

Clockwork Young People's Health Service



Clockwork Young People's Health Service is a youth specific health service set up in 1994 by general practitioners. It is run from a youth art and culture venue in central Geelong, a large regional city in Victoria. The aim of the Clockwork model is to promote the accessibility and quality of health care for young people, both by offering the direct provision of a range of holistic health care services and by distributing information on adolescent health to general practice and other mainstream health services throughout Australia.¹

Clockwork, from its genesis, recognised a need for a youth service that linked health care needs with social difficulties to overcome the barriers often encountered when young people try to access the traditional health system; a system all too often lacking either the capacity or sensitivity to handle the complex problems of youth.¹

Features of Clockwork

GP focus

It is argued that GPs are a vital link between young people and the general health care system who are well positioned to provide preventive services by offering health information and education, as well as early intervention in areas such as risk taking behaviours, lifestyle and sexual health.² However, young people have as much difficulty negotiating their way to GPs as to other services.¹

Many government funded services encounter difficulties networking with general practice.¹ Working with youth, family and welfare services including general practice to optimise service delivery to young people, Clockwork has helped to bridge the gap. It encourages

GPs to become involved in care planning and case conferencing.³

Increased youth access

The Clockwork service offers destigmatised health care to young people who would not normally seek help. A key strength of the service is its location – the Courthouse Project, Geelong's major youth arts and cultural venue – which houses performances, exhibitions, rehearsals, an art studio, library and cafe (Figure 1). This location gives young people the opportunity to access the health service yet maintain their confidentiality and anonymity. This is a particular issue in regional and rural areas where young people are less likely to go to their local GP for fear of being seen by family or friends.³

Bulk billing is offered to marginalised, at risk young people who would otherwise not access health services in a cost free, caring, friendly and confidential environment.

Youth specific service

Clockwork's services are provided specifically for young people to overcome concerns about confidentiality. Some young people may choose to bring a parent or other family member with them.³

Clockwork offers holistic health care from prevention to tertiary care for a wide range of complex health and social issues. General practitioners at Clockwork are encouraged to see the presenting problem in terms of the whole person in the context of wider, more complex issues. For example, a young woman may come to request a prescription for 'the pill'. The consul-

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tation is likely to develop into a discussion about safe sex, family support, conflict, and relationships. With a GP willing to take time with consultations (perceived as interested, friendly and nonjudgmental), other problems may be raised such as depression, and alcohol and/or drug use.

Clockwork GPs and other staff (community health nurses, youth workers, psychologists) successfully manage a broad range of medical, psychosocial and other problems. Some young people need highly specialised care, eg. for a psychotic disorder. Care may be shared with other agencies or health professionals, with Clockwork continuing to provide ongoing counselling, support and/or care for other problems.³

Youth consultation

There is ongoing youth consultation to continually develop the service to meet young people's needs. Young people are consulted about how Clockwork can best meet their needs through:

- focus groups, including young people from Koori and non-English speaking backgrounds, gay and lesbian young people, young people who are at risk of leaving school, unemployed, homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless
- youth forums
- surveys of young people, and
- involvement of young people in the development of health promotional material.

National impact

Clockwork is involved in the national distribution of information about improving youth access to general practice and other health services, GP education,

working with other youth service providers, youth health promotion and research.

National distribution of information has been achieved in a number of ways. Clockwork has been involved in the development of the National Divisions Youth Alliance, which is funded through the Australian Divisions of General Practice. The Clockwork manual, *Clockwork: time for young people*¹ has been distributed to all general practice divisions to assist them in establishing similar projects.

General practitioners are a vital link between young people and the general health care system and are well positioned to provide health care including preventive services. However, there are barriers that deter GPs from becoming involved in adolescent health. Clockwork works at a national level for changes in general practice that will help to overcome these barriers.³

Education and training for GPs

Clockwork provides education and training for GPs with an interest in adolescent health and has developed major resources and programs for GPs to use in their own practice. General practitioners undertake an orientation program, work with a multidisciplinary team, and are helped to manage complex issues that are difficult to manage in private practice. More than 30 GPs have worked at Clockwork since its inception, taking the skills, knowledge and experience they have acquired back to their own practices.

Clockwork also provides education and training on all areas of adolescent health for GPs in the community through ongoing workshops. Practice support is available from Clockwork staff and GPs can refer young people to psychologists, and groups run by Clockwork.

