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### **THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE COST OF LIVING MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON THURSDAY 24 MAY 2012**

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**Mr PAT BURTON**, FOOD PROGRAM MANAGER TASMANIA, SECOND BITE, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Ms White) - Thank you for joining us. I just remind you that the conversations we have will be recorded by Hansard. You will be covered by parliamentary privilege for the evidence you provide to us today but anything you say outside the committee will not be covered. Is that clear?

**Mr BURTON** - It is clear.

**CHAIR** - I would be interested in hearing your thoughts on how vulnerable members of our community access the services of SecondBite and other food-relief agencies. There are a number of distribution points that I am aware of, but I am wondering if there is a way we can better communicate that to the broader community. In some cases people are a little unsure about how they access these services.

**Mr BURTON** - It is timely that you should ask that because I am currently looking at our recipient list with a view to updating our data processes so that we can cluster our different recipients into easily identified areas. One typical recipient agency is a residential service, the likes of Bethel House, Mara House, the Salvation Army bridge program, so we would cluster all of those into residential services. Another classification may be outreach vans - Louie's Van, Danny's Bus - we are going to kick off with them in the next couple of weeks. We have another program called EFROS - emergency food relief outreach service - which looks after a whole lot of people who are being supported in the community, mainly tenancy support, for a whole range of reasons. It may be drug and alcohol, mental health et cetera. That is one little program that is kicking on particularly well. Another one would be drop-in centres. That is a very clear group of clientele that we service. Food-pantry types such as the Benevolent Society are probably a good example of that where it is a publicly available food pantry where people can get assistance.

Without going into a whole lot of detail, that is the sort of thing we do. In other words, my plan, and hopefully I should have this completed over the next three or four months, is to be able to produce not only our total quantity but a breakdown of all the food types and then a breakdown of the types of agencies we are servicing. I think that should help in that regard.

**Mr MORRIS** - Are you supplying the frontline agencies as such? They are presumably buying most of their food at present? The effect will be that you will bring down their costs and they will be able to provide a greater degree of service with the money they have.

**Mr BURTON** - Yes, that is a message that I like to promote at any forum I'm in. Three years ago there was no coordinated food rescue and redistribution service. It was all ad hoc. It

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is not only ourselves, there is Food Bank and Produce to the People, and we are all working in a regular way, us in particular offering a delivery service to all these agencies. I think we are at a stage now where we can start to factor in some economic modeling around this to say that we can anticipate next year and we can be fairly sure that there's going to be x number of dollars coming in via emergency food rescue and redistribution into the bigger picture.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - At the moment some organisations might give a \$20 food voucher to somebody. If that money was given to you instead would you be able to give them a lot more value than the supermarket for \$20?

**Mr BURTON** - I can show you evidence now that we are able to do that, especially through the EFROS program. A typical food hamper would comprise approximately 8 or 9 kilos of food, and it is all fresh food - eggs, milk, bread, fruit and vegetables. They would be the basics. In other words, I think we value our food hampers going out at probably \$50 or \$60 if you had to buy them. We are assisting the emergency food relief voucher system and we are making it go further.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - Would it be better to give it to you altogether or do you see there is still a place for vouchers?

**Mr BURTON** - I know from a lot of discussions that I have had with different agencies and recipients that as much as the food voucher system is able to be policed in that people can't buy alcohol and cigarettes, above and beyond that they are free to buy pretty much whatever they like. In answer to your question, yes, I think at the end of the day, if given a greater percentage of that food voucher funding we could certainly have some better outcomes as far as nutrition is concerned.

**CHAIR** - On that matter, though, in defence of food vouchers or vouchers generally - and we have talked previously, Pat, about the efficiency that your service delivers - vouchers are also provided for nappies and other services that families need.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - At times, but a lot of the time they are for food.

**CHAIR** - If you are talking specifically about food, yes, but they are also provided for school expenses and a range of other initiatives -

**Ms PETRUSMA** - I am talking about the ones where they can go to emergency relief centres and they are just given a \$20 food voucher to take to Woollies and it is supposed to be just for -

**CHAIR** - Or it could be for nappies. There are other things that they do purchase that aren't necessarily food and that SecondBite just can't provide

**Ms PETRUSMA** - Food bank do give nappies as well. I have seen them given out, and nappy wipes.

**CHAIR** - Yes, but they don't have a great variety.

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**Ms PETRUSMA** - I see on page 4 of your submission, Pat, that a social return on investment analysis was conducted by Social Ventures and it concluded that under the SecondBite model, for every dollar invested some \$4.42 was created in social value. Do you know how they calculated that?

