

Evolve Wellington Youth Service:

A community service developed by and for young people

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that barriers exist preventing young people from accessing health services. New Zealand has a range of youth specific health services and this paper will focus on Evolve Wellington Youth Service. Evolve was established by young people and continues to have young people involved in the day-to-day running through to the governance board. It is a primary health nurse-led clinic with general practitioner support, and provides a range of health and social services, youth development activities and a place to hang out.

Background

'Adolescence' is defined by the World Health Organization as the age between 10 and 19 years, with 'youth' defined as the age between 15 and 24 years, and 'young people' as those between the age of 10 and 24 years.¹ In day-to-day practice, 'youth', 'teenagers' and 'young people' are words used interchangeably to define the age group between 10 and 25 years. The health issues facing all young people are different to the health needs of other age groups, and health needs will vary greatly across this age span. The period of adolescence is a challenging time of transition from childhood to adulthood,

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with major physical changes occurring, identity formation (including sexual), cognitive development and tensions between developing autonomy and attachment.² Adolescents often participate in risk-taking behaviours that can impact on their health such as alcohol and drug abuse, cigarette smoking and sexual experimentation.³ Young people in New Zealand (NZ) have high rates of teen pregnancy, suicide and self harm, drug and alcohol abuse and injuries (especially road traffic accidents).^{4,5}

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Barriers to care

National and international research has shown barriers exist, which prevent young people accessing health services.^{6,7,8} These include: cost, fear of lack of confidentiality, services/health professionals not perceived as youth friendly, feelings of vulnerability and generally finding difficulty talking about their problems.^{6,7,8,9} NZ

research such as the Youth 2000 study, a nationwide survey of NZ secondary school students, supports these findings. The study also found that a significant number of young people report not seeking help for a health problem in the past year due to a specific barrier.⁵ Barriers cited included financial, either due to low family income or lack of financial independence, and young people not feeling they could discuss health issues in front of parents or not wanting to make a fuss or draw attention to a health issue.⁵

Conversely, research has shown that young people feel more comfortable accessing youth specific health services, perceiving them to offer holistic care.^{7,10} These services are characterised by being free or affordable, locally situated, confidential, non-judgemental, and culturally appropriate, offering a wide range of services and staffed by young people and adults with whom young people can relate.^{4,7,10} New Zealand has a range of youth one-stop shops, local youth health services, and the Centre for Youth Health in Manukau.

These services have arisen from recognised need and active advocacy from the communities involved. Other areas have recognised the success of these services and are endeavouring to set up similar clinics. Youth in the Wellington region are fortunate to have a range of services including Kapiti Youth Support in Paraparumu, Vibe Youth Service in the Hutt Valley and Evolve Wellington Youth Service. Although the philosophies of these services are similar, each health service is different due to the unique needs of the communities they serve.

Removing barriers

It is known that if young people are active participants in the design, development and delivery of health services, they are more likely to meet the needs of young people.⁴ Young people in Wellington, represented by the Wellington Youth Health Service Project Team saw the need for improved youth health care services. In 2001 they were able to commission research undertaken by Wellington School of Medicine and Health Science's fifth year medical students, which resulted in the report *'How healthy is our future? Addressing the health needs of young people in Wellington City'*.⁹ Using the results of this report the Wellington Youth Health Service Project Team lobbied for funding and in 2003 established Evolve Wellington Youth Service. Some of the original project team remain involved and are on the governing trust board (Te Whanganui-a-Tara Youth Development Trust) with the majority of trust board members aged less than 25 years.

Evolve Wellington Youth Service

Evolve is situated in the heart of Wellington City at 5 Eva St (off Dixon St) and is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 11am–6pm, Tuesday from 11am–4pm and Thursday 11am–8pm. The team at Evolve has grown to include two co-managers, two primary health nurses, who both work 32 hours a week; two general practi-

tioners (GPs) who each run two afternoon clinics a week, including an outreach clinic at He Huarahi Tamariki (school for teenage parents); seven youth support workers (YSW); a social worker and a community youth worker, providing social support; six counsellors and a Sexual Health Service outreach nurse running a nurse outreach clinic each week.

