

Latrobe Valley residents: “The government is failing very badly”

Michelle Stevens
26 October 2017

Rising numbers of families in Australia’s Latrobe Valley are being forced to rely on charities for assistance. The WSWs interviewed Fiona and Cheryl, who run a not-for-profit charity, Theodore’s Cheerful Givers, providing 200-300 food parcels a month and other aid.

Fiona, who has been volunteering for nine years, described the growing need. “We are seeing more elderly and more families with kids,” she said. “We don’t discriminate. We don’t force people to fill out forms and answer questions about where their money goes, like the other charities. People are often embarrassed that they need help and they shouldn’t be questioned. We help anyone off the street. Some people would rather go without food and starve than feel small.”

Cheryl, who helped establish the charity, said: “Some people are very embarrassed and sometimes people cry when we give them food. People are so grateful for the help they get from us. The elderly get quite distressed and sometimes won’t tell anyone they need help. They are often referred to us by someone else. We have a lot of single parents with up to six kids who need our help. We always feed the kids”.

Cheryl explained that Theodora’s Cheerful Givers, which receives no government funding and depends on fund-raising, is struggling to survive and may be forced to shut down. A rent increase of \$660 a month, combined with the increasing costs of buying and transporting pallets of food from the Food Bank in Melbourne has resulted in the need to start charging people \$5 (if they can pay) for food parcels.

Fiona described the conditions in the region. “The mill closed, then Hazelwood, and now it looks like Loy Yang [power station] will close. Unemployment is getting even higher. Lack of jobs is the main thing.

People are becoming homeless every day, things are getting worse. It’s very, very hard when there is no work. People are looking, but there are no jobs. Housing prices have dropped because of the lack of jobs. If you sell and move, you lose money and people can’t move because of a lack of money, so they are caught in an endless trap.

“No food affects people’s mental health, and they start to turn to crime and drugs. There are no jobs for young people and they are going nowhere fast. There are not many jobs here for them, except in a fast food outlet and that’s like slave labour.”

Cheryl commented: “People were told Hazelwood would remain open for another eight years, so they bought houses here. Now they have shut it down, we are expecting an increase in people needing help with all the layoffs.”

Asked about the role of the current and previous governments, Cheryl said: “The government is failing very badly. I have lived here since I was a little girl. Things started to go bad since privatisation [of the electricity company].”

Fiona added: “It doesn’t matter who we vote for, they all screw us over. They are full of promises but once they are in that all changes and they take more from us. They made a lot of promises during the Hazelwood closure. They have failed.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact