

DRIVING SOCIAL INNOVATION IN PLACE AND COMMUNITY

2025 City North Activation Program

CITY NORTH FRUGAL CANTEEN FOOD FESTIVAL

City North Frugal Canteen Food Festival

Project Lead: Dr. Helen Addison-Smith

Project Summary

The aim of the *Frugal Canteen Project* was to act as a direct solution to the City North Activation Challenge that focuses on reducing food insecurity through sustainable practices. The Project sought to combat the issue of food insecurity through fostering a sense of belonging and creativity within the RMIT community and turning simple, affordable ingredients into unique dining experiences.

Activating public spaces in RMIT's City North Social Innovation Precinct by hosting communal 'street restaurant' events allowed for students, staff, communities and partners to be brought together. This enabled social barriers to be broken down and encouraged connections to be formed through conversation around food, culture, and resourcefulness.

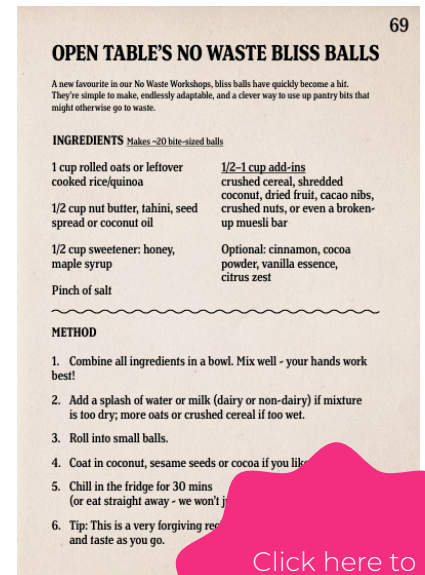
Key project aims were to make healthy, delicious meals accessible to all, highlight sustainable eating habits, and inspire participants to rethink the everyday ingredients available to them. Ultimately, the goal was to strengthen wellbeing, social connection, and food literacy across RMIT campuses. Changing the way students access and view healthy food to be an enjoyable and inclusive experience was also a priority, intending to reduce the stigma often felt around consuming cheaper, lower value and upcycled food.

The Project was delivered through collaboration with: Long Prawn, Just Food Collective, Lipstick + Bread, Heliotop, Sasha Margolis, Hagens Organics, Natoora and Cookers.

Key Project Activities, Milestones & Deliverables

The first activity delivered by the Project was the 'Fermentathon'. This event gave 65 RMIT students across the City and Brunswick campuses the opportunity to learn and take part in circular food practices and sustainable consumption. Altogether, the participants made 245 litres of pickles from upcycled vegetables.

The headline event for the Project was the participation in the 2025 City North Shared Futures Festival held in the Precinct in October. The Frugal Canteen was a key activity in the festival and served over 2,900 free meals to the City North community, exceeding the team's goal by more than 900 meals. The menu for the day included meals such as 'Bougie Ramen 2.0', Bánh mì xúc xích dân chủ and Sri Lankan Achcharu.



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access the
[Frugal
Cookbook](#)



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access the
[Multisensory
Record](#)



"It has given us the opportunity to think of food as a human right – something that's really important to our students – having to worry about where your next meal comes from is not great for learning."

Dr Helen Addison-Smith,
Project Lead

The Frugal Canteen also provided free recipes and bags of local produce to customers, ensuring knowledge about preparing healthy food and circular food practices was accessible. Several local chefs volunteered their time to help on the day of the 2025 City North Shared Futures Festival, in addition to the support provided by the 2025 City North Activation Challenge that enabled majority of participants (including Just Food Collective interns) to be paid.

Project Impact

The Project provided those suffering from food insecurity a way to access healthy, sustainable food while also making connections with others. It also strengthened relationships between various food justice and food design Project participants.

The Project's inclusion of community cooks has also prompted the team to apply to VicHealth for a three-year funded project that would link students with migrant elders to learn bulk, frugal cooking techniques, and create public feasts. Additionally, a more intimate version of the Frugal Canteen was awarded a small [City of Melbourne](#) grant, and activity took place in early January 2026 at the Assemble Developments, Kensington.

Members of the Frugal Canteen team also developed multi-sensory self-catering/food system education kits for RMIT's Post Humanist summer camp. A [Frugal Canteen recipe book](#) was developed and distributed during the Project's run, sharing with the wider public the excellent recipes featured in the 2025 City North Shared Futures Festival.

Future Planning

The Project has provided an excellent structure for collaborations between produce suppliers, cooks, chefs, artists and the food insecure. The Canteen supported a system where customers gave what they could and took what they needed.

The initiative has also shown the importance of activating event spaces that bring members of different communities together and allow for societal challenges to be addressed and reduced. By using the City North Precinct as a test bed for the Project, the team was able to trial and refine the Frugal Canteen model in a live environment, generating insights that could inform future food justice initiatives.

Furthermore, the visual identity of the Frugal Canteen demonstrated how multiple organisations can come together without being dominated by one brand identity, encouraging active participants to feel as if they are truly in partnership with a larger organisation.

A multisensory record was also created by [Sasha Margolis](#) which depicts the preparation for the Frugal Canteen Food Festival, the event itself, and a post-event reflection.

The City North Frugal Canteen is a way of strengthening wellbeing, social connection, and food literacy across campuses.

The *City North Frugal Canteen Food Festival* team acknowledge and thank the following contributors:

City North Frugal Canteen Food Festival

Long Prawn, Just Food Collective, Lipstick + Bread, Heliotope, Sasha Margolis, Hagens Organics, Natoora, Cookers.

For more information on the City North Social Innovation Precinct,
including partnership, collaboration and co-location opportunities, visit:

