

Case studies in

Innovative thinking from New Zealand's public sector

Case Study #2:

Services pull together at The Pulse

The Pulse, a one-stop-shop for Whangarei's young people and families, has attracted international attention as an innovative multi-agency response to community needs. Its services are constantly expanding to meet increasingly diverse local needs – from programmes for young dads, to an employment service, to a roving graffiti removal team.

In fact, says Pulse executive officer Lee Andrewes, "The only reason that we don't have more services is because we are running out of space."¹

A brief history

The Pulse began life in 2000 when community groups and government agencies took the rare step of forming a trust to jointly tackle Whangarei's youth issues. They began leasing a disused Raumunga primary school from the Ministry of Education. Their aim: to bring together on one site a wide range of social services targeting local youth.

One of the movers behind The Pulse was Lou Davis of community organisation Te Ora Hou Northland. Many at-risk youth referred to his group had horrific backgrounds,

and he had seen them bounced around from agency to agency. "You hear their stories and you think, 'how did you get this far?'"² Among the problems they faced were drug and alcohol issues, and Whangarei's high rates of youth unemployment, teenage pregnancy and youth crime.

These multiple, inter-connected needs meant there was a strong case for inter-agency collaboration and coordinated services. Supported by the mayor, the trust initially comprised representatives of the Northland District Health Board, Whangarei Work and Income, Police, and Te Ora Hou. Over time, they were joined by other government agencies and community organisations, and the range of youth services provided at the renovated school building proliferated.

In 2004, The Pulse became the Ministry of Social Development's second metropolitan Heartland Services Centre. This meant it could extend and better coordinate its services and recruit a much-needed coordinator. Heartland funding also helped cover running costs, previously spread among participating groups.

The one-stop-shop

Since then, The Pulse has gone from strength to strength. It now houses a huge range of social services which, in mid-2011, included:

- an Early Years Hub giving vulnerable families with children under six better access to the support and help they need;
- the DADS programme for fathers with young children;
- Whangarei Police's Youth Development Team;
- ante-natal classes delivered by Parent Support and Development (a Family and Community Services programme);
- Work and Income;
- Child, Youth and Family's youth justice service;
- a free legal clinic run by Accessible Law;
- budgeting advice provided by Anglican Care;

■ Te Ora Hou Northland: this multi-faceted community organisation provides school attendance services; a 'wraparound' social worker; D'Tag, a graffiti-removal service; He Mataariki school for teenage parents; and He Kakaano childcare centre. A new teen parent unit is currently under construction.

■ a community development project funded by Northland Health and based around the former school swimming pool, recently upgraded.

Many services and programmes, including some delivered by Te Ora Hou, are funded by the Ministry of Social Development. Other funding comes from the Northland DHB, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth Development, Police and the Whangarei District Council.

Making it work

Over the years, The Pulse has become an important hub for youth-related activities and events in Whangarei, and is well-supported by the local community. It's also attracted many visitors keen to understand what it offers and how it operates.

In 2006, it hosted a delegation of chief executives from Australian government ministries wanting to see how the agencies collaborated and shared 'back office' functions. In 2007, Britain's visiting education minister praised its teen parenting unit, calling it "better than a school" because of the holistic healthcare, employment, education and other services it provided.³ The Social Development Minister has called The Pulse a "unique and highly effective service."⁴

What makes The Pulse work? For young people, being able to visit a single site is more convenient and cheaper than having to travel between multiple services. It's also less intimidating: The Pulse is a youth-friendly place where staff are friendly and informally dressed, there are no physical barriers such as internal security doors, and waiting areas are comfortable and information-rich.

Service providers say that co-location encourages

collaborative working practices, formalised through inter-agency protocols. Staff can learn about each other's agencies at regular staff meetings; there is also a forum for staff from different agencies to anonymously discuss clients and common issues. Inter-agency referrals and communication are easy, minimising the likelihood of vulnerable clients 'falling through the gaps'.

Most importantly, the one-stop-shop model encourages agencies to take a holistic view of their clients, says Lee Andrewes:

"Every time a new client comes in we are thinking about what other services can assist them. Staff always have to remind themselves that they aren't just delivering a service, but actual outcomes for a young person."

He says that bringing government and NGO service providers together at one site has proved to be a cost-effective and down-to-earth way of supporting young people to fulfil their potential. Building on its achievements, The Pulse is now working on broadening its offerings and the range of NGOs on-site. Clearly, the Pulse's potential is still emerging. ■



"By seeing staff from all the different agencies working so closely together, [young people] will be encouraged to seek help, to see those agencies as 'human' and existing to assist and support them – not to judge or condemn them."

Source: Minister of Social Development and Employment 8 March 2004, <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/node/19092>, accessed 1 July 2011

¹ 'The Pulse is where it's happening for Whangarei youth,' FACS, *Community connect*, Issue 4, Nov 2008, <http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/working-with-us/news-room/newsletters/community-connect/issue-04/the-pulse-is-where-its-happening-for-whangarei-youth.html>, accessed 1 July 2011. Other comments from Lee Andrewes are from this source.

² 'Positive role models vital to guide youth', *Northern Advocate*, 17 August 2006

³ 'Visiting VIP here to learn', *Northern Advocate*, 17 February 2007

⁴ David Benson-Pope, 20 September 2006, <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/node/27178>, accessed 1 July 2008