

# Food sale not a hand-out

## COMMUNITY

BY JESS LAYT

AFFORDING the weekly grocery shop is becoming increasingly difficult for many Macarthur families.

The rise in electricity prices and other utilities is a burden on the family budget and makes buying the necessities more difficult. Luckily, Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative (MDSi) staff have recognised this problem and partnered Settlement Services International to ease that financial strain.

The community organisation runs a fortnightly 'Staples Bag' pop-up shop where residents can purchase groceries for \$20 (standard), \$30 (family) or \$15 (vegetarian).

MDSi chief executive Karin Vasquez said the initiative gives people back their dignity. "People don't need to be judged anymore than they already are for being involved with programs like Centrelink and social housing," she said.

"Good fresh food is a human right, it's not a commodity that we can just pass over. What we want to do



**DINING WITH DIGNITY:** Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative chief executive Karin Vasquez, staff member Peter Lonergan and volunteer Jodi-Lee Charnock. **Picture:** Jess Layt

with the Staples Bag partnership is create options for anyone who is on a low income to actually buy food that is healthy and affordable."

Ms Vasquez said the Staples Bag initiative was "not a

hand-out".

"It's about giving people the choice, giving them back their dignity," she said.

MDSi worker Peter Lonergan said they had held four Staples Bag events so far

and all were successful. Last Wednesday's event attracted about 80 people.

"We had someone say, 'this doesn't feel like charity,' he said. "And it's not - it's just for anyone who is

having a tough time. People are amazed that it's good stuff they're getting. They think because it's cheap it's going to be poor quality, but it's not."

Mr Lonergan said many

“Fresh food is a human right, it's not a commodity that we can just pass over.

**MDSi chief executive Karin Vasquez**

locals were choosing not to eat so they could save money to pay for their utilities.

"They see food as more optional than their bills, so they won't eat," he said.

Volunteer Jodi-Lee Charnock said the initiative provided people with a judgement-free experience.

"They can just come along if they've had a bad week or day and pick up their groceries," she said. "We've even got volunteers to look after the kids while parents do their shop."

**The next Staples Bag pop-up shop will be held at MDSi Blue House, 127 Dumaresq Street, Campbelltown on Wednesday, September 20 from 1pm-2.30pm. Details: 4627 1188.**