**Mr BURTON** - I couldn't tell you verbatim how it is actually done, Jacquie. From the limited research that I have done in the area this ability of agencies such as SVA to come up with a figure is a lot more reliable today than it was five or six years ago. They are getting close to the mark and have the ability to justify how they get to it. I could certainly do a little bit of research and get some information back to you.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - I would be interested.

**CHAIR** - Could you update us on where the Food Angels project is at? It was a pilot project but has it been funded to continue?

**Mr BURTON** - The Food Angels project began at the beginning of last year and it ran through last year with three pilots and there is another one going currently at the moment. It is pretty well all the way through and that is at Kingborough. At the end of this the plan is to produce a manual and get involved in the evaluation of the project.

The funding for Food Angels is an interesting discussion because there was never actually any funding for it in the first place. It was designed purely as a collaboration between three agencies that you could pretty well do off the side of a desk or as adjunct to existing programs, so there was no big impost. It wasn't a matter of agencies having to go and get set funding to run this program. It was designed to fit in especially with DHHS at Glenorchy and Anglicare, to sit within their overall case management model and that is how it has worked fairly well. However, along the way we have managed to get small amounts of funding to assist us with the evaluation of the program and some of the administration. It is not a big money thing.

**CHAIR** - How do you think it is going, without having properly evaluated it?

**Mr BURTON** - There has been good feedback from some of the clients, but it is early days and we would be more than happy to get detail of the evaluation to you when it is available in the next few months.

**CHAIR** - That would be terrific if you could provide that to the committee. I think that it sounds like quite an interesting project.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - Where else do you see that Food Angels could extend into? Where would you see the high needs areas for this program?

**Mr BURTON** - The Salvation Army have shown some interest in incorporating Food Angels into their Doorways program. Colony 47 have said that they are interested in incorporating it as well. I think that within the general sphere of case management, as an adjunct to overall case management, I think that it is a useful tool.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - Have they said particular suburbs in the state they would like to use it in?

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**Mr BURTON** - Yes, some of the low SES areas, especially Gagebrook, Bridgewater, Clarendon Vale and some areas in the north of the state which I am not entirely familiar with.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - I see where you have a target of 360 00 kilos of food this year - top of page 4 in 2012; do you see that target as unlimited? What would your goal be for 2013? What would be the ideal?

**Mr BURTON** - Jacquie, what we have done recently is engage an operations manager for the north of the state. In other words, we will have a physical presence; we do at the moment, this has only happened in the last few weeks. What has also become very apparent to us is the fact that most of the food in Tasmania is produced in the north of the State so by having a physical presence up there we are very confident of being able to access a lot more - vegetables especially. To give you a bit of an idea, I think I put a list in here of some of our regular suppliers.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - Page 2.

**Mr BURTON** - There is an example of a couple vegetable growers up there. Pure Foods, which produce around 70 per cent of the state's eggs, are a good supplier of ours so no doubt they would assist with our expansion up north as well. You are no doubt aware that we are heavily tied with Coles supermarkets and we collect from every Coles store at the moment in Tasmania. Tamar Valley Dairy, they have been in the news lately, are another supplier of ours so we would be looking to get some surplus from them. We are very confident that that figure will be easily replicated next year if not exceeded.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - Have you already started in Launceston?

**Mr BURTON** - We started in November last year through our Community Connect service. Community Connect is where SecondBite engage with local agencies and we train them in basic food handling, introduce them to a local supermarket and they collect on our behalf. Those two agencies that we did engage with were the Launceston City Mission and the Launceston Benevolent Society. They have been picking up since November thrice weekly amongst all the Coles agencies up there.

**CHAIR** - Something I am quite interested in is the collaboration across different agencies and the partnerships that can be formed, particularly between SecondBite, Food Bank and Produce to the People. You have talked also about some of the funding that comes from other agencies, particularly for a Food Angels project, in working together already. How do we help you work better together across different agencies or is it happening organically?

**Mr BURTON** - It is happening organically in some areas but I will push the collaboration thing as hard as I possibly can, especially in regard to Food Bank. Thankfully recently there has been a good deal of cooperation or at least dialogue between ourselves and Food Bank. Produce to the People is one of our agencies that is collecting from a Coles store up in Burnie, so they are already involved in that process as well. I suppose what could be useful is just to fund some dedicated economic modelling of just how a good collaborative process might work.

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**Mr STURGES** - When I read your submission I was particularly interested in Feeding the Future. I refer to the horticultural side of it, where you have these community-type gardens. You have talked about the collaboration that you have with other like organisations. Do you have any relationship with the community houses within the State, because there are a number of community gardens attached to the community houses?

**Mr BURTON** - We have a Food Producers Guild that has grown out of the Feeding the Future program. In other words, whilst the funding for that particular program is about to expire, the program will officially be over in June this year, the ongoing work will continue because we have to fund members of the guild and a lot of the community houses have gardens attached to them. So, yes, we are already dealing with 12 community houses at the moment, some of whom were in fact recipient agencies before Feeding the Future started, so we do have a very strong relationship.

