



Foodbank co-ordinator Patrick Lawrence: If we weren't here, people would be starving.

PICTURE: WAYNE TAYLOR

Foodbank desperate for more depositors

By **ADRIAN LOWE**

A MELBOURNE organisation that helps struggling asylum seekers is now facing a struggle of its own and is calling on businesses for help.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre is facing difficulty trying to keep its foodbank program afloat amid rising grocery prices. The foodbank allows asylum seekers, whose visa conditions do not allow them to work, to receive food each week. It is kept stocked by donations from the community but a new donation source is needed.

"I think the expression beggars can't be choosers is completely apt here," foodbank

co-ordinator Patrick Lawrence said. "The kind of support we get at the moment is very grassroots.

"It's absolutely true that the increasing price of groceries has led us to realise that we needed to do more. I couldn't say that we've exhausted our traditional donation base but it's well tapped and it's not enough."

Mr Lawrence pointed to the wholesale price of rice, which has jumped from \$1 a kilogram to \$1.85. "It's sort of coming to a head for us — the question of whether we really can claim to be providing a living for people in terms of their groceries," he said.

To mark World Refugee Day

today, the centre will hold a tour that will double as an opportunity to encourage more donations to the foodbank.

Mr Lawrence hopes businesses will come on board as foodbank donors, which would dramatically increase stock.

Foodbank has been supported by another volunteer organisation, SecondBite, which collects food from wholesale and suburban markets distributes it to the needy.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre is one of SecondBite's 47 clients.

"We have good dialogue with each of the recipients and we try and match our food to the kind

of food they want," SecondBite chairman Ian Carson said. "Our specialty is really the fresh food and that's where we seem to have strong volumes and a lot of these groups are after the nutritious fresh food.

"With the cost of living going up and fuel prices, people are actually getting worse food. It's incredibly cheaper to eat take-away than fresh food, so you're getting nutritional poverty, and if you don't have a proper diet, the health and everything else can suffer."

Mr Lawrence said World Refugee Day had "come as a focus for us to deal with what is really a crisis for the Foodbank, because we don't have any more

money. It's the bare bones, what we manage to provide."

There is no obligation on donors to continually donate food, Mr Lawrence said, but he said donations in any form were vital.

"If the foodbank wasn't here, people would be starving; there's no question," he said.

"Just imagine how you'd get through a week with zero money, and you can imagine the kind of situation our members are in."

The centre is in Batman Street, West Melbourne.

LINKS

- ▶ www.asrc.org.au
- ▶ www.secondbite.org