

Community-led support in response to COVID-19 –

South Seas Healthcare Trust

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Background

South Seas Healthcare Trust is Otago's largest Pacific health provider, delivering a range of clinic, community and social services in South Auckland.

South Seas provides services and support to meet the needs of the Pacific population. Pacific youth are an important part of this, with the Youth Hub providing a physical space and range of programmes and services dedicated to young people.

The Pacific community was disproportionately impacted in the COVID-19 Delta outbreak in 2021. South Seas and their Pacific partners recognised that mainstream approaches would not work to engage Pacific families. They needed to target where Pacific people congregate and provide additional support and assurance for them to engage with COVID-19 testing and vaccination services and support.

The approach

South Seas' operating model is driven by the motto *every door is the right door*.

South Seas leaders realised there were a lot of service and support responses to COVID-19, but not many were youth-led. They wanted their response to supporting young people to be by youth for youth.

South Seas leaders put youth in the centre and provided guidance and support for them to come up with solutions to their issues.



Photo credit: @southseashealthcare Instagram

Bubblegum Youth is formed

South Seas Youth Navigators gathered 15-20 young people (aged 17-24 years) from different parts of Otago who were passionate about supporting youth. This group became the Bubblegum Youth initiative with tag-line *Let's stick together*.

*South Seas gave us free reign and support to talk about ideas and bring those ideas to life.
(Youth Navigator)*

Bubblegum Youth surveyed young people about the kind of support they needed around COVID-19. Feedback highlighted common themes around education and mental health.

During lockdown the group planned a 12 week programme of 'waves', each dedicated to a different theme such as sense of identity, connectedness, mental health and wellbeing.

They reached out to young people by word of mouth and a social media campaign. They ran check-ins and online game nights, and ran a Youth Call Centre staffed by mostly under 30s who could speak more than one language.

South Seas also started two mentoring programmes in 2021, run by the Youth Navigators. The 'Format' programme focused on academic support, with mentors helping young people with their school work and homework to help them get back into school after the mid-year lockdown. The 'My Story' programme focused on topics such as mental health, leadership, self-expression and life skills, delivered through a mentoring model.

Our response needs to be broader than health and sustainable. We need to support the immediate needs of families as well as their holistic wellbeing needs in a way that is sustainable.



Photo credit: @southseashealthcare Instagram

Barber Shop opens

The Bubblegum group discussed the longer term effects of COVID-19 and lockdowns especially on young men. They heard from young men about the challenges of speaking out about mental health issues and the need to feel safe and confident to do that. Bubblegum Youth asked - How can you make it safe?

The idea of a Barber Shop came from this. It would be a comfortable, safe place where young men could get their hair cut, relax and talk (if they wanted to).



Photo credit: @btbcuts Instagram

Bubblegum Youth set up the Barber Shop in January 2021. They hired two Barbers – young Pacific men aged 21 and 19 years, who were interested in supporting young people. A Coordinator, with experience working with young people, was employed to mentor the Barbers. Young men kept coming back, which gave opportunities for the Barbers to ask them

if they'd like to talk with someone else, and would put them in touch with the right person or service for further support. Reflective of the South Seas motto, the Barber Shop is another door to young men to get support for issues they want help with.

The Barber Shop is a 'peer family' away from home where the young men feel safe and able to talk, and can get support if and when they need it.

The Barber Shop has now been established for 12 months. During the August lockdown in 2021 the Barbershop had to close temporarily and the Barbers pivoted into helping out at the Food Hub, another South Seas initiative.

Outcomes – What difference did they make?

A lot of the young people who were part of the Bubblegum initiative continue to be involved and some are now employed by South Seas helping run the Food Hub, and running programmes. Young people are given opportunities, guidance and support to drive and implement initiatives.



How could central Government further support initiatives like these?

Having more flexible approaches to funding would help organisations like South Seas to deliver holistic services in flexible and agile ways while remaining accountable on delivery.

If central Government agencies could also make it easier to report on multiple funding sources and separate contracts, that would lessen the administrative burden that comes with having multiple funding sources and separate contracts on organisations like South Seas.

For more information, visit

www.southseas.org.nz/community-services/youth

About the Social Wellbeing Agency

The Social Wellbeing Agency works on challenging social-sector problems to improve people's lives. We focus our efforts on where we can make the greatest impact to lead and shine a light on policy issues that affect the wellbeing of New Zealanders. In this case study, we highlight a community-led response to COVID-19, to demonstrate how different delivery models can best meet the needs of local communities, with a view of central Government and other local initiatives learning from examples of community-led best practice. For more information, visit www.swa.govt.nz

Thank you to South Seas' management and staff for sharing this story of empowering young people while in the midst of the pandemic.