

Summary

The Brotherhood of St Laurence's Youth Program engages young people aged 15-25 from refugee, asylum seeker and migrant backgrounds to support them to engage in education, employment and social inclusion activities. Due to COVID-19, they have had to adapt how they run their social inclusion activities, using Instagram, WhatsApp and other forms of social media to connect. Instrumental to the success of these activities has been the use of platforms which young people are already using, and the fact that rapport had already been established before COVID-19 through face to face interaction.

CASE STUDY

Brotherhood of St Laurence

Background

The Brotherhood of St Laurence's Youth Program works with young people aged 15-25 to support them to access education and employment support through one to one or group coaching. They also run social inclusion activities and civic engagement activities, such as workshops and camps.

How did Brotherhood of St Laurence adapt during COVID-19?

During COVID-19, Brotherhood of St Laurence's Youth Program had to transition to an online format for all of their activities to keep young people connected and supported.

- Using whatever medium preferred by the young person for one on one coaching and mentoring for education and employment (e.g. over the phone)
- Online group workshops
- WhatsApp group chats and Facebook groups to keep young people connected with each other
- Using Instagram as a youth led, face to face platform to host live sessions where people can check in and chat to others

These online activities have had high levels of engagement, and clients have reported a positive experience of moving activities online. This has been due to using platforms young people were already using, such as WhatsApp and Instagram. The pre-existing rapport developed through prior face to face interactions also made it easier to connect through online mediums. Without that relationship, there may have been less uptake and the online communication may have been less fluid.

In the future and beyond COVID-19, Brotherhood of St Laurence will look to continue connecting with young people online.



Challenges

Moving activities online has been a generally positive experience, but also posed some challenges.

This has included:

1. Young people have varying levels of digital and social media literacy, and access to technology.
2. You can't assume young people always prefer to engage online! With school and TAFE moving online, many young people are already spending a lot of time online.
3. In the early stages of COVID-19, some young people disengaged because they were consumed by other priorities like supporting their families and adapting to changes to study. However, after the initial adaptation period, they often re-engaged.
4. Online public forums can have limited capacity to manage privacy and safety concerns.

Outcomes

By moving services to online platforms that young people are already using, Brotherhood of St Laurence has been able to maintain its connection with young people, despite physical distancing requirements.

Key Learnings

This experience has generated four key learnings for Brotherhood of St Laurence:

1. It's important to develop rapport with clients through face to face interaction, before moving to online engagement.
2. Although technology can never replace face to face interactions, it can be better used beyond COVID-19 to supplement face to face engagement.
3. In using online platforms, it's more effective to use platforms clients are already using and familiar with.
4. Care needs to be taken to protect the privacy and safety of young people when using public online forums.

More information

Brotherhood of St Laurence spoke about their work in response to COVID-19 on SCoA's webinar 'Settlement Service Innovation During COVID-19.' You can view the webinar at:

<http://scoa.org.au/innovation-centre/settlement-service-innovation-covid-19-webinar/>

You can also contact Brotherhood of St Laurence through:

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