



## Thriving Young Families Client Voice

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: Young parents feel their voices are not heard



Young parents can experience high levels of shame, stigma and discrimination.<sup>1</sup> They report feeling scrutinised, stereotyped and judged.<sup>2</sup> This can have a negative impact on how young parents feel about supports and can prevent them from accessing services. This is exacerbated when services are not tailored to meet the specific needs of young parents.

Universal interventions can be seen as fragmented, siloed, stigmatising, and out of step with the realities of daily life, leading to poor uptake and participation by young parents.<sup>3</sup>

One way of engaging young parents and enhancing their sense of control is to involve them in the change process.

<sup>1</sup> Conn, B. et al. (2018). "Our lives aren't over": A strengths-based perspective on stigma, discrimination, and coping among young parents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 66(November), 91-100.

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

<sup>3</sup> McDonald, M., et al. (2017). *Young parents and parenting support: Submission to the National Children's Commissioner*.

## Client voice: Empowering young parents

Client voice refers to the experience, knowledge, and views of the people we work with, including how they see their own stories, their work with us, and the broader systems impacting their lives.

Actively supporting and embedding the voices of people who use our services:

- acknowledges and respects the rights of people to be involved in all actions and decisions that affect their lives
- empowers people to speak for themselves, build their confidence and skills, and realise their hopes and dreams
- ensures what we do and how we do it is appropriate to people's needs and leads to better outcomes
- contributes to a more inclusive community and to a more just and equitable society.

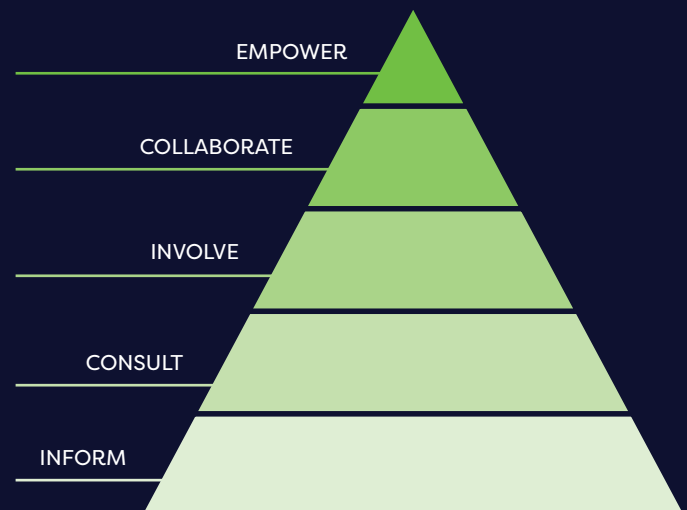
Young parents are at the centre of the Thriving Young Families initiative. We are partners in achieving individual and systems change.

## Client voice strategies

Strategies for amplifying and integrating client voices are multi-layered. They may involve incorporating young parents' voices into service design and delivery, program evaluation or organisational governance.

The level of client involvement can range from symbolic to transformational. At its deepest level, clients are empowered through the process to set the direction and take action.

## Ladder of participation



## Logan's Young Parent Influencers

Logan's Young Parent Influencers are a group of young parents who have been using their own experience to improve the lives of other young parents in Logan. These young parents have advised and collaborated on numerous projects, drawing on their own lived experience to make the pathway for future young parents a little easier.

The Young Parent Influencers group is convened by the Logan Together Backing Young Parents Working Group and facilitated by YFS. The initiative aims to raise the profile of young parents and amplify their voices.

Since commencing in 2021, there have been 15 Young Parent Influencers. The length of their engagement has ranged from a couple of meetings to years, often moving on to full time employment.

# Key learnings about building young parents' capability to exercise voice

Embedding the voices of the people we work with requires organisational commitment and active support for participants.

Over the past four years we have learned a lot about what it takes to deepen participation and equip young parents to exercise their voice in a meaningful way. This includes:

1. building a strong foundation of psychological safety and connection
2. ensuring young parents feel valued and heard
3. creating opportunities to develop skills, build confidence and identity as an influencer
4. enabling young parents to set the direction
5. taking joint action for better services and outcomes for young parents.

## 1. Building a strong foundation of psychological safety and connection

When young parents are asked to share their expertise, which is based on their own lived experience, it is important to make sure there is a strong foundation of safety and connection. Lived experiences are often connected to trauma and can be triggering.

Building trust within the group and with facilitators takes time. Each meeting includes activities designed to build connections and trust. Initially activities were kept 'light' but over time, the group delved into more sensitive topics. Briefing and debriefing became crucial to ensure psychological safety.

Throughout the process, there were ongoing and open conversations about how to maintain safety, and to be mindful of the information being shared.

## 3. Creating opportunities to develop skills, build confidence and identity as an influencer

Key to success was building the identity of the Young Parents Influencers as a group and as individuals.

Together the group created a shared a mission statement and moto based on their goals.

**YPI mission statement:**  
"breaking stigma with support and connection to empower you and all children".

**YPI moto:** "conversations + connections = change"

This created a sense of ownership in the group, which was backed with training and development, equipping the Influencers to adopt the role and take on new challenges.