Evolve provides free primary health care, social services, activities and youth development programmes, as well as a drop-in centre to young people aged between 10 and 25 years. As well as small meeting/consultation rooms, Evolve has a 'hang out' space with a free pool table, foosball, Internet access, and tea and coffee. The hang-out space gives young people a safe opportunity to 'suss' the place out, especially the health professionals that work there and test/evaluate the boundaries of confidentiality! Often the younger people hang out for several weeks before knocking on the door, and asking if they 'can talk to you for a minute'. Flexibility and making the most of these opportunities is key to reaching some of the more disadvantaged and marginalised young people.

Funding and client base

Evolve is funded to provide a range of services through several contracts with the Capital and Coast District Health Board (CCDHB), through GMS subsidy, and through the South Eastern City Primary Health Organisation (SECPHO). There are now over 2300 young people registered as clients at Evolve with a current ethnicity breakdown of: NZ European 57%, Maori 19%, Pacific 7%, Asian 3%, African 6% and Other 8%. Although Evolve is funded to provide a range of services to young people from age 10, most young people attending are aged from 13 years upwards. Those

using the service include: young people in mainstream school or alternative education settings, university students, students on courses, employed, unemployed, and young people who have been excluded or fallen out of the education system at an early age.

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In 2006, an analysis of the client register identified there was a proportion of young people using the health services at Evolve not enrolled in any other primary care practice in the country. This group was asked if

they wanted to enrol at Evolve and as a result there are now over 300 funded clients. As a member of SECPHO, Evolve is able to access a pharmaceutical fund. If a young person cannot afford to get a prescription from the pharmacy, the prescription can be stamped and subsidised to a \$3 pharmacy part-charge or completely subsidised if there is financial hardship. Even though parents may have community service cards, young people do not always have access to this information. If young women cannot afford it, Evolve will also pay for maternity ultrasounds to 'date' for referrals to the termination service.

Youth participation and youth development

Youth participation and youth development are key philosophies of Evolve. This is achieved through the employment of a team of YSWs all aged under 25 and coming from various ethnic backgrounds, including Pakeha, Maori, Assyrian, African, as well as YSWs with personal experience of mental health issues. YSWs welcome visitors and clients and offer low key but significant support, such as finding accommodation, writing CVs or arranging support to access benefits, as well as registering clients, and making appointments. The YSWs are involved in all the day-

to-day running and decision making of the service. Such youth development opportunities result in young people feeling connected with others and society and leads to a desire to give something of value back to the community. In doing this young people can see that they have choices about the future and they become more positive and comfortable with their own identity.¹¹ The YSWs are supported to develop and lead youth development projects when they identify a need. These have included Kapa Haka, drama projects, 'Pacifica' dance group (a mixture of Pacific and African dance), working with young people with gang connections through doing a hip hop project in conjunction with CART (Consultancy Advocacy and Research Trust), kick boxing, a mental health activity/support group and 'African night' (involving workshops on sexual health and contraception, African history, brokering a relationship between African youth and the police, and preparation to sit driving licence tests with the police). All these activities involve young people of different ages and ethnicities and

aim to link-up with the local community using healthy activities and positive role models.

Health services

Evolve offers health care through a primary health nurse-led clinic, which has GP support. Primary health nursing practice is autonomous, utilising advanced nursing skills to provide holistic care, but is also interdependent with other members of the multidisciplinary team. Close collaboration between the primary health nurse and GP creates an infrastructure ensuring quality care and safe practice. This philosophy of shared governance is built on pro-

fessional trust and collaboration providing clinical services that are complementary and maximise different disciplinary skill-sets.¹²

For example, in my role as a registered nurse at Evolve, I saw a young man (consent to report exemplar granted however some details changed), who was living in City Mission accommodation. Through thorough history taking, assessment and clinical examination, and phone collaboration with one of the GPs, an urgent chest x-ray and blood tests were organised, leading to a diagnosis of a pleural effusion and then acute referral to hospital. This included organising transport to hospital and arranging for a YSW to support him at the emergency room until a staff member he trusted from the City Mission could come to be with him. He was then admitted and found to have tuberculosis. This young man then failed to attend outpatient clinics and missed or declined anti-tuberculosis treatment with the public health nurses. In consultation and collaboration with the young man, public health nurses and respiratory clinic

staff, I took over responsibility for ensuring concordance with anti-tuberculosis treatment (successfully!).

