

Connecting Young Parents

Engaging and Empowering Pregnant and Parenting Teens

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Connecting Young Parents: Engaging and Empowering Pregnant & Parenting Teens

Introduction

- 'Connecting Young Parents' (CYP) is a cross-border, multi-sector project in Albury-Wodonga that has quickly and effectively developed a variety of services with and for teen parents. These have strengthened connections, developed understanding and skills, and created engagement.
- This presentation will look at the journey taken by this project, the community development principles that have underpinned this work, and the challenges and opportunities that these create

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The general issues

- Teen pregnancy /birth rates are higher in rural areas
- Ante-natal services are under-utilised by teenagers
- Support services can lack integration and continuity
- Teenagers want distinct and separate services
- Outreach services need flexibility & accessibility
- People in rural communities have specific issues e.g. visibility, accessibility, confidentiality, anonymity
- Young people also have specific issues e.g. housing, food, transport, bulk-billing, lack of educational opportunities

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The particular challenges

- Half of teen pregnancies occur during the first 6 months of sexual activity
- Teen pregnancy and childbirth is closely linked with decreased chances of completing secondary school, welfare dependency, ex-nuptial births, responsible fatherhood and workforce development issues
- Successful strategies are built upon early intervention when pregnancy is first confirmed, with an on-going and consistent service relationship
- However teens in rural areas face particular difficulties accessing appropriate services

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The regional background

- Local research into teen pregnancy experiences and services was undertaken in 2003-4 for Upper Hume Community Health Service (Wodonga) and Youth and Family Services (Albury) by students from La Trobe
- In response to findings of disconnection, isolation, complexity and fragmentation, a working group of youth/education/health services was set up in 2004
- This Teen Pregnancy and Sexual Health Working Party operates under the Youth Platform of the Upper Hume Primary Care Partnership

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The overall project

- 'Connecting Young Parents' is a major outcome of this working group, has Federal funding until 2008, and acts as facilitator for further developments
- The overall goals are to improve services to, and the connectedness of, pregnant/parenting teens by
 - developing service provision for young parents
 - connecting young parents with local services
 - strengthening the parenting skills of young parents
 - building social networks for young parents
 - linking young parents into further education

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Progress to date

- a network of 49 services (including young mums groups)
- monthly network meetings for sharing information, discussing issues and further project partnerships
- youth friendly information for young mums in the form of "Young Women's Business" pamphlets on services
- ante-natal classes specifically for young parents with free classes for the under 20's provided every 8 weeks
- young mums / parents groups that are run for and by young mums on both sides of the border
- an increasing set of connections designed to create and maintain the engagement of pregnant/parenting teens

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The principles underpinning this work

The progress of 'Connecting Young Parents' is based on use of community development/support principles

- Respect
- Participation
- Collaboration
- Self-determination
- Empowerment
- Responsiveness
- Working and learning together
- Reflective practice
- Social justice

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“Caring for Kids”

- The focus today is on one aspect of the project, a course designed for young mums - 'Caring for Kids'
- This takes 1/3 of the Certificate III in Children's Services, offered at the local Continuing Education Centre in a class specifically designed for young mums
- It brings together vocational qualifications, social opportunities, & parenting skills in a 10 week course
- It is modified through additional time, use of specific tutors, gender specific, availability of childcare, free transport, regular lunches and all homework in class
- Development is an ongoing and evolutionary process

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“Caring for Kids”- service outcomes

- 'Caring for Kids' is now offered every term, and has attracted interest from 55 young mums, who are increasing coming through word of mouth. These include some who are highly isolated, and/or left school early, and/or have chosen to be disengaged.
- 29 of these young mums came in to see us and enroll, most did at least 1 competency & 50% did them all
- To date 20 have engaged with further study options, other courses or various young mums groups
- This is now a valuable place to ask 'what do you want next' which becomes the basis for further activities

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“Caring for Kids” - young mums outcomes

- From a young mums perspective the course is enjoyable, recommendable and they always want more
- Initial interest is to learn something, get workplace qualifications, meet new people and learn things that will help them to be a 'good mum'
- The primary reason why those who engage enjoy it so much are social, they get to meet new people, they make friends, and they learn new and valued skills
- An unspoken/unidentified reason is possibly also their move into being connected, being valued, having a voice and being empowered ... listen to what they do

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“Caring for Kids” - what young mums then do

Young mums engaged in 'Caring for Kids' have

- become facilitators for a group that lost funding
 - established another young mums group of their own
 - set up a petition to get a local service open overnight
 - participated in parents and young people's forums
 - organised publicity and media coverage of the above
- and on a personal level some now
- buy clothes that their boyfriends disagree with
 - move to establish independent living arrangements
 - believe they can study and be wonderful parents

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What can we learn and where do we go from here?

What can we learn ?

- The core principles underlying this work have been respect, collaboration, responsiveness, continuity and the notion of learning together - these all make the process, the 'how', a vital part of what is achieved

Where do we go from here?

- Sustainability, connecting with existing structures & \$
- Deciding where to extend in 07 amid competing needs
- These decisions and choices will be made using what we have learned so far & the principles we have discussed

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Thank you

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