

BRIEFING 2 FOR MINISTERS AND MINISTRIES

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN RESPONSE OF COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES

Analysis of NZCCSS COVID-19 Survey

April 20, 2020

1.0 Background

1.1 At the end of week 2 of the Covid-19 Lockdown NZCCSS undertook a quick self-selecting survey of social services organisations to see how they were responding to the lockdown. Access to the Survey was promoted in two editions of Policy Watch. A total of 42 individual responses from 12 organisations (7 NZCCSS members from 3 Denominations and 5 non-member organisations) responded.

1.2 The survey sought to understand, from the perspective of service providers, the impacts of the Covid-19 Lockdown on the work and practice of social service organisations and on the whanau, families and communities they serve. The following is an analysis of the responses received.

Overview of Responses

2.0 Emerging Work and Practice

2.1 In the area of emerging work and practice in the community social services most respondents reporting they are working online. Some organisations were well equipped to respond to the online working environment and provided staff with equipment to support their at-home offices and working environment.

“My work has provided ways for us to be comfortable working from home. They have given us keypads, office chairs and desks if they have been needed. My team has increased the amount of meetings and are having them weekly to help support everyone at this time, we also have a chat we can post in during the day to get support or have quick questions answered.”

2.2 However, others with less IT resourcing have struggled to ensure the required level of connectivity.

“Lack of adequate electronic resources to provide services to clients.”

“IT – work better if all staff had remote ways to work more fully with clients as OT does, as an NGO this is expensive and not obtainable.”

2.3. Some practitioners noted that clients were reaching out for support and were happy to engage electronically.

“I normally do play therapy for children, but the children seem to be willing to chat on-line.”

“Phone calls same time each week give clients a sense of normalcy.”

“Personally I have found that most clients do want to have contact at this time – often for emotional support.”

“Workers setting up Facebook profiles for work and Facebook groups – this has been working well for us.”

2.4 Others were stymied by their clients lack of access to electronic communications hardware and access to the net.

“Families not having access to wifi or internet.”

“Clients restricted because of lack of communication. Not many have computers, or even phones, we have all the resources, not all of them.”

“If parents do not have internet access, unable to engage in our programmes. Some are court referrals or OT referrals required to engage and complete a programme.”

3.0 Children and Caregivers

3.1 Social Workers in Schools, and Social Workers working with vulnerable children in the community have a range of concerns about working remotely.

“Main impact is not seeing child – using devices to make contact with child and whanau”

“Being able to sight the children we work with, as caregiver is usually in the room when we make contact by phone or viber. Makes it difficult for children to talk. Stress and tension building up in some homes due to lock down, Mindful of family and domestic violence in time of uncertainty.”

“Being able to contact student directly instead of going through parents.”

“Unable to do any face to face meetings and being able to check on the children and young people and where they are living. Having to put more trust in the caregivers in what they tell us.”

3.2 The impact on caregivers and the inability to provide respite support is impacting on foster parents, particularly single caregivers.

“The inability to provide onsite practical supports to foster carers who may be experiencing crisis with young people. The suspension of respite care for caregivers who require a break from fostering. The impact is especially felt by caregivers.”

“Unable to do any face to face meetings and being able to check on the children and young people and where they are living. Having to put more trust in the caregivers in what they tell us. Also, things are on hold including educational plans for children needing to start school this year.”

4.0 Impact on Families and Whanau

4.1 The additional stress of lockdown on whanau and families was identified as a significant issue. These impacts included access to food, to services and supports.

“Families are applying for hardship with creditors to reduce payments on loans or are applying for Kiwisaver hardship withdrawals as they are no longer able to meet with essential living costs.”

“Clients are wanting to take help but due to lockdown not keen on registering for any intervention services at the moment, however they admit they are going through additional stress at home with relationships, financial stress and extra childcare responsibilities.”

“There are a lot of people in the community who are barely managing on a normal day to day basis. When something like this comes along it shows that we didn’t fully know how many families were struggling – we are seeing more families in need than had previously been identified.”

“These are uncertain times, people everywhere, in my life, in my work and in the community have experienced grief and loss at varying levels. This has meant requests for more check-ins and more regular scheduled 1-1 counselling times.”

4.2 Some families are self medicating with alcohol and other substances, others are struggling to access the alcohol and drugs they rely on. This is creating additional stress, sometimes resulting in family violence.

“There is rise in the nos. of incident reports involving interpersonal conflict and lack of drugs and alcohol.”

“I have concerns around the drug and alcohol use of clients as well as their mental health. These issues are safer discussed on a face to face basis where we can also look at the surrounding environment, e.g. cans and bottles, the presentation and responses of the client, over time.”

5.0 Recognition of Helpful Support from Government and Community

5.1 Survey participants noted a number of responses from government which supported their work and improved conditions for those they served. The additional support for foodbanks was noted as being immediately helpful and necessary. The commitment to maintain social services funding also allowed community based social services organisations and workers to focus on their work and on innovation to respond to the changed situation.

“All of our contracts for aged care and family services are going to be paid at the full rate until end of September – this gives me complete confidence to carry on providing our full range of services.”

“We have had great response from the community for our foodbank in the way of goods, produce and money.”

6.0 Residential Services

6.1 Providers of residential services noted the loss of staff due to age or to impaired immune systems had impacted on their services. Managing staff anxiety and the anxiety of their whanau has also been an issue. Lack of access to their other children has been a major cause of distress for mothers in residential services as a result of an Oranga Tamariki based intervention.

“Aged care residential – managing anxious staff who are still working in close contact with residents and getting enough PPE”

“The mothers are in lockdown with the child/children currently returning to their care which means they don’t have any access with their other children outside ...(the residence) while on lockdown which can cause them to be anxious and stressed while worrying if their children and whanau are safe.”

“We have had to work differently with our community-based clients and still have support workers going into homes”

“Stability of services and maintaining staff.’

7.0 Suggestions, Recommendations and Observations

7.1 Based on their 2 weeks lockdown experience practitioners and managers saw direct access for social workers and advocates to Work and Income and emergency housing services as a way of increasing the effectiveness of services. Better support for whanau will be critical for wellbeing. The resourcing of services in an ongoing manner to respond to increased demand was mentioned often.

“Government organisation such as WINZ, SOCIAL HOUSING may need to have open line of communication with agencies who are advocating on behalf of a mutual client. Especially at this time.”

“Concern about future funding from our community funders who rely on income from delivering services themselves and relying on return on investments. This could impact on us significantly as this makes up about \$300,00 of our income.”

“Certainty around what happens after the lock down period – work wise and financially.”

Survey Participants

The 42 participants were working as managers, practice managers and practitioners for their organisations. They worked in a wide range of services and settings. Including:

- Social work
- Family violence
- Care for children (Oranga Tamariki)
- Residential services -mothers and babies
- Aged residential care
- Home and community care for older people
- Counselling
- Chaplaincy
- Youth work
- Social workers in school
- Day programmes for older people
- Mentoring
- Community work/community development

These participants were mostly located in Auckland, however there were participants from Christchurch, Wellington and other “Urban Centres over 30,000 population”.

Final Response

“It will be helpful, that we really try to do things better than we have done before, sometimes keeping things simple, but realistic and having warm hearts to show kindness in these circumstances, that has forced us all to be in it together. So it would be good to get it right, or at least as close as the ideal requires.”

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