

Mental health impacts and psychosocial support services in a COVID 19 environment

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Mental Health Impacts

More consultations were done on request, for students who had challenges operating in the online environment or navigating the hybrid approach to learning. The inconsistencies of the latter negatively impacted academic outcomes for many.

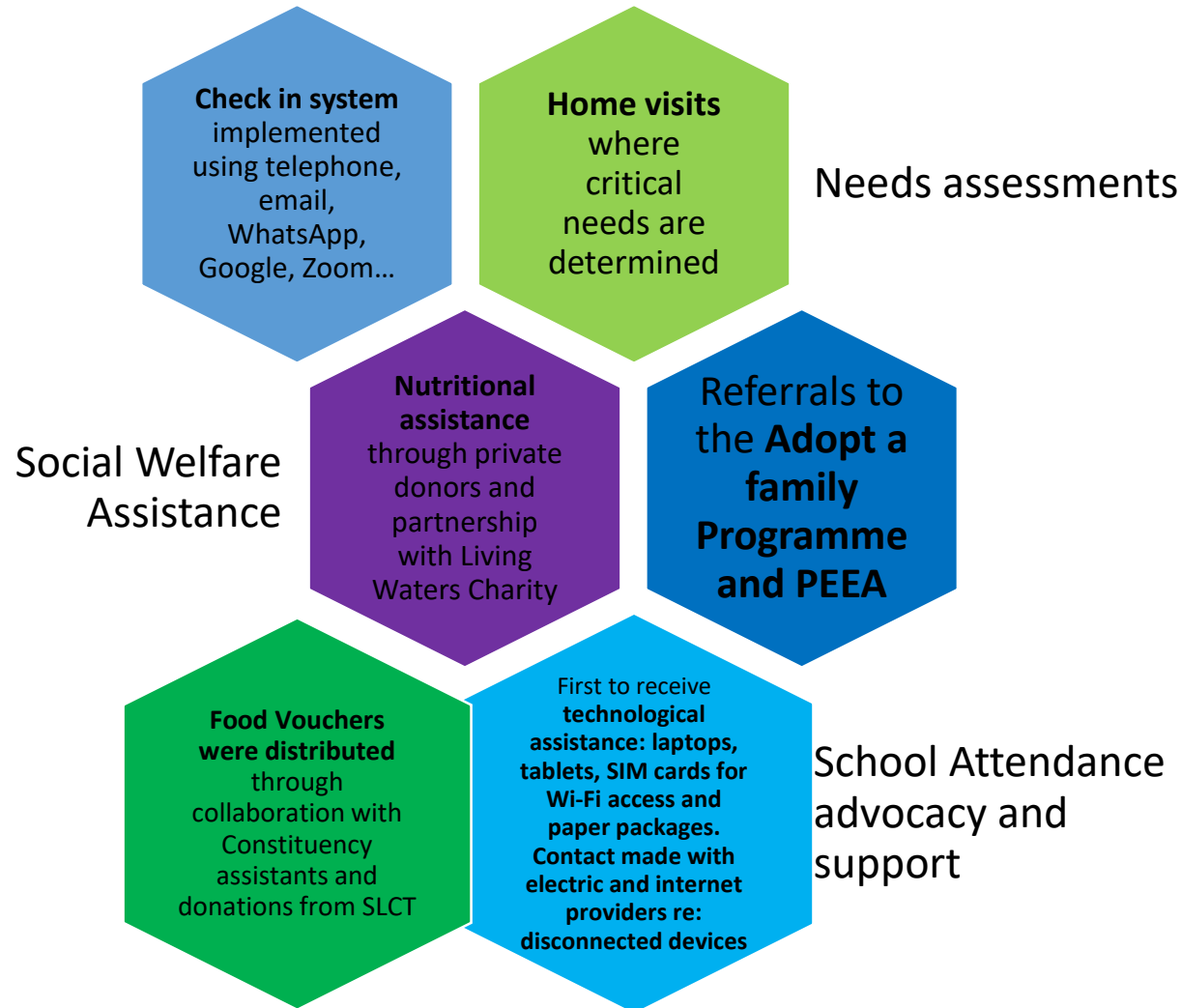
Referrals from schools for students with behavioural challenges decreased, (possibly because of the smaller numbers of students being at school together) but referrals from parents for the same increased.

