



New(town) Beginnings #26

Dear Neighbour,

Back in mid-March when the coronavirus pandemic was rapidly unfolding, our team from the Boarding House Outreach Service (BHOS), sprang into action by hosting a roundtable specifically to explore the issues of COVID-19 within boarding house environments.

“Our event coincided with the Sydney Local Health District wanting to increase awareness of the virus within vulnerable populations – the same client group our staff support – so we knew this was the perfect opportunity for both parties to share our respective expertise,” explains manager, Paul Adabie.

A collaboration was born and together with staff from NSW Health, the BHOS team developed a plan to host targeted community wellbeing pop-up clinics, with the aim of encouraging residents from boarding houses and social housing to attend.

“We’re all primarily concerned with preventing the spread of COVID-19 within disadvantaged communities who may be less likely to test and seek treatment,” continues Paul.

“By incorporating health promotional strategies, it was a valuable way for NSW Health to test how they would respond if there was an outbreak within a boarding house setting, which mimics the potential scenario in an aged care facility.”

For the clinic locations, the group selected suburbs with a high concentration of boarding houses including Marrickville and Ashfield. Glebe and Waterloo were chosen to attract residents of social housing blocks.

The NSW Health Promotion team developed flyers which were distributed to clients in nearby areas as well as operators and landlords; “We even went door knocking on the day of the clinics to encourage as many residents as possible to attend,” reflects BHOS team leader, Mischa.

This grassroots strategy paid off with approximately 80 – 90 people visiting each of the boarding house targeted clinics, and attracted an even mixture of men and women. The pop-ups in Glebe and Waterloo had several families attend, and a clinic held at the Exodus Foundation saw around 100 people show up.

As a way of saying thank you to attendees, NSW Health provided free care packs. BHOS staff also purchased some food hampers from the Addison Road Food Pantry to hand out as gifts and both were greatly appreciated.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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We think one client's quote sums it up perfectly: "This was all *beeping* awesome."

NSW Health understood the importance of testing people living in Boarding Houses or social housing communities and found the partnership to have "achieved really amazing things".

"Overall, our colleagues at NSW Health have seen over 1000 people from vulnerable populations and so far not a single person has tested positive for COVID-19 at these clinics," shares NNC Team Leader, Mischa.

"This is a pretty extraordinary result considering the shared facilities and common spaces at these accommodation types, and where there's also less consideration taken to adopting proper hygienic practices."

"Our clients reported the pop-ups felt personalised and they appreciated that they had been tailored specifically for boarding house residents which made them more comfortable," continues Mischa.

"But mostly, the feedback we received was that the clinics allowed the clients to alleviate some fear and anxiety surrounding the virus, and they appreciated learning ways to avoid catching it in the future."

As restrictions begin to ease our team will continue to look after those most marginalised and ensure that they have the appropriate education and protection when it comes to COVID-19.

A big thank you to our BHOS team and NSW Health for getting involved in such unique events.

Mel

Community Strengthening Team

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