania and the third Meals on Wheels in Australia.

But here is an intriguing aspect. The year before, on the 10th of May 1954, the following appeared in the *Mercury* newspaper's Letters to the Editor page. I quote:

'There is one way in which old people could be helped in their own homes ... I refer to the idea of 'meals on wheels', as carried out in the Melbourne suburb

of Brunswick ... They take hot meals to the homes of old people who are sick, or bed-ridden. I find many others interested in the idea ... With an insufficient number of rest homes, this could be a valuable contribution.”

End of quote. The full letter was signed by “Old Identity [of] Sandy Bay.”¹

So, there must be every chance this “Old Identity’ worked together with Edith Cuthbert on bringing the idea to life in Tasmania.

In the inaugural October 1957 Annual Report of Hobart Meals on Wheels, it was noted that there was, I quote: “A psychological bonus attached for the clients when the drivers delivered their hot meal. Even volunteers stressed the social benefits for those receiving the meals. In many cases it led to improved health.”²

Elizabeth Dunbabin, one of the early stalwarts of Hobart Meals on Wheels, also stressed the importance of personal contact. She pointed out that services like Meals on Wheels alleviated isolation when she stated: “It is a good service, Meals on Wheels. It is a community service... A sort of friendship.”³

In 1963, a second branch was formed at Glenorchy, with meals provided by volunteers using a small kitchen made available by the local council.

The inaugural meeting for establishing the Meals on Wheels Association of Tasmania was held in Campbelltown in March 1971. That meeting was attended by representatives of seven of the twelve Meals on Wheels groups then operating. They were Hobart, Glenorchy, Devonport, Ulverstone, Latrobe, Burnie and Portland\St Helens, which was interestingly operated by the Red Cross Society.

The collapse of the Tasman Bridge in 1975 was the catalyst for the formation of an independent group on the Eastern Shore, when it became isolated and could not then receive meals from Hobart.

I have acknowledged your founder, Edith Cuthbert. She passed away in late 1989, aged 96. Her son donated \$1000 to the Meals on Wheels Association in memory of his mother. It was agreed that the money should be used to pay for the printing of the 1989 book: *The First Twenty Years: A History of the Meals on Wheels Association of Tasmania* by Geoffrey McFarlane.

¹ Mercury, Monday 10 May 1954, page 4.

² Attachment to Rebecca Free email dated 28 October 2021 to David Owen.

³ Ibid.

There have been quite a few publications since, including the comprehensive 2005 book *Meals, Wheels and Volunteers: 50 Years of Meals on Wheels in Hobart* by historian Dr Dianne Snowden.

I have been made aware that during the height of COVID-19 in mid-2020, Meals on Wheels volunteers organised phone calls to clients who requested a need for contact. That will have been most welcome. I thank you all for your contributions to our community in such difficult times.

The phrase “More than just a Meal” has become the motto for Meals on Wheels and volunteers are the backbone of the organisation.

Your work over the past half a century is enormously appreciated, just as it will be into the future. On behalf of all our community, I thank you and all your volunteers.

On a personal note, my mother was a volunteer for many years. I recall helping her as a young child, taking the meals to clients. Many years later, Don helped her. I also volunteered for a short period when I was at university. We both could see how much the clients appreciated the social contact.

As this is a 50th birthday, our Executive Chef, Ainstie Wagner, and her Kitchen team have made lots of birthday cupcakes to take home with you. Ainstie’s team are constantly cooking for or assisting groups such as Colony 47, the Migrant Resource Centre and Hobart Women’s Shelter.

Thank you again for your wonderful dedication and please now enjoy the reception.