

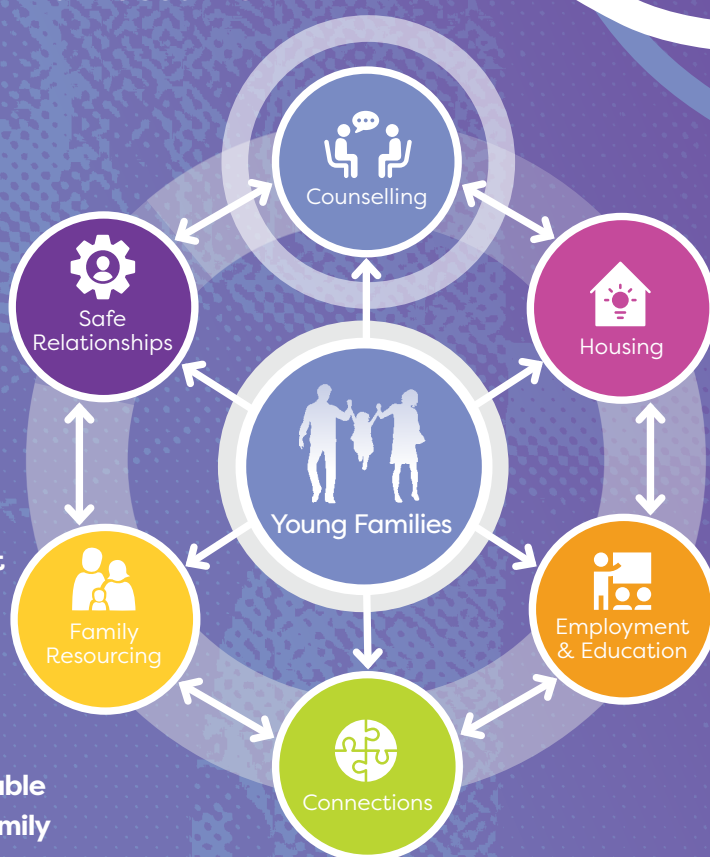


Thriving Young Families

Therapeutic support

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: Poor mental health and coping skills



Young parents are at significant risk of experiencing poor emotional and mental health. Disadvantage, trauma, lack of family support, isolation, relationship conflict, poor housing, lack of employment and the demands of parenthood can all contribute to poor mental health outcomes for young parents.¹

Mental health issues are common for the young people linked with Thriving Young Families. When young people first join the program:

 40% have poor mental health

 30% have limited resilience or coping skills.

Furthermore, mental health concerns can often go unnoticed as young parents may avoid services due to stigma, concerns about being under surveillance and fear that they will be seen as not coping.² Other barriers to connecting with mental health services include:

- adverse experiences of health care
- competing priorities when basic needs such as housing and food are not met
- logistical barriers including childcare, lack of transport and cost.³

¹ Adams, C. (2016). Strategies for engaging young parents to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

² de Jonge, A. (2001). Support for Teenage Mothers: A Qualitative Study Into the Views of Women About the Support They Received as Teenage Mothers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 36(1), 49-57

³ policylab, (2020). Addressing the mental health needs of parenting teens. Exploring barriers and improving access to care: lessons learned from Philadelphia.

Therapeutic intervention: What the research says

Individual, family and group therapeutic activities are critical to address trauma, decrease stress and improve resilience and coping skills for young parents.

The literature identifies a number of possible approaches to therapeutic intervention for young people, including:

Working with therapeutic intent

All staff working in community services connect with people's lives. The relationship between workers and vulnerable families are therapeutic in nature and provide the foundation for alleviating distress and enabling change.⁴

Working with therapeutic intent includes:

- building safety and trust through connection
- noticing a young parent's state of being and their responses
- supporting emotional regulation and stimulating readiness to work towards change
- working at the young parent's pace, listening, reflecting and clarifying
- making everyday matters a therapeutic experience (creating routine, being reliable and predictable).



