



Thriving Young Families

Family resourcing

Through our partnership with Hand Heart Pocket we are investigating what works for at-risk young parents and their children to thrive, and evaluating the effectiveness of integrated service delivery.

Our transformative approach to backing vulnerable young families wraps support around a young family tailored to their needs, goals and hopes for the future.



Issue: Multiple and complex needs



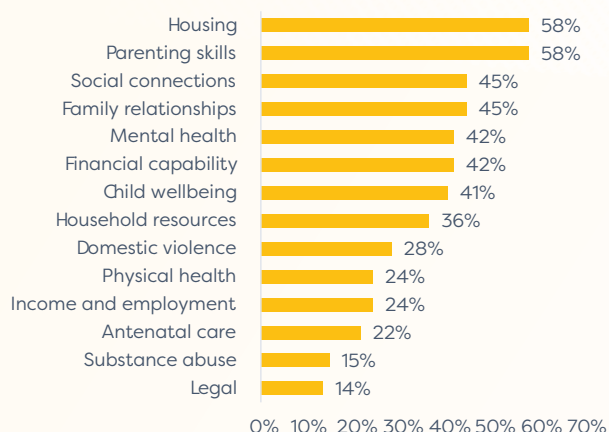
Young parents in Logan bear exponential risk across multiple generations: they are often from highly disadvantaged backgrounds; they experience complex challenges as people and as parents; and their children are at significant risk of poor outcomes throughout life.

Within Thriving Young Families:

88% of young parents presented with four or more issues.

Housing, parenting, relationships, mental health and financial issues are most common.

Presenting issues



Resourcing families to thrive

The Thriving Young Families initiative aims to resource strong and proud young families where children thrive, learn and grow. To this end, Family Resource Practitioners work alongside young parents to address immediate needs and build their capacity for long term outcomes.

Five key principles inform the way our Family Practitioners work:

1. Relationships are the foundation and vehicle for change
2. Support is holistic and multifaceted, responding to whole-of-family needs, at times multi-generational
3. Parents set the direction and pace of the work
4. There is an intentional focus on building the skills young parents needed to succeed
5. Responses are tailored to the unique needs, circumstances and aspirations of each family.

Underpinning this approach is a strong understanding of the impact of intergenerational trauma and child and youth development.

¹Butler, K., et al. (2010). Experiences and Aspirations of Younger Mothers.

1. Relationship as the foundation and vehicle for change

Family Resource Practitioners strive to build safe and trusting relationships with young parents that enable change. This means taking the time to build rapport and safety as a priority.

Research suggests that young people can benefit from having a long-term, positive working relationship with a dedicated practitioner, as it:

- aids engagement
- helps young people feel seen, safe and secure
- provides an experience of positive attachment and a safety net
- demonstrates persistence, stability and predictability
- increases the likelihood that positive changes will be sustained.^{2,3,4,5}

In some cases, it can take considerable time to connect with young parents, especially if they have previous negative experiences or concerns about being judged. Family Resource Practitioners try a range of strategies, taking time to get to know young parents and keeping the door open until they are ready to move forward.

²McArthur, M., & Barry, E. (2013). Research to Practice Series. Younger Mothers: Stigma and Support.

³Siegel, D. (2014). Brainstorm The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain. Scribe Publications: Brunswick.

⁴Boulden, K. (2010). What It Takes. Supporting pregnant and parenting young people.

⁵Fletcher, J., et al. (2013). Engaging Young Parents and Their Families in a Multi-family Group Work Intervention: Lessons from a Pilot in England. Practice: Social Work in Action.

⁶Taylor, C., et al. (2012). What works to engage young parents into services? Findings from an appreciative inquiry workshop. Contemporary Nurse, 42(2), 259-271.



Burrabilly

Thriving Young Families includes a dedicated position that works directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and supports non-Indigenous staff in their work.

This role enhances engagement and trust with young First Nations families.



35%

of participants identify as First Nations.

2. Holistic, multi-faceted support

Family Resource Practitioners focus on the family as a whole, responding to the needs of young people as individuals and as parents, and the needs of their children. This often involves working across generations to effect intergenerational change.

Through practical support with day-to-day issues such as housing, finances, transport and health care, Family Resource Practitioners work to:



stabilise the family's situation, increasing young parents' ability to manage crisis



reduce stress on parents, freeing up executive functions for planning and decision making



demonstrate value to parents, for continued participation.

