



THE BEST LASAGNE EVER

By Neil Starkie

It's a big claim. It's a bold claim, but we are standing by it.

The Spiers Centre is officially declaring that Paprika Café in Belridge, makes the **best lasagne ever**.

Now, before anyone's Nonna throws down the gauntlet of a cook-off, let me explain.

On Monday mornings we collect a donation of freshly cooked meals from Paprika Café in Belridge. Not long after our doors opened, two men came into The Spiers Centre. They'd never met before. Both are sleeping rough. Both around the same age. Both carrying the weight of trauma that had left deep marks on their mental health.

We offered them something simple, a hot drink, a safe space, and a meal. We told them we had freshly made lasagne, and, half joking, half serious - we said, "It's the best lasagne you'll ever eat."

One of them, Italian by heritage, smiled like he'd just been issued a challenge. The other, with a keep cup the size of a small bucket (and six sugars in his coffee), looked sceptical but willing to give it a try.

They sat down in our reception, chatting like old friends, the smell of lasagne filling the air. And as they ate, something shifted. Two strangers found connection. The verdict? Unanimous. **Best lasagne ever.**

Later that same morning, a woman came in with her three children. She had recently escaped a violent relationship. Her life right now is a cocktail of chaos, confusion, and fear, all the ingredients of survival mode.

We offered her meals for herself and each of her children. Two days later, she came back for a financial counselling appointment and told us the same thing: it was the best lasagne she'd ever had. It wasn't just about the food. For her, it was a moment of comfort in the middle of overwhelming anxiety, a taste of normality when everything else feels uncertain.

Why is it the best? Maybe it's the sauce, slow cooked, rich and comforting. Maybe it was the mix of cheeses, different flavours coming together, melting into something better than any one ingredient on its own. Or maybe, it was the care that went into making it.

That's the secret, isn't it? Care. It's the same secret ingredient in everything we do at The Spiers Centre.

When someone walks through our doors, exhausted, worried, unsure where to turn, we don't just see their circumstances. We see the person behind them. We listen. We care. And in that care, something beautiful happens. People start to feel seen again, heard again, and feel self-worth again.

Just like Paprika's lasagne. It's not only about the recipe, it's about the heart and the passion behind it.

Community Supporting Community

Paprika Café has joined us in living out our ethos of community supporting community. They've taken it one step further by introducing a Pay It Forward opportunity in their café. It means anyone can walk in, buy a coffee or meal for someone doing it tough, and trust that it'll find its way to the right person at the right time.

That's how change begins; not always with grand gestures, but with lasagne, coffee, and kindness shared between strangers.

So yes, this is an unashamed plug for Paprika Café. Because when a local business not only feeds people but feeds hope, that deserves a shout-out.

And to the two men who sat in our reception on Monday morning, thank you. You remind us that sometimes the best things in life aren't fancy or complicated. They're just real.

Donate to The Spiers Centre today. Scan the QR code, or head to our website, www.thespierscentre.com.au/donate

