

## **Emerging lessons learnt from online engagement**

### **Fortnightly Zoom Meetings hosted by Britt Guy, AADANT Youth Project Worker**

As our world changed rapidly in 2020 due to COVID-19 most of our communication and services moved online. For those supporting clients with AOD concerns this has required a complete rethink on how one-on-one service delivery can be achieved for clients.

At AADANT we have been meeting with the NT Youth AOD Services sector fortnightly on Zoom. Through these conversations key learnings have emerged about online engagement with young people.

#### **Building a connection**

- Being supported through a youth program or undertaking AOD case management for most young people is a new experience, with many clients entering the service with a range of preexisting traumas. Connecting initially online can be uncomfortable as many non-verbal cues are lost.
- Where possible being able to initially connect face-to face is invaluable, if this is not possible, connecting in with a local youth or health support service to help provide on the ground support to the young person can be a great approach. This local partner can also provide ongoing support between specialist online catch ups. Currently there are no formal existing examples of this in the NT but many partners we are working with were trying out various models and partnerships and seeking support to build these into formal relationships moving forward. This is currently seen by the NT Youth AOD Sector as a best practice mode of delivering online services to young people.
- If there is a pre-existing relationship with the client; drawing on positive videos, photos or memories of the last time they connected with the service can help build the online connection.
- Rewards are an effective way to encouraging young people to regularly engage with a program. Data cards are a favourite amongst young people, and have the added bonus of providing WIFI access for young people to attend the next session.
- Games form an essential part of engagement, and are integral to play therapy. Conducting suitable games online can be daunting but understanding the particular young people's strengths and interests help in creating positive outcomes. One popular game used in CAAPS's SIGNAL online youth program was Guess It. Images of bush tucker and bush medicine were presented in extreme close up and young people had to guess the objects as the level of zoom was reduced.

#### **Things to consider**

- Initially all elements of the online setup need to be thought through from WIFI connection, equipment, local tech support etc. Particularly in a remote context where urban services may need to rely/partner with local services or family members to provide tech support.
- Any materials required for sessions needed to be very cheap or free and easily accessible
- Some content is just too large for remote WIFI capacity, check all file sizes before meet ups to avoid disappointment.

- When undertaking case management online it can be tricky to assess risk due to the client being in environments with others. If there are concerns that you are not getting the full picture, alternative environment or communication mode may need to be negotiated.
- Just like an in person program, an online program needs to build on previous sessions to keep young people engaged. This can feel more difficult online, particular if new young people are joining the course along the way but it is important for regular attendees to see the program and in turn, themselves, grow.
- Think about what might happen between sessions that can promote health and well-being. Whether that is giving young people reflective exercises to do or encouraging collection of digital content such as photos, videos to be shared at the next meet up.

### **Unforeseen Positives**

- Many urban clients once setup have preferred to connect over the phone or via video call, making support more frequent and the client seeming more comfortable with the service.
- The opportunity for positive diversion activities to be undertaken in young people's homes, means that it coincidentally shared with the family. Creating opportunities for siblings to support through participating and parents to see their young people in a different light.
- Services have been given insight into young people through seeing them in their home, work etc. Building opportunities to strengthen relationships through chatting about a family pet or poster on the wall etc.
- Online services have removed barriers for young people accessing services. No longer do they need to worry about transport, cost and time concerns. It also has removed the requirement to get up and leave the house which can be daunting for many young people with AOD issues.
- Catholic Care's DAISY program noted that they were seeing a much higher attendance at all sessions. Which was creating efficiency for the agency, while also requiring a rethink about how the day was structured to balance case management and other work tasks.