**Mr STURGES** - I am pleased to hear that because I immediately think of three in my electorate in the area that you are targeting. I see the benefit of being able to get not only the fresh produce but also learning the skills to grow the vegetables.

**Mr BURTON** - Yes. It is a big focus of what we do.

**Mr STURGES** - I am very pleased that you have that relationship.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - Just on EFROS, I see where it began in October 2010 following a request from an agency, so did Colony 47 or something like that request it?

**Mr BURTON** - Our biggest recipient agency is Centacare. They are running quite a few tenancy support programs in the community and, yes, originally it came from a one-off request. The case at hand was an agency supporting a rather large family that were living in two caravans in a caravan park in the middle of winter and they had no food and no money. That is pretty much where it started off and it has grown exponentially to the point where I think we are pushing out between 1 200 and 1 500 kilos, up to one and a half tonnes per month. I think if you can imagine a tonne of food, it would be three or four pallets done up into food hampers. That is the amount of food hampers going out. There are six or eight a day.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - So how many people?

**Mr BURTON** - It would average, say, three people in a family. Sometimes it is a single person, sometimes it is a single mum with a couple of kids, or it could be mum and dad and three teenage kids. When they phone the orders in we try to pack the hampers accordingly. There are 40 a week, 120 a month.

**Mr STURGES** - There is a community house in my electorate that has just created an emergency food pantry. You may well be aware of the house that I am talking about. Now you have talked about the distribution of the food, and I commend you for the work you do, but is there capacity or a possibility that some of these community houses could work with your organisation to help maintain an emergency food pantry at those houses? The reason I ask is that over the years I have come in contact with people who have been

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a little ashamed to seek help in what we would consider is an open and transparent way. Is that something you are involved in or would possibly contemplate?

**Mr BURTON** - We would certainly contemplate formalising that because it's happening anyway in a lot of areas. One of the coordinators of one of the houses told me last week that there are more and more disadvantaged people accessing that service and they know when the SecondBite truck turns up. They are all out of their house waiting for us.

**Mr STURGES** - I was astounded one night last week. I was driving past the Glenorchy City Council Chambers, and I have seen Louie's Van out and about before, but the number of people who were there. I think it was a Wednesday night and that indicated to me that there is a growing demand.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - What does SecondBite need to go into the future?

**Mr BURTON** - Funding.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - What programs would you like to put in place or see extended and what are your needs into the future?

**Mr BURTON** - I think what we have done in the last three years is look at a whole lot of different avenues where we might make a difference or enhance existing services. To enable a lot of those initiatives to come to fulfilment we require the certainty of knowing that we'll be here next year doing the same things.

To give you a bit of a snapshot - and I spoke to our manager before we came out today - we are needing \$252 000 next year. We already have \$100 000 committed, so we have \$100 000 in the bank. We have \$75 000 in submissions outstanding, so even if we get that in, which isn't a certainty, we are still \$177 000 short. That is just to keep ticking along. I do not think that's a lot of money in this day and age.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - So this is the financial year starting 1 July?

**Mr BURTON** - Yes, this is the 2012-13 budget.

**CHAIR** - Can you expand on where your costs are?

**Mr BURTON** - Luckily we maintain a lot of our human resources costs by using volunteers. I never miss an opportunity like this to let people know the great work that our volunteers do, especially the Rotary organisation; they are very much behind us. We can maintain a lot of our costs but, with the increasing price of electricity, we have to run cool rooms and refrigerated vehicles. We have one that has chalked up about 290 000 km at the moment. It is an older vehicle and we have to keep those vehicles going. It is just the cost of running a logistic organisation; nothing is getting any cheaper.

**Mr STURGES** - Do you lease or rent your location at Glenorchy?

**Mr BURTON** - St Vincent de Paul has been very good. The place we are renting at the moment became available; it was very timely so we moved in there. We have a long tenure there, so that isn't an issue. It is not huge, but we don't need a huge operation

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because the food is coming in and out fairly quickly. The location is good, we have mostly all we need; we just need to be able to maintain that and replace vehicles when they come up for replacement. Obviously the price of electricity is something that we really try to keep an eye on, especially in the summer. It is very expensive to run the cool room. I don't think fuel is going to get any cheaper.

**CHAIR** - Talking about collaboration across the other food security relief providers, I find Penelope Dodd's model of Produce to the People quite interesting because she collects from a range of different small shops. I might grow vegetables, have a surplus and I can drop them off at my local shop and then she picks it up or has a volunteer pick it up. It also allows that shop, if they need to, because there is an excess and you don't want to use all that broccoli, to use that in their own products and they sell broccoli soup. It is a little bit of social enterprise model and they have a bit of a trading pattern happening. Is there any scope for your organisation to incorporate that model in the southern part of the state?

