



AUGUST 2020



Welcome to our August newsletter. It's hard to believe we are half way through the year – and what a year 2020 has already been.

The last time we sent out our newsletter was in April, right in the middle of the nationwide COVID-19 Level 4 lockdown. I am incredibly proud of the way our kaimahi stepped up to respond to this difficult crisis and to ensure our Emerge Aotearoa whānau stayed safe and well.

In no time at all, our teams mobilised to launch a COVID-19 microsite to keep everyone informed; we introduced the messaging app Kaizala that enabled notifications and alerts to kaimahi; Ignite Aotearoa's wellbeing resource library was made available ahead of time; and the Keeping in Touch Squad was introduced to increase support.

It was also wonderful to see The Generator businesses stepping in to provide thousands of emergency meal deliveries across greater Auckland. Another initiative fast-tracked during lockdown was The Ideas Box, which encouraged all staff to send in ways they thought the organisation could operate more efficiently. Suggestions so far have included ways to improve our sustainability; innovative research ideas; and flexible working environments. The results will be exciting as we start implementing some of these ideas.

In this issue, we talk with our Rainbow Partner Cynthia Spittal, who played a vital role during the Level 4

lockdown period to ensure whānau in the Rainbow community were not overlooked in the response planning. Cynthia had only been in her new role a matter of weeks before the Level 4 Lockdown, so we welcome her to the Emerge Aotearoa whānau and thank her for this important mahi.

We also take a look at the development of Koru House; Emerge Aotearoa's Sophisticated Needs Service in West Auckland; and Wattle Downs, our newest housing initiative.

With the news that COVID-19 has reappeared in the community, we know this is a distressing time for everyone. Thankfully, we can all draw on experience gained earlier in the year.

Be kind and look out
for each other,

Ngā mihi,

Barbara Disley
Group Chief Executive



OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

Along with the rest of the country, Emerge Aotearoa was put to the test in March with the government announcement that New Zealand would be entering a Level 4 lockdown to stop the spread of COVID-19.

For an organisation involving essential residential and support services, this was a huge challenge, but one our teams met incredibly well under difficult circumstances.

We knew preparation, planning, and good, consistent communication would be the keys to ensuring our extended Emerge Aotearoa whānau were kept safe and well, and that key sites remained operational.

To manage these new demands, the Group Executive Team quickly established a committee, led by our People Experience Manager, Luke Franks, and our National Clinical Lead, Chris Maxwell, to keep track of COVID-19 developments and oversee Emerge Aotearoa's response. In a very short space of time, we also launched a COVID-19 microsite as part of Emerge Aotearoa's intranet, Te Kete. This became a valuable, central place where we could publish relevant information to all kaimahi, engage directly, and receive up-to-the-minute feedback.

The wellbeing of the people we support and our kaimahi was paramount in our COVID-19 response. With this in mind, we introduced the Keeping in Touch Squad. This involved a bunch of friendly, approachable kaimahi with experience or a passion for mentoring and coaching, who made themselves available to speak with a colleague requesting support.



United Against COVID-19

We also fast-tracked the development of our new social enterprise Ignite Aotearoa, so we could reach people needing support when it was needed most. Emerge Aotearoa staff, their whānau, and the people we support were given access to its wellbeing resource library, which included hundreds of validated, practical, evidence-based tools to help people look after their mental-health, wellbeing and resilience.

In the midst of lockdown, The Generator - our MSD-funded initiative, delivered in partnership with Vaka Tautua – stepped in to provide emergency meal deliveries throughout greater Auckland. More than 13,000 meals and 5000 vegetable packs were boxed up and distributed to those in need thanks to kind offers of gifts, voluntary hours, and support from an Auckland Emergency Management grant. Thank you to everyone involved.

Many insights were gained from our early COVID-19 response that will serve us well as we continue to work with the rest of New Zealand in keeping our communities safe. New ways of working were explored; we saw people go out of their way to help one another with food and supplies; we also saw the benefits of better hygiene in stopping the spread of many illnesses; and witnessed a resurgence in people picking up the phone to connect with each other.

Thank you to everyone we worked with during this time for your support and partnership.



Wattle Downs opens this month

Emerge Aotearoa is excited that it will soon see people moving into its brand-new homes in Wattle Downs.

Located on Mahia Road in Manurewa, Auckland, the 15 homes include six one-bedroom units and nine two-bedroom townhouses. Other housing providers, Penina Health Trust and Accessible Properties will also be providing homes in the 112-house development, with the remaining properties to be privately owned.

National Housing Manager Hope Simonsen said the development will be officially blessed and it is anticipated tenants will begin moving in early September.

“It’s a beautiful area, almost on the estuary, with a walkway around the waterfront and a creek that runs through the development. We think it will have a really nice community feel.”



Meeting 2020 housing needs

Throughout the COVID-19 lockdown, Housing continued to provide support to people in transitional and emergency housing.

National Housing Manager Hope Simonsen says that several organisations and teams of kaimahi worked together to see well over 700 food parcels distributed to whānau.

“We were contacted by other organisations, that had received funding to put together food parcels and ready-made meals, to see if we had families that needed assistance. We were able to distribute food parcels to our families in Wellington, Hamilton and Hawkes Bay, so it was wonderful to make sure they were getting nutritious meals during lockdown,” she says.

Emerge Aotearoa has also been expanding to provide housing services in other parts of the country. Towards the end of 2019, the Trust began delivering transitional housing services in Dunedin and Invercargill, as well as providing support to people living in motel units commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development.

The Sustaining Tenancies programme was extended and is now being run in Porirua, Masterton, Hamilton, Dunedin, Invercargill, and Christchurch. The service works with people who are at risk of losing their current tenancy. Kaimahi work alongside the tenants to address the issues that may be threatening their tenancies, such as budgeting or maintenance, to prevent them from losing their home.