A range of individualised services and resources are wrapped around young families as required. Many of these resources are available within the team, so families don't have to be referred out, retell their story, or to go on a waitlist.

Within an integrated team, the level of coordination is high. Family Resource Practitioners coordinate contact to ensure everyone is on the same page, working together as a team.

In its first year, the program supported **110** young families. Of these:



74 received ongoing support through family resourcing



58% of these accessed other components of the program

3. Parent-led, goal-focused engagement

The program is led by the voices and choices of parents.

Parents set the direction and pace of the work. Family Resource Practitioners guide the process and provide the backing that young parents need. This may include:

- asking powerful questions about young people's aspirations
- sparking hope for the future and building on it
- exploring motivators and constraints
- holding the parent's vision for the future when times get tough
- helping parents brainstorm solutions
- developing a realistic plan to achieve goals, with incremental steps forward.

Pursuing goals requires equal parts support and challenge so young people feel safe to take on new things, learn and grow.



4. Intentional and opportunistic skill-building

Family Resource Practitioners equip young parents to pursue their goals by supporting them to develop the skills needed to succeed.

Young parents are still developing and learning basic life skills. This often goes unrecognised by services that expect adult capabilities from young people who aren't there yet developmentally. Within Thriving Young Families, specific tasks are broken down into small steps and support is scaffolded then scaled back as parents demonstrate increased competence.

Everyday interactions present an opportunity to build capacity, for example, role modelling how to fill out forms, engage with services, communicate effectively and stay calm in stressful situations. The key focus is on skills such as resilience, hope and self-efficacy - critical enablers of change on the pathway to thriving.⁷ These skills facilitate positive adaptation to adversity, the belief that goals are achievable, and the competence and confidence to work towards those goals, regardless of the challenges along the way.

This requires attunement to the person and their emotional state. People do not learn well when distraught or distracted. Helping young people to regulate their emotions creates a window of opportunity to promote learning.



Safe and healthy relationships

Family Resource Practitioners have a specific focus on building skills around safe and healthy relationships. As young people, young parents are still learning about relationships.

The team adopts a universal approach to building relationship skills, ideally intervening before problems are identified. Where signs of unhealthy or unsafe relationships are identified, Family Resource Practitioners engage with participants around the impacts of domestic violence based on a number of frameworks.

⁷Brown, D. et al. (2017). Human Thriving: A Conceptual Debate and Literature Review. *European Psychologist*. 22 (3):167-179.

5. Tailored responses

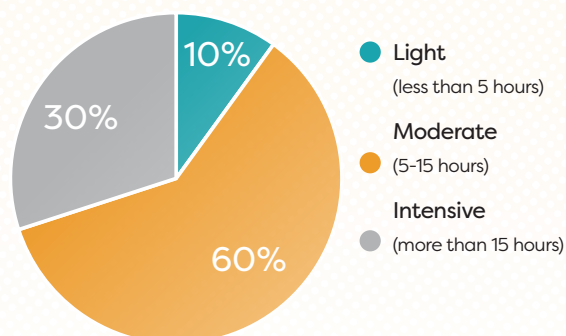
Some families face more challenges than others, requiring a different type and level of support.

On average, around two thirds of participating families received light to moderate support, and one third received intensive support.

This variation indicates that:

- the family resourcing approach caters to and offers benefits for a wide range of young parents
- the program works across the spectrum of early to acute intervention
- mixed caseloads are essential as staff can only work with one or two high intensity families at a time.

Monthly support hours per family



Family Resource Practitioners utilise a range of tools and techniques to support families including strengths-based case management, motivational interviewing, family coaching and group work.

For families with a high level of complexity and risk, a more directive, case-management style is more appropriate, while those with less complexity can engage better with a family coaching style.



Enablers and barriers



Practitioner level

Doing this work well requires practitioners to adopt different roles at different times. This necessitates:

- agility to be able to wear multiple hats
- tolerance of ambiguity and complexity
- self-awareness to be able to stay positive and calm and effectively support others.

These qualities often come from experience rather than qualifications.



Service level

Services need flexible funding to be able to provide individualised, holistic support to young families.



System level

Family Resource Practitioners take a proactive role in influencing the service system to increase its accessibility and responsiveness to young parents. This includes developing relationships with other agencies to better support young parents and deepening understandings of relational practice and trauma responsive approaches.



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