**Mr BURTON** - There certainly is. Early discussions between myself and Penelope came down to the fact that she said, 'Well, you need a Produce to the People in the south and we need a SecondBite up here'. The two models can work extremely well together. There is no doubt about that.

We are getting into this whole area of community gardens, as you mentioned before, Graeme. One little thing that I will mention is that we are involved in developing a program in collaboration with the prison. The Risdon Vale Community House, the local schools and the local council are involved. It is all about prisoners actually producing vegetables inside the prison and making them available to the local community and then any surplus that is left over goes into the SecondBite redistribution network. That is the sort of thing that can be done fairly cheaply now, especially with the Hayes inmates that will be coming back to Risdon Vale and looking for opportunities. On top of that the local church have donated a couple of acres of land that has already been ploughed up and is ready to go as well. There is a hell of a lot of potential out there or resources to start to do what David Adams has been banging on about for a long time, and that is getting these local food systems happening.

**Mr STURGES** - I heard what you said about the need for security of funding - and it is not lost on me, I understand - and as you grow your capacity to obtain produce thus you grow the need or necessity to distribute.

**Mr BURTON** - Yes and no. If we can assist people with building local food systems then they don't have to travel as far to source some of those.

**Mr STURGES** - Of course, yes.

**Mr BURTON** - I think once you have a logistic operation and it is pretty well funded, it is not much more expensive throwing an extra 500 kilos on the truck as it goes around. But there will obviously be proportionate need for more funding as we expand and there is no two ways about that.

**Mr STURGES** - As it stands now, the critical issue is vehicles and the appropriateness of vehicles. The refrigerated vehicle and electricity are your two major costs.

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**Mr BURTON** - Yes, and wages.

**Mr STURGES** - Yes, of course. That takes up the bulk of the \$250 000-odd that you are referring to?

**Mr BURTON** - Pretty much, yes.

**Mr STURGES** - That is obtained through applying for grants?

**Mr BURTON** - We were lucky to get a bit of a kick start with the state government. They have been good - the Tas Community Fund.

**Mr STURGES** - Again, there is no security -

**Mr BURTON** - There is no security.

**Mr STURGES** - so there is no real capacity for you to plan?

**Mr BURTON** - Exactly.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - Pat, on 1 July, if you don't have that \$177 000 that you need on top of your \$100 000 to keep on going forward, what is going to happen then?

**Mr BURTON** - The worse case scenario is we pull the door down. We don't think that way, though. We're a little bit more optimistic than that. A big part of what we do obviously is funding submissions and looking for opportunities for funding. But it is a very competitive market out there and it is becoming more competitive.

**Ms PETRUSMA** - When do you need that answer?

**Mr BURTON** - I could not tell you it is on 15 September or anything like, but about three months down the track if we did not have some fairly concrete knowledge of some funding coming in then we would be a bit concerned.

**CHAIR** - SecondBite is a national organisation so what support do you get from the nation office to run your operation?

**Mr BURTON** - SecondBite is set up so that each state looks after itself. However some of the funding that is donated in Melbourne is not donated specifically for that state, so we have been able to access small amounts but there is not a lot involved.

**CHAIR** - Do they assist with the administration of the organisation in Tasmania, for instance the HR payroll and those type of things?

**Mr BURTON** - Yes, they look after that.

**CHAIR** - Is there anything you would like to add before we finish?



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**Mr BURTON** - Thank you for the opportunity; it has been an interesting ride in the last three years. We have learnt a lot and we want to go forward in a collaborative way. We want to see the efficiencies of any initiatives that have happened to date continue on. The big issue is food security, and having David Adams as Social Inclusion Commissioner. When we looked at the terms of reference, originally food security was not there and it is up there now. I think it is something that needs to be recognised as an important part of the whole.

**Mr STURGES** - In your submission you made reference to some research that you had undertaken in relation to food security. Are we able to get a summary of that or any of the report that may have been produced? I would be interested to see what you have looked at, what recommendations have come out of it and what key issues surrounding food security are? I assume that research has been done in relation to Tasmania.

**Mr BURTON** - We are conducting a recipients survey annually

**Ms PETRUSMA** - I thought the Food Security Council report came out last year.

**Mr BURTON** - No, we have done our own. We get a lot of good information back from the recipients survey. We can make that available.

**CHAIR** - That would be great, thank you.

**Mr BURTON** - There is a paper written by a PhD student who has been running our research and development in Melbourne and I can make that available.

**Mr STURGES** - That information would be of assistance.

**CHAIR** - Thank you again, Pat, for coming today and sorry for the delay in starting.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**