

MEDIA RELEASE

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LITTLE FREE PANTRY NETWORK EXPANDS TO FOUR-LEGGED FAMILY MEMBERS

A new Little FREE Pet Pantry at Portland Secondary College is helping ensure that when local families are doing it tough, their much-loved pets don't have to go without.

United Way Glenelg has expanded its Little FREE Pantry initiative with a dedicated pantry for pet food and basic pet supplies, located on the perimeter of Portland Secondary College and accessible to the wider community.

The pantry operates on the same simple principle as United Way Glenelg's existing Little FREE Pantries, "give what you can, take what you need," providing discreet access to support without registration, appointments or questions.

United Way Glenelg Executive Officer Nicole Carr said the idea recognised that food insecurity affected the whole household, including its four-legged members.

"Anyone who has a pet knows they are much more than an animal in the backyard. They are companions, part of the family and, for some people, one of their most important sources of connection," Ms Carr said.

"When household budgets are stretched, people are making incredibly difficult choices. We want to make one of those choices a little easier."

Foodbank Australia's Paws in Need – Pet Hunger Report highlighted the lengths people experiencing food insecurity will go to protect their pets. Almost one in four food-insecure pet owners surveyed reported skipping meals so their pets could eat, while 34 per cent reduced their own food intake and 42 per cent bought cheaper food for themselves or their household.

The research also found surrendering a pet was considered a last resort, highlighting the importance of helping people keep their animals fed and at home with the people who love them.

Locally, food insecurity is also a concern. Glenelg Shire health and wellbeing data shows 11.3 per cent of adults definitely worried about running out of money to buy food during the previous 12 months, compared with 9.7 per cent across Victoria, with a further 14.5 per cent sometimes worried about having enough money for food.

"We know there are people in our community who will go without themselves before they let their pet go hungry," Ms Carr said.

"The Little FREE Pet Pantry is a very simple response. If you need some pet food, take it. If you are in a position to donate some, leave it. There is no judgement and no need to explain your circumstances."

The pantry itself has also become a student-led project. Portland Secondary College students worked alongside staff member and artist Gene Stewart to paint and create a

unique design for the pantry, turning a practical community resource into something that reflects the creativity and contribution of the young people behind it.

Portland Secondary College Principal Joanne Kindred said the project was a great example of students using their creativity to make a practical difference in their community.

"Our students have really embraced the opportunity to put their own stamp on the pantry and, importantly, understand the purpose behind it," Ms Kindred said.

"It's a simple project, but one that encourages our young people to think about the challenges others may be facing and how they can be part of the solution. We're proud to provide a home for the Little FREE Pet Pantry and to see our students contribute to something that will support local families and their pets."

The project provides an ongoing opportunity for students to be involved in practical community action, from raising awareness and encouraging donations to helping keep the pantry stocked.

The Little FREE Pet Pantry now joins United Way Glenelg's network of Little FREE Pantries providing free food and essential items across the Glenelg Shire.

Community members are encouraged to support the new pantry by donating unopened pet food and suitable pet supplies, helping ensure local pets and the people who love them are supported when times are tough.

PHOTO: Scott Graham, Mason Lindsey and Addi Newton. The head at the back is Chaz Hann-Robb.

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