

CORE Community Services

CORE Community Services is a not-for-profit community organisation which has been operating in South West Sydney for more than 40 years. CORE Community Services delivers vital services to the people of South West Sydney, with a particular focus on culturally and linguistically diverse communities, children, young people and their families, people with a disability, the aged, and those facing financial disadvantage or hardship.

COVID-19 impacts

For many families and individuals, the 2021 lockdown was not a completely new concept, having experienced the lockdown in 2020. However, a second, long lockdown created several difficult challenges which left families and individuals fatigued.

During the lockdown, CORE anticipated an increase in demand for services which resulted in a shift in focus and pace for service delivery through innovative programs to ensure clients and communities received the support required. New partnerships were formed with Government and NGOs to respond to residents living in the Liverpool and Fairfield Local Government Areas, including clients experiencing difficulty who have never previously accessed CORE services.

CORE Community Services' COVID support

CORE community services organised emergency response programs which provided weekly food hampers, food vouchers, brokerage, stay at home packs for adults and children, including art, craft, stationary, sanitary COVID packs, sensory toys, and equipment to help with the anxiety and challenges clients were facing.

During their weekly food emergency program CORE had seen an increase of asylum seekers on bridging visas as they relied heavily on these services. These clients, who had lost their job due to the pandemic, were not eligible to receive Centrelink assistance. As a result, families and individuals faced extreme financial poverty and emotional stress and reported feeling hopeless and helpless. CORE assisted families through the emergency food relief program providing essential food hampers and brokerage.

Providing emotional support was deemed vital for client wellbeing and maintaining client connection with the community during the lockdown. With staff working from home, courtesy and welfare calls were provided to clients to inquire about their health and wellbeing, therefore providing information, advice, and referrals to clients to seek emotional and practical support as required.

During the lockdown programs were moved to online, through community needs and consultation programs that were tailored to meet the needs of the organisation and community. Programs included:

- physical wellbeing to keep fit;
- online children’s educational, art and dance programs to keep children and families engaged and entertained during school holidays and after school programs;
- educational accredited training for adults to maximise their learning goals whilst at home;
- parenting programs to help with self-care and emotional and family wellbeing.

Classes were all well attended, and retention was high which was not expected for online activities. Online programs played a crucial role with providing a platform to make connections, break isolation and share experience and stories during lockdown. There were challenges with participants engaging and providing the facilitator with full attention due to parent’s home schooling. However, participants in the program looked forward to online weekly sessions to connect to other people and newfound friends with similar experiences.

Face-to-face service delivery is the method preferred by CORE’s clients, however, clients appreciated connecting with others. Clients understood that face-to-face methods of service were not available and shifted their mindset to participate online to achieve the best of their ability.

Client case study, Anna*

A former migrant, 45 year old wife, mother of three children, living in Fairfield, Anna had flashbacks of feeling like a migrant all over again - confused, lost and helpless with no support – Anna did not know where to go to seek support and help.

Anna struggled with anxiety and felt helpless because she had lost her job in hospitality and her husband lost his job in the tourism industry. This couple had never needed support as they were financially stable. However, losing their jobs and losing connections with people left them extremely isolated and overwhelmed because of COVID restrictions. Anna felt concerned about securing food and keeping up with family demands.

CORE Community Services were recommended to Anna by word of mouth. She contacted the community development worker for support. At the time she was not receiving Centrelink support and was waiting for approval. Through the assessment process Anna expressed to the caseworker that she felt like a migrant again, lost, confused with no one available to support her.

Services provided by CORE included:

- food hampers through the weekly food relief program as needed
- stay at home packs for the children
- brokerage support
- engagement via our online programs, that Anna’s children also participated in.

Anna expressed gratitude and was very happy with the ongoing support that as offered and provided to the family during lockdown.

*name changed to protect privacy