



**POSTAL ADDRESS**

PO Box 99  
OAKLANDS PARK  
SA 5046

Phone: (08) 8352 4044  
Fax: (08) 8352 4011  
genesispregnancysupport@msn.com  
ABN 32 947 063 007

**OFFICE ADDRESS**

2 Brooker Terrace  
COWANDILLA  
SA 5033

16 May 2017

Megan Mitchell  
National Children's Commissioner  
Australian Human Rights Commission  
Level 3, 175 Pitt Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Mitchell

Thank you for the invitation to make this written submission and to participate in a roundtable discussion on the subject of young parenting.

Genesis has been associated with this demographic for 26 years and has gained considerable insight into some of the problems experienced by teenage parents.

Our interventions include:

- Free unplanned pregnancy counselling
- Free material assistance (cots, prams, bassinets, manchester, baby clothes etc)
- Affordable baby gear via our 'Reborn' second hand baby gear shops (Cowandilla and Woodville)
- Free access to our 'MummyLink' young mums support groups
- Post abortion counselling and 'eMerge' healing retreat weekends
- beREADY sex and relationship education for primary and high school students (2000 students/yr)

Our latest project currently in progress, is our 'eMbrace' program, intended to be a live-in, mothering and nurturing skills intensive for young mums at risk of having their babies removed and placed into foster care. As with all of our service provisions, this program is being created in response to demand.

In regards to your request for input in relation to early interventions that may assist in reducing the risk of negative outcomes for young parents and children, please see my submission on behalf of Genesis Pregnancy Support Inc attached.

Regards

Juli Bednall  
Executive Officer  
Genesis Pregnancy Support Inc.





**Submission to:**        **Megan Mitchell**  
                                 **National Children's Commissioner**  
                                 **Australian Human Rights Commission**

**Regarding:**

- **types of early interventions likely to decrease the risk profile and trajectory of young parents, young parents to be and their children**
- **types of early interventions which improve their capacity for safe and effective parenting**
- **types of early interventions which increase their likelihood of becoming economically secure**

---

**In relation to those relevant areas in which Genesis Pregnancy Support has had extensive experience and seen significant effectiveness:**

#### **Crisis pregnancy, Pre-natal & Ante-natal Support**

Ignorance regarding pregnancy can be exacerbated by the absence of any source of informed adult or reliable family structure. Friends provide limited practical assistance or know-how and often young parents lack the skills to seek out the support that is needed. From the moment of discovery of a positive pregnancy test, questions arise and information and support is needed. If it is not provided by the immediate family then encouragement and advice must be made easily accessible elsewhere. Marginalised youth are particularly vulnerable at this stage. They lack confidence and mature wisdom and are in need of guidance regarding a number of areas significant to achieving positive outcomes for their, and their children's, future. The change of lifestyle that they are experiencing necessitates the presence of peer group support and friendships on a consistent basis in order for them to find some stability and normality. Pregnancy and parenting education that is delivered in that environment can be better assimilated and absorbed, where similar issues are shared and are in common.

#### **Recommendation:**

That small group support be prioritised, resourced and sustained to provide:

- peer group experience and friendship development
- regular weekly/fortnightly meetings
- crèche facilities
- an informal, non-threatening, non-judgemental, non-institutionalised environment
- a sense of worth, significance and autonomy
- home visit support as required
- educational sessions
  - Self esteem and self confidence
  - Sexual health
  - Healthy relationships and boundaries
  - Communication skills
  - Mothering/fathering and parenting skills
  - Coping skills (single parenting)
  - Health and nutrition



- connection to
  - other support groups/services/activities
  - CaFHS nurse
  - Legal support and mediation
- recreational outings/activities
- referrals
  - professional services
  - mental health
  - rehabilitation

That existing groups that provide these services be given extensive support and opportunity for expansion.

Practical material assistance is also initially essential to unsupported parents to secure the baby's immediate well-being and for the young parents emotional support until they are better established. Organisations that are providing free baby gear and equipment need government backing as only a few exist to meet the considerable demand. Genesis provides material assistance to over 30 government and non-government referring agencies.

## **Motherhood**

Youth who have come from dysfunctional homes are ill equipped to navigate the demanding expectations of motherhood alone, and often, a dysfunctional home has exposed them to mistreatment, sexual, physical or emotional abuse, or being ostracised. These young women then look for love in all the wrong places and as new mothers, are simply expected to rise above the neglect of their upbringing and cope normally. Often teenage girls who are vulnerable to having their children removed into the care and protection system may simply be in need of personal, one on one, support and attention to address and help develop their parenting skills. With the overload that the government system is currently experiencing, this can become an issue that is not adequately addressed and the problem is thereby compounded.

### **Recommendation:**

That young mums at risk of their babies/children being removed into foster care be provided with short term (4-6 weeks), live-in, intensive programs to give opportunity to gain basic mothering and parenting skills covering:

- nurturing skills
- basic baby/child care
- parent/child roles and boundaries
- child behaviour management
- accessing healthcare
- self-worth and personal development
- physical, emotional and spiritual health
- self-awareness and self-expression
- personal goal setting
- sexual health and hygiene
- employment pathways



- job seeking skills
- educational pathways
- community awareness
- food preparation, cooking, nutrition
- cleaning, home management
- budget management
- social behaviour skills
- animal/pet care
- gardening

There should also be opportunity for access to long term programs (6 - 12months) for those young women who require longer exposure to this type of education.

The overall objective of the program would be to reduce the cycle of dysfunctional parenting that is perpetuated through inappropriate, inadequate or absent role modelling. To thereby reduce the need for intervention or child removal and alleviate the negative impact of cyclic fostering on children and families.

These recommendations of course do not cover the many areas of intervention that are be needed particularly in regard to the young fathers, although it is considered that the programs needed would be similar in intent. This submission has merely recommended courses of action that our organisation has already taken, has received positive feedback and seen positive results from.

The degree to which we have been able to offer these services is restricted only by the limited amount of support we are able to illicit from donors and volunteers alone.

### **Earliest Intervention – Preventative and Protective Education**

It is said that 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure', and on this particular subject matter the saying is worth substantial consideration. Teenage parenthood, single or partnered, is the direct result of sexual activity. This is no news bulletin, however the prolific young parenting dilemmas of the current day are not typical of days gone by. This is largely due to a liberal sexual culture along with sex education that no longer places a primary focus on encouraging children to delay sexual activity until adulthood. Unlawful sexual intercourse is no longer conveyed to youth and a harm minimisation approach to teenage sexual activity has proven to have consistently failed dismally on a number of aspects.

The latest Secondary Students & Sexual Health survey 2013 reveals that after decades of campaigning to encourage use of condoms, students reporting 'always using a condom' was just 43%. Given that 50% of students are sexually active by year 12 and almost 25% report 3 or more sexual partners in the past year, it is not surprising that we have high teen pregnancy rates and 3 STIs in epidemic proportions, particularly for this age group.

We can continue to 'bandaid' the problem by trying to simply contracept our teens via long lasting implants and injections, without instilling any sense of personal responsibility or self-control, but these qualities need to be taught, and developed, for successful relationships and parenting as well.



**Recommendation:**

That school sex and relationship education programs with a primary focus on:

- delaying sexual activity until adulthood
- emphasising the significant risks associated with early and casual sexual activity (including unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and emotional harm)
- developing healthy relationship skills
- building self-esteem and self confidence
- exercising self-control and discernment
- involving and informing parents

be given due acknowledgement, position in the state school system, public validation and significant financial support from the government.

Submitted by:

Juli Bednall  
Executive Officer