Increase of referrals for students with Anxiety and Depression concerns and by extension more cases were noted of parents with the same.

Suicidal threat referrals increased as did referrals to The Assessment Unit and admissions to the THRIVE Center (Children's Wing of the Psychiatric Hospital).

Students experiencing social challenges increased as a result of parent's job losses, reduced income etc. This is impacting ability to cope significantly for a large number of families.

1. Vulnerable students register



2. Coping Skills: Dissemination of Information and Support Sessions

Students

- MRD TV
- Radio stations
- Government Information Systems (GIS): print media and CBC
- UNICEF jingles and infomercials “Bounce Back”
- METVT website and Facebook page
- Sandy Lane Primary School counsellors Instagram and Facebook pages
- Counsellor Sessions for primary school students (individual and group) using Google classroom
- HFLE (Secondary)

Parents

- MRD TV
- Radio stations
- Government Information Systems (GIS): print media and CBC
- UNICEF jingles and infomercials
- METVT website and Facebook page
- Sandy Lane Primary School counsellors Instagram and Facebook pages
- Counsellor sessions on request with primary school counsellors
- Special schools facilitated sessions for parents of special needs students
- Parents referred to parent education sessions done by NCSA on Facebook live
- Plans in place for a Parent Academy programme

Teachers

- Partnership with UNICEF and Network Services to provide support sessions
- Special sessions for school administrators and Class 4 teachers
- Return to happiness sessions in conjunction with UNICEF
- Governments EAP programme
- Mental Health support offered through SS

3. Adjustments to the standardized referral and response systems during shut- down period

Revised Operational
Procedures and protocols
to work in a hybrid
environment based on
ASCA/NASP standards

COVID response
framework was put in place
so the referrals could be
done electronically

Worked well in the primary
schools as referrals were
done with ease and there
was a faster and more
efficient response system
put in place

Parents could refer directly
rather than go through the
school

4. Hotlines

- Several hotlines were set up including for persons wishing to access counselling, needing parenting support, requesting assessments, needing access to devices etc.
- The Child Care Board also has a hotline to report abuse
- FMH/SLCT/BASW hotline for children also is another resource



5. Staff Increases

Increased staffing in SSS by more than 100% (additional social workers, Special needs Learning Support Coordinators and soon School Counsellors)

6. Assessment Services

Officers and consultants to the SS programme continue conducting assessments during shut down periods, using online modalities

Once protocols allowed psychological testing continued incorporating all the necessary protocols e.g. sanitization, sneeze guards, etc.

7. Online Counselling

- Student Services offered online counselling services through the Sandy Lane Charitable Trust Primary School Counselling Programme and the outsourcing programme on an ongoing basis throughout the pandemic
- Professionals utilize various media depending on the services user's comfort and accessibility: G-Suite, Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp calling, etc.
- Training was facilitated prior on implementing effective online counselling whilst employing all the necessary ethical standards

8. Interagency Collaborations to provide meaningful interventions



Online Inter-agency referral system implemented



Consultation is done using online mediums and the telephone rather than face to face



Collaborative home visits are done in critical cases, even during national shutdown



Case conferencing has increased. They are facilitated using Microsoft teams and Google Meets



9. Continuous Professional Development

1. Trauma Response Training and Using a Trauma Informed Approach in the classroom

- Counsellors, Social Workers, Educators

2. Facilitating Social and Emotional Learning in a COVID Environment

- Counsellors, Social Workers

3. Crisis Response: Suicide, Bereavement, Sexual Abuse Protocols in the online environment

- Social Workers, School Attendance, Safety Officers



10. Mental Health and Wellness Committee

- An expert committee was established by the cabinet of Barbados in May 2021 to devise a comprehensive mental health plan for the school community, given the events of the last year
- The committee is reviewing and making recommendations to policy makers with regards to mental health needs of the ministry's constituents and initiatives that would impact those needs positively.