

CAMPBELLTOWN

# Healthy basic food at low cost

Luisa Cogno

FAMILIES, seniors and people doing it tough have been joining a fortnightly queue to buy a staples bag of food and household items since a pop-up shop opened in Campbelltown.

The Staples Bag pop-up shop is a joint project between Campbelltown charity Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative (MDSI) and Settlement Services International.

MDSI chief executive officer Karin Vasquez said people on low incomes or support were really struggling due to the rising cost of living and the recent hike in utility prices including electricity and gas.

"The first thing to go (in these situations) is healthy foods because they are more expensive. People have to be more resilient so we sought out the opportunity to set up a pop-up shop," Mrs Vasquez said.

"If this service wasn't available people would go without, particularly people that are vulnerable in the community.

"People may not have enough money to go around after they have paid for elec-



Child and family connect coordinator Jodi-Lee Charnock with staff and volunteers at The Staples Bag pop-up shop in Campbelltown. Far right: Abeer Naji, who runs the pop-up shop, and volunteer Ume Mahesh. Pictures: Simon Bullard



## Staples Bag



» People doing it tough can get their groceries from The Staples Bag pop-up shop at MDSI Blue House, at Campbelltown, every second Wednesday

» It contains discounted food, groceries and pantry items

tricity, rent, medications and their children's education costs."

Mrs Vasquez said the staples bag was not a hand out because it was much better for people to remain in control of their lives and for it to be a fair exchange for goods at a subsidised cost.

Anyone who feels they need a bit of help can buy a staples bag, no questions asked.

Customers choose what they want to buy from a range of pantry staples including bread, milk, cereal, free range eggs, meat, fruit and vegetables and they pay

up to 70 per cent off the retail price for each bag.

A standard bag costs \$20, a family bag is \$30 and a vegetarian bag is \$15.

All items in the bags are sourced by Settlement Services International.

Mrs Vasquez said demand for the bags was so strong

that 70 were purchased at the first pop-up shop on July 26, and 30 were purchased at the next pop-up shop.

She hopes to expand the service by the end of the year to include cooking classes so people can use the grocery and pantry items they buy to make healthy meals for their

families and at hope.

The pop-up shop opens at MDSI Blue House, at 127 Dumaresq St, Campbelltown, every second Wednesday from 1pm to 2.30pm.

It next opens on Wednesday, September 6.

For more information, phone MDSI on 4627 1188.