Emerge Aotearoa is continuing to build its property portfolio of long-term social housing and is in the process of redeveloping some of its older properties as well as purchasing and leasing new properties across the country.



KORU HOUSE OFF TO A GREAT START

In eight months, Koru House, Emerge Aotearoa's Sophisticated Needs Service in West Auckland, has grown from strength to strength.

The dedicated team of nine provide a supportive environment for people with complex needs to help them reach their potential through developing and implementing goal plans; daily residential living activities; whānau and community interaction; and one-to-one support.

Service Manager Ashleigh Clarke says that since the service opened, there have been no inpatient readmissions and no emergency services contact.

"Reflection and continuous improvement is part of the ethos at Koru House," she says. "We are always looking at creative ways to do things. One piece of work that was really well received has been introducing a weekly timetable. It outlines all of the different activities and visits for the week so that everyone knows what to expect and can participate."

She said having a multi-agency collaboration between Koru House, the Forensic Coordination Services -

Intellectual Disability (FCS-ID), and a clinical team, enabled them to provide wraparound strategies for up to three people at a time.

Ashleigh says that while the COVID-19 lockdown presented some challenges for the newly opened service, the team worked to minimise disruption where possible.

"There needed to be a lot of pre-planning around how significant events, such as Easter, for tangata whaiora would be managed," she said. "All activities had to be redesigned or supplemented for things that could be done in the house. The team needed to use social stories and frequent, transparent communication to provide reassurance and consistency during this time. There had to be a balance of educating and informing tangata whaiora about the situation but not causing undue anxiety and worry."

"Looking at the future, we'll continue to help people build independence and expand their potential while in Koru House," Clinical Operations Manager Kirsten Norris says. "We want to foster a sense of community belonging."



CELEBRATING OUR RAINBOW PARTNER

Rainbow Partner Cynthia Spittal had only been in her new role at Emerge Aotearoa a matter of weeks before the COVID-19 lockdown.

Thankfully, a previous stint covering a parental leave position in 2018, meant she was already familiar with the organisation, and with a vast list of contacts to draw on, she was able to continue providing support and resources throughout the lockdown period.

“I saw my role as making sure that the needs of the Rainbow community were not overlooked in response planning,” says Cynthia, who uses the pronouns She and Her. “Because of my networks with a number of Rainbow organisations, I was really aware of the things they were doing, and I wanted to let kaimahi know this information and know where to refer whānau they were working with.”

During the COVID-19 response, Cynthia heard anecdotes that members of the Rainbow community - both in New Zealand and abroad – were facing extra stresses during the lockdown period. These included; being isolated in a ‘bubble’ with people who were openly hostile or unsupportive of the Rainbow person’s sexual orientation or gender identity; being disconnected from usual support networks; experiencing difficulty accessing usual gender-affirming treatments (especially delays in initial psychological/ endocrine appointments and difficulty accessing medical supplies); and fear of discrimination.

Cynthia says many Rainbow organisations pivoted to operate online and offer support to people who didn’t feel safe to be out at home. “At least if people, especially youth, had a cellphone, or wifi access, they could join in,” she says. “In fact, some people who hadn’t been able to attend face-to-face groups previously, found new ways of connecting and new support.”

“The Christchurch-based Rainbow group, Qtopia, reported an increase in the number of people attending digital support meetings, from as far away as Australia. It highlighted an ongoing need that hopefully will be looked at as groups return to business as usual.”

Operating within the HR team, Cynthia’s role has been developed to support kaimahi who work directly with clients. During the COVID-19 response, she supplied information and resources that were distributed through Emerge Aotearoa channels, such as Te Kete and daily COVID-19 updates. Calling on her



background in clinical social work and mental health as a Registered Social Worker and Clinical Educator, she also joined the organisation’s Keeping in Touch Squad, to reach out to kaimahi working from home and provide support as necessary.

“I really valued the fact that I didn’t have to go door-knocking, or persuading people this work was important. It was readily accepted and warmly welcomed.”

“Colleagues were really, really pleased that the work that I’m doing is visible. They’ve been overwhelmingly positive. I think it gives an important message about Emerge Aotearoa as a place to work, and also its values. The fact that a number of lived experience partner roles and cultural partner roles exist, and are valued, is hugely important.”

The idea of creating a Rainbow partner role came about through the Rainbow kaimahi network, Te Whānau o Uenuku Roopu. As well as networking and liaison, Cynthia spends time looking at new initiatives to improve services, is reviewing policies, and is investigating how education might be addressed in the future.

Cynthia is also available to provide counselling and support related to Rainbow issues through the Ignite Aotearoa platform.

FIFTH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS



Emerge Aotearoa celebrated five incredible years on 30 June, and received many kind wishes and birthday messages. A big thank you to all kaimahi, stakeholders, collaborators and partners who have worked with us during this time. Your contribution is part of our collective success.

We are proud of the work our kaimahi do and we can't wait to see what the future holds for our organisation.

Ideas Box captures Covid insights

During lockdown, Emerge Aotearoa fast-tracked The Ideas Box, an initiative developed to capture some of the new ways kaimahi had been working and to prompt innovative ideas for the future.

The project, which was championed by the Group Executive Team (GET), encouraged all staff to send in ways

they thought the organisation could operate more efficiently.

To investigate how the ideas could be implemented, a working group was formed, and with the help of subject matter experts from across the organisation, they have met regularly to compile and review the information being received.

Ideas have ranged from improving our sustainability to flexible

working environments, innovative research ideas, and streamlining our processes.

