

Oakridge Bible Chapel Outreach Program

One of the foundations of the charitable sector is the opportunity for volunteers to help others. The chance to make an appreciable difference in someone else's life is a unique experience. Could it be as simple as finding an area of the community in need and offering the chance to provide fresh food? If you ask Pastor Dean Kennedy, he will tell you that launching the Outreach Program at Oakridge Bible Chapel and helping their neighbourhood was not rocket science – it was a very simple way to help people's lives. In fact, the first time Karen Bonham from Food for Life made a presentation at Oakridge, sixteen church members signed up on the spot. They knew this was a volunteer opportunity they couldn't miss.

The outreach program at Oakridge Bible Chapel started as a delivery point for Food for Life, where we could work with on-site volunteers to provide access to fresh food for families in need within the community. As we have found in so many of these programs, it proved to be more than that, as the Oakridge volunteers also wanted to use their facility to prepare food. Within a month of partnering with Food for Life, they achieved their goal - they ran their first Christmas turkey dinner for their clients.

The Oakridge program now offers food to about 30 families, with an average age range of 30-35. While many of the clients are over 50, it is a younger crowd relative to other Food for Life Outreach Programs. Regardless of the demographics, this outreach program is aiming to achieve a higher goal than simply to provide food – they are helping build a stronger sense of community. As Pastor Kennedy explains it, running this program “isn't about building our congregation, it's about building relationships.” The Oakridge clients arrive early to have a coffee with their neighbours. The volunteers are willing and eager to help and act as a resource for the clients.

Pastor Kennedy will tell you that he is privileged to be involved in a program of this kind. It has been a gift to the community and to his church, made possible through the incredible support of the team of volunteers. Church has always been about community and providing people a forum for meeting their neighbours – and Food for Life is proud to play a role in that!