Evaluation

The Victorian Department of Human Services commissioned the external evaluation of Clockwork in 1999.³ A range of processes and tools were utilised for the evaluation to ensure a broad level of participation by all key stakeholders. This included a literature review, service user consultation through case studies, attendance at group sessions, analysis of contact data, consultation with youth workers and GPs via questionnaires and interviews, meetings and interviews with staff, interviews with key stakeholders and reference group members, and a workshop with staff, GPs and key stakeholders. The review concluded that the Clockwork model has been successful because it:

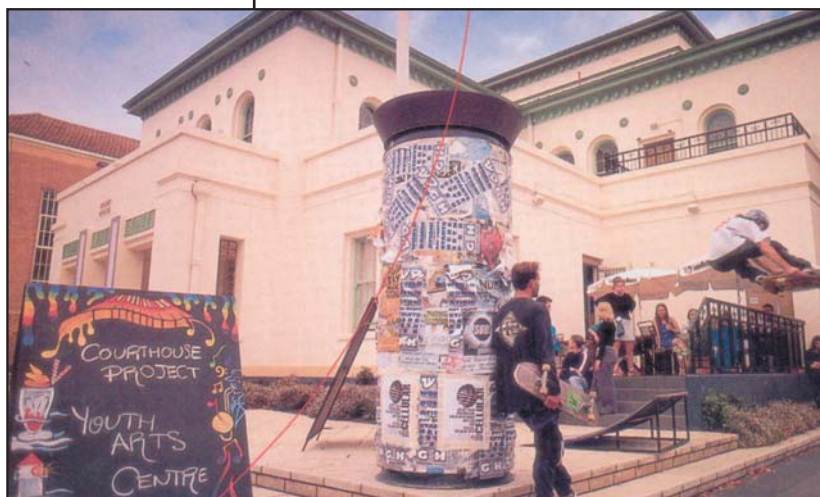


Figure 1. The Courthouse Project, Geelong

- is GP driven and auspiced by the Geelong Division of General Practice
- is accessible and flexible
- responds to ongoing youth consultation and targets marginalised young people
- has a confidential and nonjudgmental approach
- has skilled and committed staff and a caring staff culture
- has a multidisciplinary team that provides holistic health care and responds to young people in crisis, and
- is co-located with other youth services.

The key outcomes for the youth service system are:

- the major source of referral to Clockwork is through family and friends, and clearly service user satisfaction is high to encourage this 'word of mouth' referral source
- other referral sources include welfare and youth workers, and psychiatric services
- the service is perceived by the service system as youth specific, relevant and an asset to the service system, and
- Clockwork has good networks with the youth sector through the Barwon Adolescent Taskforce (Geelong's peak youth organisation).

The key positive outcomes identified by a review of young people attending Clockwork were that:

- young people are using the service when not able to access any other medical service
- there is success in dealing with vulnerable young people in terms of mental health and family relationships
- there is a focus on enhancing the personal coping abilities of young people
- the service is able to address the multiple and complex problems of young people
- the service attends to urgent medical needs, provides gateways and referrals, and deals well with complex issues
- the groups operating at Clockwork are working effectively and have a high degree of service user satisfaction, and
- there is the delivery of an integrated service to young people based on nonjudgmental practice and confidentiality.

The service is able to respond to adolescent health issues (alcohol and drugs, depression, sexual health, pregnancy, self care, abuse), mental health issues (self esteem, anger management, psychiatric issues, suicide, depression, self harm), and welfare issues

(unemployment, family conflict, education, behaviour, family separation, accommodation, domestic violence).

Outcomes for GPs

The key outcomes for GPs, as identified by the evaluation are:

- GPs have increased skills and knowledge in adolescent health and counselling
- consultations are more complex than in traditional general practice and thus afford the opportunity for GPs to extend their skills
- GP focus is highly valued and GPs are seen to take a unique case management and advocacy role with young people.

Conclusion

Clockwork's youth specific, holistic model has gained a high level of acceptance among service users and service providers alike. Clockwork is perceived as making a substantial contribution to improving the physical, psychological and social health of young people attending the service, and is playing a key role in the community providing a central base of skills and expertise on adolescent health issues.

Results indicate that Clockwork is delivering positive outcomes in a range of areas, although many of these outcomes are difficult to quantify due to the ongoing nature of working with this client group and the complexity of the issues presenting. Overall, there is a high level of satisfaction with the service.

It is also well regarded by GPs, enhancing their skills and expertise in adolescent health issues. The service is also valued as a resource for workers with young people in the broader community, particularly those in health and education.³

Conflict of interest: none.

References

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