

Hon Josh Willie MLC (Chair)
Legislative Council Select Committee Tasmanian Child and Family Centres
Parliament of Tasmania
Parliament House
Hobart, TAS 7000
c/o Secretary Natasha Exel

22 March 2017

Dear Mr Willie,

Re. Legislative Council Select Committee Tasmanian Child and Family Centres

The Youth Network of Tasmania is the peak body for young people and the non-governmental youth sector in Tasmania. YNOT advocates for the needs and initiatives of young people and the youth sector, and aims to increase the participation and contribution of young people in Tasmania.

As the peak body for youth issues, we recognise the support structures that can be provided and continued for young parents and young families by Child and Family Centres. Furthermore, we would also acknowledge the way in which the Tasmanian Child and Family Centres can contribute to health and educational benefits for young children, that will help them through their developmental years, and introduce them to educational environments.

Whilst the rate has significantly dropped in Tasmania over the last five years, the current rate of teenage pregnancy is 16.1 per 1000 births, and is still the second highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the nation. Teenage parenthood presents a number of challenges that have a significant impact on the health, socio-economic wellbeing and education outcomes of the parent and child alike. The parenting experiences of a teenage mother are unique to this cohort and require a tailored approach. We suggest a focus on bringing up and creating further opportunity to those who may be affected by social and economic barriers. Working with young parents requires sensitivity to a number of unique factors that may influence their ability or willingness to participate in programs¹.

Child Family Community Australia (under the Australian Institute of Family Studies) has outlined some of the challenges and needs of working with young parents when delivering services. Firstly, teenage parenthood is often a challenge that can have a considerable impact on a young person's life and is associated with a number of adversities. For example, it is more likely to occur for young people from a low socio-economic background.

Due to the social stigma surrounding young parenthood, young parents tend to respond more positively to practitioners who are non-judgmental and understand and accept the realities of young parenthood. Moreover, reaching these groups and keeping them engaged can be difficult and young parents can often be reluctant or find it difficult to engage with programs on a continual basis. In this respect, the emphasis of Tasmanian Child and Family Centres on community belonging and community capacity is a welcome focus. However, perhaps more can be done in regard to outreach and creating specific environments that may be more welcoming of young and teenage parents. For

¹ Rhys Price-Robertson, 'Supporting Young Parents', *Child Family Community Australia Practice Sheet– Australian Institute of Family Studies*, November 2010 <<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/supporting-young-parents>>.

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example, developing programs that might focus on initiating ways which might allow more space for young families, programs that allow them more input, or introducing specific outreach programs may help in overcoming some of the difficulties in engaging young parents.

Often these groups have significant economic and time constraints that might prevent them from regularly utilising these services and accessibility is an important consideration for many young parents. They are more likely to participate in programs or activities that are accessible by public transport or that provide transport to participants (Soriano et al., 2008). This is a unique challenge for Tasmania because isolated communities can be disconnected, and there can be barriers in terms of time and money spent in devoting time for young parents to commit to travel to services. The placement of these centres in rural and semi-rural locales has been a beneficial way in which the Centres have addressed some of these concerns, effort should be made in making sure that all centres are accessible either by public transport or providing ways that lower income or people without means of transport can fully participate on a regular basis.

Whilst challenges are significant, the benefits of the Centres for young people in the community are also quite numerous. In providing an integrated and collaborative service approach, preventative health benefits for Children assist in early identification, prevention and pre-emption which can mitigate and identify further complications as children move from early childhood through their development years.

Early accessible education also presents a benefit as to young people as it is an opportunity to introduce children into a culture of education, help people to adjust to school life and maintain an engagement and interest in education throughout their youth years.

The centralised aspect of the services affecting parents as well as children is also a beneficial approach to young parents' education outcomes and this is a point that could be utilised further. As young parents tend to be from lower socio-economic situations, programs like the parent education programs and pathways to employment programs for parents could represent a way to gain further means of education. Opportunities and environments that allow young people to stay with their child and access other important services whilst gaining skills that may assist them in further developing skills for employment are important environments that many young Tasmanians can be shut out or feel alienated from when they have a child. These programs could represent a positive opportunity to provide some further education which they may not be able to attend because of their parenting responsibilities.

Stemming out of the *Tasmanian Youth Forum*, some young people have also expressed the feeling that pre-parenting classes should be mandatory. Young Tasmanians have also stressed the growing importance on understanding mental health and introducing more accessible programs that help parents develop parenting skills, and understand mental health issues in children before and after birth should be considered and continued.

We thank the Committee for this opportunity to contribute to this Select Committee and welcome any further opportunities to provide input.

Yours sincerely,



Joanna Siejka

CEO
Youth Network of Tasmania