

KARINYA YOUNG MUMS'N'BUBS

LAUNCESTON, TASMANIA



SUBMISSION TO NATIONAL CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

EARLY INTERVENTIONS FOR YOUNG PARENTS, YOUNG
PARENTS TO BE AND THEIR CHILDREN

May 2017

1. Introduction

Karinya Young Women's Service (KYWS) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) National Children's Commissioner regarding the types of early interventions likely to decrease the risk profile and trajectory of young parents, parents to be and their children.

This submission addresses the following points highlighted by the National Children's Commissioner:

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

BACKGROUND

Karinya Young Mums 'n' Bubs (KYM) is an early intervention service for one of Tasmania's most vulnerable groups, pregnant teenagers and young parents aged between 15 and 19 years. KYM prioritises those with the highest need – those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and with limited family support. The program covers the Launceston area, providing accommodation and intensive case management for young parents and parents to be.

KYM provides support at a critical time in the lives of these parents and their babies, and aims to redirect them from the welfare and child protection systems. It aims to achieve the following broad outcomes:

- a) Healthy, skilled, connected and confident young-parent families;
- b) Healthy, nurtured babies of young mothers; and
- c) Healthy young parents pursuing the development of their personal potential as productive, socially and economically engaged adults.

Karinya Young Women's Service established KYM in August 2012. Karinya has provided short-term crisis accommodation to young women aged 13 to 20 years since 1979 and serves the Launceston and greater northern Tasmania region. The Karinya workers noticed that some teenagers who were pregnant or had young babies were falling through cracks in the service system. They established KYM as a pilot program from 2012-2015, after receiving three years of funding from Clarendon Children's Home.

The young parents supported by KYM have complex and often traumatic backgrounds. Many grew up in poorly functioning families, experiencing multigenerational unemployment, low literacy, domestic violence and neglect. Many entered KYM with a range of personal issues including poor mental health; low self-esteem; drug, alcohol and tobacco use and involvement with Youth Justice.

As an example of the support delivered our recent cost benefit evaluation showed that in the twelve months from September 2015-August 2016, KYM supported 24 young parents, including 17 mothers, 7 fathers, and 19 babies (including pregnancies). Seven parents and babies exited the program. The

average length of stay for mothers exiting the program was 15 months, fathers averaged 9.1 months.

Early interventions likely to decrease the risk profile and trajectory of young parents, parents to be and their children.

From Karinya's research into the needs of young parents and parents to be, it became apparent that access to suitable properties and security of tenure was a clear and tangible barrier to support for this high risk group of vulnerable people. From our experience of the Young Mums'n'Bubs program over the past four years the types of early interventions likely to decrease the risk profile and trajectory of young parents, young parents to be and their children starts with the foundation of establishing stable accommodation.

The KYM program is addressing this need by providing an early intervention service that includes supported accommodation with intensive wrap around support that is targeted to the identified needs of parents and their children. The program also works towards addressing the root causes of homelessness and associated personal challenges they face e.g. substance misuse, family breakdown, abuse, as well as providing intensive parenting support, and living skills education. Without the stability of accommodation the young parent is restricted in addressing any other needs and it is fundamental to their future development and that of their child/children. It has been identified that once accommodation is in place then other issues, concerns or requirements can be addressed. The complexity of the participants is reflected in their case plans and how often they require home visits, assertive outreach and advocacy to best reduce their risks and increase supports required.

The KYM program makes linkages with local community organisations, services and resources that focus on parenting and child development to assist in shaping a positive trajectory for parents and children. Networking with other services and organisations is an important factor in widening the supports available that young parents can access. KYM helps participants' to utilise these networks which builds their overall confidence and parenting skills.

Early interventions which improve the capacity for safe and effective parenting.

The KYM program engages participants in education, support and group activities that will benefit them as well as their babies. Activities are delivered in purpose designed groups to improve the capacity for safe and effective parenting. This approach provides the opportunity for the participants to then go on to mentor, educate and support other young parents.

KYM was successful in obtaining funding from John T Reid Charitable Trust in 2016 to commence a Healthy Choices Program working towards interrupting the cycle of intergenerational poverty and poor social, economic and health indicators in young pregnant women, parents and their babies.

The Healthy Choices program aims to provide nutritional, health and education support to young mothers/parents. The goal of the program is to develop strong nutritional and health foundations for the young parents and their babies in the hope that they will have healthier lifestyles than they may otherwise have had. The program comprises of cooking and nutrition classes focusing on cheap nutritious meals for parents and children. It also incorporates self-esteem workshops which include a focus on body image, resilience and healthy relationships.

Mum and bub swimming classes were also provided highlighting water safety and motor skill development so parents can have an understanding of the purpose of each skill and how they relate to the child's developmental stage.

This early intervention approach was established to improve parenting effectiveness and confidence, improve the nutrition of parents and babies and to maintain healthy parents and healthy babies.

Prenatal and postnatal care as well as follow up with Child Health Services is also included within the intensive support provided by the KYM program. The KYM support workers help participants navigate their way through the pregnancy experience and provide transport to and assistance at appointments whilst advocating and empowering the young person to ensure their needs are met. Liaising with and attending Child Health appointments occurs and 100% of babies supported in the program have been immunised.

Early interventions which increase their likelihood of becoming economically secure.

The KYM workers use a strengths based approach to direct service delivery. In particular, when working with young parents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, this approach is considered to address some of the issues impacting on engagement. Goal orientated case management also ensures that areas for growth and development – such as participating in learning opportunities are a core factor.

A key focus for all participants in the KYM program is the development of links with education and training opportunities. Karinya acknowledges education is a key driver behind breaking the cycle of poverty which increases their likelihood of becoming economically secure, contributing members of society not relying on government benefits. The KYM program works with services providing targeted education opportunities for the young parents as they have often been disengaged from education/training and main stream education may not be the right approach for them.

CONCLUSION

Findings from evaluations of the KYM program show it is meeting its core objectives and demonstrated:

- Accommodation has been maintained.
- Young parents have engaged with child health services.
- Their children are being monitored throughout the early years so issues can be identified and addressed.
- A number of participants have exited their KYM unit and program into their own stable housing choices.
- Participants are engaging with education.

We believe the uniqueness of this program and the early intervention approach helps fundamentally change the lives of the young parents and children supported. Young parents and pregnant women have had the opportunity to alter the trajectory of their lives for the better and their children have commenced a positive start in life and their development opportunities have been improved.