



Thriving Young Families

# Peer support and connections

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: Risk of social isolation and exclusion



Young parents often feel isolated and excluded.<sup>1</sup> Their responsibilities as parents make it hard to spend time with friends and maintain friendships.<sup>2</sup> Young parents may find they have less in common with their non-parenting peers and have limited opportunities to meet other young parents. As a result, they can miss out on socialising with peers, which is important for their own development as young people.<sup>3</sup> They can also find themselves with few people in their lives that they can really count on when they need support.



Within Thriving Young Families, only **four in ten** young parents reported they had a friend they could count on when they started with the service.

## Peer support: Building connections

Peer support involves people with a common interest, who share life experiences and challenges, giving to and receiving support from each other. It is a reciprocal process that is helpful to all participants. Peer support can play an important role in:

- connecting young parents with support
- reducing isolation
- buffering against the negative effects of stress and harmful relationships
- improving self-esteem, confidence and sense of control
- learning social and interpersonal skills
- empowering young parents in developing solutions to their own challenges
- contributing to developing young parents' independence and participation.



<sup>1</sup>Australian Human Rights Commission. (2017). The rights and needs of young parents and their children. A summary of key findings from the Children's Rights Report 2017.

<sup>2</sup>Boulton, K. (2010). What it takes: Supporting pregnant and parenting young people. Queensland, Australia

<sup>3</sup>Hoffmann, et al. (2019). "Everyone My Age Doesn't Know What It's Like": A Mixed-Method Study of Young Mothers and Social Support in Australia.

**There are a number of approaches to peer support. Thriving Young Families is currently trialing multiple strategies to better understand what works for building peer supports.**

### Approaches to peer support

#### COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Catch ups and play dates

Community sports and activities

Drop in space for young parents

Facilitated play group or parenting group

INFORMAL ACTIVITIES

FORMAL ACTIVITIES

#### ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

## Co-designed with Logan's Young Parent Influencers

We asked Young Parent Influencers<sup>4</sup> to help us understand how we can support young parents better. They told us they want:

- support that is flexible and informal, including drop-in spaces
- services that are accessible and non-judgmental
- group activities and social events, including dad specific groups
- to focus on self-care
- to address barriers so they can participate in education and training
- to engage through social media.

<sup>4</sup>Young Parent Influencers are convened by the Logan Together Backing Young Parents Working Group to raise the profile of young parents and amplify their voices.

## Young Dads' Squad

The Young Dads' Squad is an eight week program run in partnership with Substation33. Dads build a sensory box that reflects the five areas of child development, whilst sharing information and experiences.

### Purpose:

- connect Young Dads
- learn about child development
- learn about manufacturing, power tools and safety in the workplace
- access food resources through Oz Harvest
- share information about the supports available to young dads
- share experiences about being young dads.

### Discussion topics:

- fine and gross motor skills
- cognitive development
- language and speech development
- social and emotional development
- neuroscience and child brain development.



**"Young Dads' Squad has helped me connect with other dads without being judged or feeling out of place. I've learnt more about how to read my children's behaviour and how to cope better with them."**



**"I learnt that spending quality time with children with lots of play helps with their development."**





## Peer mentor

Dean participated in the first Young Dads' Squad and has since stepped into a Peer Mentor role. He acts as a role model to other young parents, using his own experience and knowledge to support others navigate the young parent experience and journey towards thriving.

## Bump to Jump

Bump to Jump is held weekly. It is an informal drop in space for young parents. Young families can choose from a range of fun, hands on activities for themselves and their children, including:

- sensory play
- singing and dancing
- painting
- story time
- cooking, baking and decorating
- pampering.

Activities are accompanied by:

- morning tea
- conversations around parenting and child development
- sharing experiences
- referral to services as needs identified.

Many of the activities are requested by the young parents themselves, supporting a person-led framework.



## Social media

Instagram and Facebook are used to share information about 'what's on' for young parents in Logan.



## Early learnings

We've already learnt a lot about what it takes to effectively build informal support networks and develop peer mentoring strategies.

### Strengths:

- **Hands-on activities** - having a hands-on task to focus on takes the pressure off social interactions (such as building the sensory box or baking).
- **Skill building opportunities** - including activities that expose young people to education and employment opportunities (such as Substation 33) is helpful.
- **Person-led** - young parents and their children are able to have a say, from weekly activities to having their voices embedded in strategic planning.

### Challenges:

Building strong, consistent attendance and engagement is challenging. This is in part due to:

- barriers to attendance, especially for those experiencing crisis and receiving targeted or intensive support for multiple and complex needs
- limited referral pathways from universal health or education services, for those with less intensive needs
- disruptions from COVID 19 and flooding
- young people entering work or study and no longer able to attend.

## Next steps:

We will continue to pursue different strategies and approaches to enhance engagement in group activities and try other approaches to building peer support, including:

- establishing strong linkages with universal services, broadening the target group
- developing alternative engagement strategies for those receiving intensive support, including home visits from the Connections Coordinator to build trust to attend group activities
- adapting the Young Dads' Squad to include more relationship building at the start and after hours activities to suit dads who are working
- promoting activities through services, social media and community events
- building partnerships to expand the range of venues and activities and bring supports and resources to young people - such as child health nurses and dental health clinics
- working with Families Resource Practitioners to identify families to connect one on one for play dates
- developing targeted peer support opportunities for First Nations families
- establishing child-free spaces and activities for young mums.



**One thing is clear, it takes dedicated resources and perseverance to develop groups, build informal support networks and equip peer mentors to support other young parents.**

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