General nursing and medical care consists of a wide range of services including contraception and sexual health, general health

care (preventative, restorative, and maintenance), alcohol and drug, mental health, vaccination, health education and promotion, ACC injuries, and screening such as cervical smears. As primary health care is holistic care, the HEADSS assessment provides an assessment tool that enables clinicians to get a good overall view of the social aspects impacting on the life of the young person, thus putting

issues into perspective and not seeing problems/issues in isolation.³

The developing Evolve infrastructure has resulted in the development of policies and standing orders (including commencing young women on the oral contraceptive pill – when there are no contraindications; treating sexually transmitted infections – if a contact or if confirmed on testing; giving 'repeat' depo provera injections and treating uncomplicated urinary tract infections). Evolve GPs are available by telephone for advice and young people are referred to them when necessary. Confidentiality is a key concern of young people and is always discussed with each, including the limitation of 'staff concern for safety'. Similarly young people are asked if they wish information to be sent to their family GP, or if they want families to be involved in their care. Young people can be referred to Evolve by family GPs in order to access the counselling service. Usually the young person first meets with a primary health nurse, is shown profiles of the counsellors and selects the counsellor of their choice. With the young person's permission the counsellor can directly link with their GP for ongoing care.

Collaboration

Clinicians at Evolve also work with the young person in collaboration with a wide range of service providers with the aim of providing integrated holistic care. These include: not-for-profit sector agencies such as Salvation Army Youth Services, City Mission, Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu (Maori theatre in education company); government agencies such as Child Youth and Family Service, Work and Income; secondary health services including the pregnancy termination service; mental health services such as the Early Intervention Service or Child, Adolescent and Family service, and sexual health services. In addition, referrals are made to other health and social service providers including public health nurses, midwives, plunket and well

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child nurses, other medical practices, and school nurses/counsellors/guidance counsellors.

A new venture: The Adolescent Diabetes Clinic

In 2007 a new initiative has seen the transition of some adolescent diabetes clinics from a secondary care hospital setting to a wellness setting at Evolve. This is a pilot project and aims to expose young people with diabetes to a range of settings of health care and provide wider options for seeking advice on other health issues (such as sexual health, mental health, primary care services) while continuing their diabetes care with the same diabetes team (HHS medical team, diabetes nurse specialist, and dietitian). As adolescents mature they begin to engage with the principles of self-care.¹³ The pilot project provides opportunities for a partnership, empowerment and growing autonomy as they move towards full engagement with self-care and then finally begin a transition process into adult health care services.¹⁴

Where to from here?

Evolve is looking to consolidate existing services and is currently implementing the Te Wana quality im-

provement programme to facilitate the streamlining of policies, systems and audit processes. Evolve also works to pro-actively identify unmet youth needs and looks for new ways to meet these. Evolve recognises that youth in other parts of NZ could benefit from health and social care and actively supports those who are endeavouring to set up services. As the Project team members get older there is a challenge to keep young people involved meaningfully in governance and to ensure YSWs undertake ongoing supervision that actively affirms the meaningful use of their time, i.e. they are not acting only as receptionists. A further challenge for the service is to find ways to involve families in the care/lives of young people, as we know that this is a protective factor, increasing resilience.³

Conclusion

In conclusion, Evolve originated from a group of Wellington young people who recognised the need for holistic interdisciplinary health and

social support, delivered in a youth-friendly environment, integrally involving youth within the staff and governance body. Wellington young people have greatly appreciated this service and this has been demon-

strated by steadily increasing demand. Evolve has responded by continuing to look at providing new services and increasing diversity as well as increasing numbers of staff. Through membership of SECPHO, Evolve is now able to

offer PHO-enrolled services as well as DHB-funded services, actively meeting financial hardship and reaching out to young people marginalised by mainstream primary health care services. However, there is still more to be done and, utilising a quality improvement framework, Evolve is now embedding processes and actively seeking opportunities to improve services as well as supporting others around NZ in developing their own youth services.

Competing interests

None declared.

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