## 2. Ensuring young parents feel valued and heard

It was crucial that participants felt that sharing their lived experience was meaningful and mutually beneficial. Part of this was making it clear that young parents were the experts in the room, that they would have the ability to drive the direction of the group, and that when they spoke it was heard and their contributions mattered.

Young parents were financially remunerated for their expertise and recognised for their contribution.

## 4. Enabling young parents to set the direction

Initially, services would ask questions or seek feedback from the Young Parent Influencers. However, it was not always clear how the feedback was used. This created a dynamic where the interaction was mostly still led by service providers. Now, whilst providing feedback remains a valuable function of the group, the scope of the role has expanded. Though ongoing development, young parents are building their confidence to be able to determine the directions of the group.

## 5. Taking joint action for better services and outcomes for young parents

Since its inception, Logan's Young Parent Influencers have contributed to the design of:

YFS' group activities for young parents

YFS' Parent Pathways program, which assists parents to prepare for employment by the time their youngest child reaches school age.

The Lady Musgrave Trust's transitional housing project Jindii Waijung, meaning 'Mother's Nest' in Yugambah language.



*The Young Parent Influencers with Aunty Robyn Williams, WRLC Arts Artist Waylene Currie and The Lady Musgrave Trust CEO Victoria Parker after a planning session.*

## Benefits for young parents

An important foundation of the Young Parent Influencers is that the young parents involved benefit from being part of the group. Some of these benefits were intentional from the outset and others were discoveries along the way.

### Being the Expert:

*“Being listened to has been really empowering”.*

The Young parent Influencers regularly reported the impact of being placed in the role of expert, having their voices not only listened to but seeing their input actioned. This created a sense of feeling valued and empowered, resulting in a notable increase in their confidence.

### Contributing to a better tomorrow:

*“It’s been nice to be able to give back, knowing that another young parent will benefit”.*

Most of the Young Parent Influencers were eager to be part of a group which gave back to their community and made a difference in the lives of other young parents and their children.

### Connection and healing:

*“Connection is healing”.*

The Young Parent Influencers found connecting with other young parents with similar experiences was a powerful healing process. Being able to use their experiences and channel them for the benefit of future generations helped them heal from their own trauma.

### Having services that work for them:

*“Services are often designed by people who don’t use them and then they don’t work”.*

The Young Parent Influencers have talked about services that have not worked for them, or where they felt stigmatised for being a young parent. Through this process they were able to unpack what this looked like for them. This also helped to co-design the Step-by-Step Thriving Young Families program, ensuring that it is a service that works for young parents.

### Professional development:

*“This has given me the confidence to start my own business”.*

The Young Parent Influencers have been able to engage in some development, including talking to the media or sharing their story with a group of people. It has allowed them to build connections and experience other professional opportunities such as being on an interview panel. Young parents have primarily left the influencer group because they have gained employment.



*Several of the Young Parent Influencers looking over housing plans with the Logan Housing Project Team.*



## Value of client voice

**Victoria Parker, CEO of The Lady Musgrave Trust**, worked closely with the Young Parent Influencers to co-design Jinndii Waijung, a purpose-built housing complex for young mums and their children. She saw firsthand how powerful the design process was.

*"My experience working with the incredibly talented, generous and inspiring Young Parent Influencers has been nothing short of a life and work highlight... They have significantly impacted me and others both professionally and personally.*

*In practical terms, their thoughtful and informed feedback on the designs, layout, furnishings and naming of the project has ensured the project is fit for purpose, which, once completed will provide transitional housing and support for young mothers and their children who have been impacted by violence.*

*Their involvement has also delivered social impacts, with many from the project team (professionals from disciplines including architecture, project management, construction, town planning and engineering) commenting on the impact of working with them and learning from their lived experience. Michael Rayner, a world renowned architect, has said that his experience with the YPIs has altered his view on the purpose of architecture and his role within it.*

*It has also been a delight to observe the blossoming of this group. I have witnessed a growth in their confidence and a wonderful sense of ownership as they continue to engage with this project.*

*... The YFS team are genuinely committed to the development of young parents and it's wonderful to see how this commitment transforms into life skills and hopes for the future."*



## Kloe's experience as an influencer

Kloe, one of the Young Parent Influencers who provided input into the design of Jinndii Waijung, was asked to speak about her experiences as a guest speaker at a fundraiser for The Lady Musgrave Trust which raised over \$1 million.

*"I wouldn't have had the strength or the capacity to do that if I didn't have you guys [YFS] behind me," she shared. "A lot of the resources and tools have come from you guys."*

*Kloe said she was motivated to speak by seeing someone else stand up and talk about their situation. "Hearing someone say, 'hey I went through this, you're not alone'; what it did for me, I want to do that. I want to be able to stand up and say you're not alone and for someone else to say that was meant for me."*

*"My motto is: be good, do good."*





## Insights

We can build young parents capability to exercise voice by creating:

- spaces where young parents feel safe, connected and heard and
- opportunities for young parents to learn, lead and take action.

This is mutually beneficial for young parents themselves and ensures services work for them.

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YFS acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's first peoples and the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet and work.



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