

Stepping up: How Youthline is training our teens to tackle the mental health crisis

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Due to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Youthline has experienced a huge increase in the level of demand for its services, as well as more young people presenting as being at serious risk.

New Zealand's growing youth mental health crisis has prompted Youthline, in collaboration with its Principal Partner ASB, to launch a new student-led leadership programme for teens to help tackle the problem head on.

The Youthline Leadership Connect programme will see selected year 12 students given training and ongoing support to become leaders who can lend a listening ear and help connect students to the support available.

Auckland's Glenfield College is one of five high schools where Youthline is piloting Youthline Leadership Connect and principal Paul McKinley says the programme will change lives.

"For the students that take part, and the teens they help, this programme can and will be life-changing, and potentially lifesaving," he says.

"Now, when one of our students is going through something they can turn to a trusted peer, a mate, a friend, someone they trust, for help and guidance and I cannot overstate how much of a difference this will make."



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Glenfield College Principal Paul McKinley says the college is excited to be one of the school's taking part in the Youthline Leadership Connect programme pilot.

The programme, which is free of charge to schools, is being piloted in selected schools across the Auckland region with plans to expand to more schools nationwide in 2024.

"Glenfield College is excited to take part in the Youthline Leadership Connect programme because it provided us with an opportunity to identify potential student leaders and equip them with the skills, training and support they need to make a positive impact on their peers and the wider school community," says McKinley.

"Already you can start to see the selected students really stepping up and becoming the types of leaders and support people that teenagers need in this day and age."

Youthline research* shows young people (13-24 years) consider mental health to be the biggest issue facing their generation, and almost half of young Kiwi don't feel they have positive ways to cope with their problems, up 10% since 2019.

"We really are at a crossroads when it comes to the mental health of our young people and the launch of the Youthline Leadership Connect programme could not

come at a more critical time," says Joanna Madsen, Youthline's Clinical and Services Manager.

"They are the generation that has borne the brunt of so much, like the pandemic and the anxiety of the climate crisis and all the pressures around social media. They are facing so much, but they are also such a strong, resilient generation and that's why this programme will work so well – because they know themselves and how to help each other better than anyone."



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Youth development workers will facilitate the Youthline Leadership Connect programme, providing training to student leaders who can help connect peers to the support services available.

Madsen says key points of difference set the programme apart, notably that it was co-designed with youth, and is peer-reviewed.

"This programme is very much 'for youth, by youth' and our rangatahi have been with us right from those first planning stages, working alongside Youthline and ASB to help create the programme. Because they've been part of it right from the very start, they have so much buy-in with the programme."

Another key point of difference is that the programme is both clinical and peer-reviewed with youth workers, registered therapists and registered psychologists giving the programme clinical sign-offs, says Madsen.

In addition to this programme, ASB is aiming to normalise the conversation around youth mental health and how to seek help, and increasing the number of Youthline counsellors available to support young people.

"We know our rangatahi play a crucial role in helping to navigate their peers to appropriate mental health support," says Hannah McHugh, Community Partnership Manager at ASB.

"ASB is proud to be collaborating with Youthline to help develop the next generation of leaders who have the knowledge, confidence and resilience to support their own mental wellbeing, and can also have a positive effect on the wider community."

Youthline has been helping young New Zealanders for more than 50 years. Due to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Youthline has experienced a huge increase in the level of demand for its services, as well as more young people presenting as being at serious risk.

[Click here](#) to find out more about ASB's partnership with Youthline.

How to contact Youthline:

Mobile: Free text 234 (8am-12pm)

Phone: 0800 376 633 (24/7 with a crisis line from midnight-8am)

Email: talk@youthline.co.nz

Webchat: youthline.co.nz (4.30pm-10pm)

*Youthline's State of the Generation nationally representative survey of 581 people aged 13-24 was conducted in 2021 by Colmar Brunton.