Counselling

Counselling is a talking-based therapy involving collaborative discussions in a supportive and confidential environment for the purpose of addressing issues or developing strategies to manage them.⁵

Other therapies

The use of animal assisted and outdoor adventure interventions have gained increasing prominence in responding to the emotional, physical and mental health needs of young people. Due to their physical, psychological and social dimensions, these approaches can be a highly engaging and motivating form of intervention and are appropriate for the adolescent stage of development.⁶

Peer support

Peer support has a positive impact on the mental health of young parents.⁷ Many young parents experience social isolation and exclusion, finding it hard to maintain friendships and meet the demands of parenting. Connecting with peers who share life experiences and challenges provides opportunities for fun, companionship and support – all of which add to emotional and mental health and wellbeing.

Linking to specialist mental health services

Identifying other key mental health services and programs that best meet the needs of young parents.

Cultural healing

Therapeutic practices based on traditional life affirming Indigenous knowledge systems.⁸ A culturally responsive approach to work with First Nations young families around healing, deep listening and spiritual connection can create a process and environment for young First Nations parents to have therapeutic conversations, identify their strengths and focus on solutions.

⁴Rollins, W. (2019). Social work - client relationship practice: exploring social worker perspectives.

⁵Moloney L. (2016). Defining and delivering effective counselling and psychotherapy.

⁶Pryor, A., et al., (2018). Outdoor Adventure Interventions – Young People and Adversity: A Literature Review. Melbourne, Australia.

⁷Jones, C. Jomeen, J., and M. Hayter. (2014). The impact of peer support in the context of perinatal mental illness: A meta-ethnography. Midwifery 30: 491-498.

⁸Dudgeon, P., et al., (2020) Wellbeing and Healing Through Connection and Culture. Lifeline Australia.



Learning in action: Collaborating to achieve therapeutic goals

In practice, collaboration between counsellors and others working with young parents strengthens the impact of therapeutic intervention as the benefits are mutually reinforcing. In the Thriving Young Families initiative, key workers have both direct and indirect roles to play.

Counsellors

Counsellors provide direct support to young people in the form of one-on-one counselling, and indirect support to the rest of the team. For example, by:

- providing advice and training in understanding and responding to mental health issues including micro-counselling skills
- supporting ongoing professional development through practice reflection and participation in family review meetings
- identifying strategies that staff can support and reinforce with young parents in their day-to-day contact
- informing group activities to incorporate information and education to young parents on mental health issues
- supporting discussion of mental health issues and assist in removing stigma surrounding the issue.

Family Resource Practitioners

In developing effective relationships and working with therapeutic intent, Family Resource Practitioners directly contribute to young parents' mental health. They also provide a conduit for young parents to access and use counselling and other interventions through:

- informing young parents about the role of counselling
- being attuned to the needs of young parents and, where relevant, facilitating young parents' consideration of counselling
- identifying and addressing any issues impacting young parents access to counselling
- connecting young parents with counselling and specialist mental health services
- preparing young parents for counselling by building readiness
- following up and applying strategies identified through counselling.

