

Counterpoint Community Services: Flexible Response Project

About Counterpoint Community Services

Counterpoint Community Services Inc. provides a wide range of community support services in the Inner City and South-East Sydney LGAs, focusing on working with social housing tenants and diverse communities. Counterpoint act as the lead agency for many local grassroots groups and services.

Flexible Response Project

Counterpoint launched the Flexible Response Project in July 2020 with funding from the City of Sydney. Initially, a 6-month project to respond to community needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, Counterpoint extended the project for six months without further funding. The project prioritised support to various groups impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those living in public housing estates within the City of Sydney local government area.

The project focused on ensuring isolated, vulnerable, and senior residents from English and non-English backgrounds had access to support and resources, particularly those not supported by any existing government care packages. Counterpoint offered a comprehensive well-being assessment to all clients. The flexible response team undertook over 450 welfare checks and well-being assessments throughout the project.

Flexible Response Services

Several priority areas were identified. These translated into seven areas of specialised support designed to offer clients integrated and comprehensive care and assistance:

- Support Mate - Emotional, counselling and case management support.
- Delivery Mate - Collection of essential shopping, medicines, or other household items.
- Chores Mate - Assistance with small tasks around the house.
- Tech Mate - Help with navigating and accessing online services.
- Buddy Mate - Full support and wellbeing check and assistance to access other supports.
- Coach Mate - Personal growth, education, and development.
- Job Mate - Job seeking assistance.

The project directly supported over 114 people with various services and indirectly supported multiple communities by disseminating essential information, supporting various activities, and forming collaborative partnerships.

Partnerships

Counterpoint partnered with Viral Kindness, OzHarvest and Hillsong to provide food relief. With funding from local MP Jenny Leong, emergency relief Foodbank parcels were purchased from Addison Road Community Centre for those experiencing homelessness or identified as at risk. Over the project, 162 people were supported with food relief, delivering 1063 food parcels.

To support vulnerable CALD members of the community, Counterpoint partnered with Hong Kong Mask Australia and the Australian Chinese Charity Foundation (ACCF) to supply over 800 reusable and non-reusable cloth masks. The ACCF also partnered with Counterpoint to provide \$4,500 in cash relief to fifteen international students identified as destitute following the lack of government income support.

Counterpoint collaborated with organisations and agencies through the referral process to ensure wrap-around and specialised support for clients. Joint service delivery and referral partners included the Department of Communities and Justice, Sydney Local Health District, Redfern Legal Centre, and Glebe Youth Service.

Project Observations

Counterpoint's COVID-19 response identified and supported people with complex needs, many of whom would have gone unnoticed if it wasn't for the Flexible Response Project.

Many of the presenting challenges faced by clients supported by the flexible response team were not a direct result of the social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they were significantly exacerbated by the COVID-19 health crisis. The personal circumstances of these clients, many of whom are isolated, immobile, housebound, or CALD, explain their invisibility to the system and highlight the need for targeted projects to reach these groups.

Many clients supported through the project had no access to government care packages either because they were ineligible or felt disempowered to access such services due to bureaucratic hurdles. The flexible response team endeavoured to connect clients with permanent support services, including the NDIS and My Aged Care, following the cessation of project funding. For clients who were ineligible for support or stuck in bureaucratic processes, the team either referred them to internal case managers or ensured they were connected to better-resourced organisations to support their needs.