

SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER HRC ROUNDTABLE

MELBOURNE, JUNE 30TH, 2017

This submission presents a wrap-around, place-based, service delivery which is evidenced based and addresses the types of interventions which:


1. decrease the risk profile and trajectory of young parents,
2. improve their capacity for safe and effective parenting, and
3. increase their likelihood of becoming economically secure.

Zoe Support Australia was founded in 2012 to provide the benevolent relief of young pregnant and parenting mothers, who without support experience significant barriers to education, employment and long term positive outcomes. Zoe Support provides integrated individual intervention and place based support to young mothers to reengage and complete education, while supporting improved parenting skills. We support young mothers (13-24 years) to address barriers to social connectedness, civic life, pathways to education and employment as they embark on their parenting journey. Zoe Support provides a socially inclusive environment with connection to peers, staff and the wider community. Zoe Support is an environment, where young pregnant and parenting mothers can access and receive the support they need to increase parenting capacity, improve wellbeing, and optimise future opportunities for themselves, and provide the best start for their children. Our mission is: Connecting, Inspiring, Learning: supporting young mothers in parenting and education.

Zoe Support Australia is a local evidence-informed program specifically targeted to young parents ready to engage in education, training and/or employment in Mildura. This model includes a fit-for-purpose property close to an educational precinct that provides a community space for teenage parents and their child/ren. Unlike existing student parenting programs, which haven't demonstrated sustainable longer term outcomes, this program model works by addressing identified barriers such as: affordable housing, transport, flexible childcare, supportive education settings and social isolation, based on a decade of research evidence (Harden, Brunton, Fletcher, Oakley, Burchett & Backhans, 2006).

Currently the Zoe Support fully integrated model includes:

- employment of qualified professional staff to provide case management and on-site child and family day care
- delivery of on-site educational and life skills programs

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- delivery of perinatal support including birthing classes and lactation advice, & MCHN visits
 - accredited and flexible education options with external providers onsite or online
 - Support of young parents transitioning out of education and into employment
 - Housing support into private property rental/lease
 - transport
 - access to other support services and/or referral pathways to local community services

This model:

- assists the Australian Government to meet its objectives of the Priority Investment Approach to improve lifetime wellbeing (although we are unfunded).
- is cost effective
- is readily replicable and scalable
- is evidenced-informed
- has demonstrated its effectiveness to positively and permanently change lives in Mildura
- addresses intergenerational disadvantage leading to welfare dependency
- actively involves the young parent in designing the program to meet their needs
- is continually evaluated

Currently Zoe Support has 77 young mothers (60% single), and 79 children.

Just in the last year alone, our data shows reduced numbers of clients using drugs, with a drop from 23% to 14%; a drop in FV history from 43% to current experiences of FV at 20%; a reduction in engagement with Child Protection where 28% of our young mothers experienced out of home care themselves as children, but only 12% of young mother's children are engaged with CP. Interestingly concerns regarding mental health have soared from just 16% acknowledging or being diagnosed last year, to now 54% of clients consider they have mental health concerns with both diagnosed and undiagnosed numbers in this figure. 35% of clients are now successfully renting in the private rental market and 65% of clients are engaged and attending education either onsite or with other institutions nearby.

We have just completed a co-design and development process with the Department of Social Services addressing the very same actuarial report by PWC to reduce welfare dependency among young parents. Accordingly, I am very interested that your Commission is also seeking to address this space and see change. Some of our young mothers were interviewed by DSS and Thinkplace who facilitated the

collaborative approach to development, and I am sure that many of them would be interested in the opportunity to tell their story again.

I look forward to being able to engage in whatever way is helpful.

Kind regards,



Anne Webster