

# Free food and a big heart

#foodisfree  
movement comes  
to Warrandyte

By **LARA MCKINLEY**

WHEN Judith Lightfoot read about a laneway in Ballarat where food is free to anyone who wants it, she thought, “Why can’t we do this in Warrandyte?”

So last month that’s exactly what she did.

Instead of a laneway she uses the Rotary op-shop, which she manages as a volunteer. Vandals wrecked her first attempt to give away food, so she moved her operation inside.

Now, there are food racks filled with fruit, vegetables, herbs, bread and even baby formula.

The food has all been donated—it’s fresh and free to anybody who needs it.

“In this job you hear a lot of sad stories and people come in who need some assistance. It’s such a simple idea. People have extra [food] in their gardens. They can bring it in and share it,” Judith says.

When the *Diary* spoke to Judith, the project had been going just three weeks and already more than 100 people had taken food. Donations were being dropped in every day, aided by a call out on the Warrandyte Business and Community Facebook page.

“It just makes me all warm and fuzzy,” Judith adds.

Aldi is also donating food, as Rotary fits under their charitable guidelines.

“We pick it up every Monday and Friday,” Judith says. “It’s such an adventure. We bring it back and make it look pretty.”

Judith, who is a former chef, says it’s really heart-warming to see all sorts of people coming in and taking the food—even if at first they are a bit shy.

“It needs to be taken while it’s fresh. So I say, ‘Grab something for the kids’



**Judith Lightfoot, voluntary manager of the Rotary op-shop at Warrandyte, stands in front of her free food stand. “I read about the free food lane in Ballarat and thought, ‘Why can’t we do something like this in Warrandyte?’ and so I set this up.” Picture: LARA MCKINLEY**

lunchboxes. Take what you need’.”

There are gold coin donation boxes to help people feel more comfortable taking the food, Judith explains.

“I get that people are embarrassed, so we just want to make it an enjoyable experience.

“Anyone’s welcome to it. Rotary doesn’t mind who has it. We can’t sell the food, and it makes us cry to

throw it out.”

Judith is at pains to explain this initiative isn’t replacing the long-standing Warrandyte Food Bank, run by Margory Lapworth.

“This is new and it’s different to the food bank because it’s fresh food. We just need to see what happens.”

The #foodisfree movement started in Texas in 2012—with free planter

boxes given to schools and community groups as edible gardens. Since then it’s spread around the world. Founder John Van Deusen Edwards estimates it’s operating in around 190 cities world-wide.

Anyone wishing to donate fresh food can drop it into the Rotary op shop, behind the Yarra street shops near the roundabout.