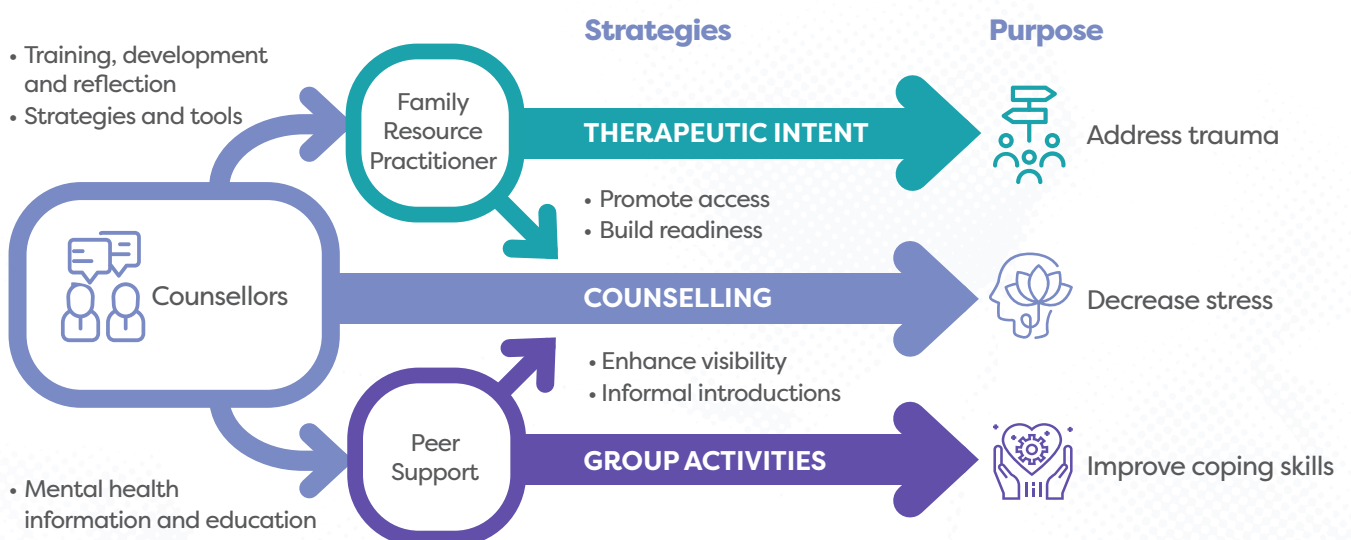
Peer support

Peer support and group activities have a role to play in promoting mental health and resilience, by supporting access and providing information and skills.

Counsellors' involvement in group activities can:

- provide a forum to deliver and support group therapeutic work
- enhance the visibility of the counsellor and create pathways to counselling
- provide informal opportunities for young parents to meet the counsellors so that counselling doesn't seem so scary.

A collaborative, multi-faceted approach to therapeutic intervention



Early outcomes:

Improved engagement with counselling

A collaborative approach to therapeutic intervention appears to have a positive impact on engagement with counselling.

Program data shows that ongoing support with another worker is associated with stronger engagement and retention in counselling. The longer the period of support with another worker prior to commencing counselling, the better.

This is due to:

- higher levels of trust with the primary worker, which is transferable to the counsellor
- greater stability, whereby the young person is no longer in crisis
- greater readiness for counselling, whereby the young person knows what to expect and is not overwhelmed by the idea of counselling.

Young parents maintaining connection with their support worker during counselling helps to sustain engagement and reinforce positive outcomes. To date, of those who have engaged in counselling:



71%

have improved
self-awareness



59%

have increased
positive coping
strategies



47%

have improved
family or inter-
personal relationships



41%

have improved
mental health

What's next?

Adventure-based therapy

We are exploring alternative models for therapeutic intervention, including Adventure Therapy for Complex Trauma, which uses outdoor activities to allow participants to:

- connect to their bodies and the natural environment
- recognise physiological states
- physically and emotionally regulate.

These connections help young people to become grounded and remain present. By sharing adventures with other people and providing opportunities for positive experiences, they can connect with peers and co-regulate their emotions. Once young people are calm and regulated, they are able to access and use the thinking part of their brain. This provides a window of opportunity to work towards change.

This approach is different but complementary to more traditional talking-based therapy. Components of adventure-based therapy will be incorporated into individual and group activities. For example:

- Counsellors will start some one-on-one outdoor walking sessions for those who are not ready for groups.
- Our Young Dads' Squad and Bump to Jump group programs will include therapeutic goals and activities in their next iteration.

Cultural healing

We are exploring culturally appropriate therapeutic practices for our First Nations young parents.



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