

Submission

“Young Parents and their Children, Australian Human Rights Commission, National Children’s Commissioner”

This submission comes from a small community based education focused service offering a unique education alternative for young teenage parents or expecting young teenage parents and their children in the Greater Geelong region.

The Diversitat Youth Education’s Young Parents Program was established in 2012 in response to the needs of young people who were attending our alternative education program and either currently pregnant or have recently given birth and were unable to continue with their education. The program has since expanded and has had many students from the general population of teenage parents enrolled, primarily through word of mouth and service provider referral. It is the only program operating in the region and one of only a handful operating across Victoria.

The program was set up to offer students and their young children up until the age of 2 an opportunity to continue in their education whilst bringing their young babies/toddlers to school with them. This was in response to the fact that many teenage parents may not have supportive carers available for young children to enable a return to education or feel ready or able to afford formal childcare options. It may be difficult for many young teenage parents to access childcare due to a reliance on public transport options. Many young teenage parents were also unable or unwilling to be separated from their young children at any early age. A further issue was the cost of childcare, even with subsidies it can be an extra cost on a tight budget.

Students studying within our model complete the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) qualification at the foundation or intermediate levels with pathway planning and wellbeing assistance available as part of the model. The funding for our program comes from students being enrolled within the Skills VIC framework. Although this pays for the basic costs of a student it does not allow for any additional costs such as food and nutrition options for students and baby specific items (cots, highchairs, baby wipes nappies etc.). We also provide specialist speakers and mentoring on topics such as child first aid, baby health and wellbeing and nutrition etc. All of these items make up a holistic offering within the program. This means the extra costs of this program must be worn by our organisation which is a not for profit organisation and makes the funding of the program on an ongoing basis to be very vulnerable.

There are many bodies of research to support the ideology that the longer a young person participates in education the greater likelihood of ongoing employment and the less likely they would be to experience poverty and severe social disadvantage. Currently young parents on a Centrelink payment are not required to re-enter work or study until their youngest child turns 7. This is a long time to be out of the workforce and out of a study routine and would make it very difficult for a young teenage parent to return to study and or work. The Pricewater Coopers valuation of this client group concluded that this young person would attract an average lifetime cost of around \$540,000 to the welfare system.

Our program strongly supports a model of early intervention within the life of a teenage parent to continue their education and improve their likelihood of becoming self-reliant in the future. Investment and fully funding programs such as ours may well impact the lives of many young teenage parents and in turn their own children and is worthy of more investigation and consideration at the Federal and State level.

Helen Foord

Young Parents Program Coordinator

Diversitat Youth Education Geelong

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