

Young Parents and their Children Project

ACT Government Input



Contents

Preamble	3
Community Health Programs for Young Parents and their Children	3
School Youth Health Nurse Program	3
Maternal and Child Health (MACH) Nursing Services	3
Women Youth and Children Community Health Program (WYCCHP) Early Parenting Counselling Service	4
The Junction Youth Health Service	5
Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service	5
Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation	6
Community Services Support for Young Parents and their Children	6
Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS)	6
Community Participation Group (GPG)	7
Strategy, Participation and Early Intervention	8
Social Housing and Homelessness Services	9
Educational Support for Young Parents and their Children	11
Support within a School	12
CCCare Program	12

Preamble

The health and wellbeing of young people and children is crucial to the future of the Australian Capital Territory and that of wider Australia. Recognising the importance of providing young parents and their children with the best possible start in life, the ACT Government provides a wide assortment of supportive policies, services and programs designed to enhance the wellbeing and rights of children and young people in the ACT.

The following report provides details of ACT Government Education, Health, and Welfare policies, programs, and services relating to young parents and their children, including details of any evaluations of these policies, programs, and services and case studies showcasing effective ACT Government initiatives already in place.

Community Health Programs for Young Parents and their Children

School Youth Health Nurse Program

This program assists young people in high schools to make a safe transition into adulthood while laying the 'foundations' for health-promoting behaviours and attitudes, which will continue through their life. The School Youth Health Nurse works with a preventative focus including early identification, brief intervention and harm minimisation activities. The nurse is often the first point of contact for young people, their families and school community members seeking information, advice and support in health matters. For issues requiring treatment or intensive counselling, they play an important role in providing referral for clients to the relevant agencies

Maternal and Child Health (MACH) Nursing Services

MACH Universal Services

Maternal and Child Health and wellness support for families/carers with new born babies and young children utilising the Primary Health Care Principles. The MACH service is offered to all families who have had a baby and live in the ACT.

Services are delivered through universal first home visits and child health clinics. MACH service provides information on baby and child health and development, nutrition and feeding, sleep issues, parenting, child safety, behavioural issues and maternal wellbeing.

Groups for parents include: new parent group, sleep groups for various ages, and Early Days groups for feeding and settling issues.

MACH Parenting Enhancement Program (PEP)

The PEP program is a sustained home visiting program with Maternal and Child Health nurses to provide additional support to vulnerable families.

PEP clients are those individuals or families who are considered vulnerable and may present with the following criteria:

- Substance use;
- Domestic violence;
- Mental Health issues;
- Disability – parent or child;
- Young and/or inexperienced parent/s;
- Limited support;
- Social issues; and/or
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD).

MACH Outreach Service to Canberra College

MACH provides outreach services to Canberra College - a secondary school for pregnant and parenting students from the ACT and surrounding districts. MACH clinics and childhood immunisation are provided.

Women Youth and Children Community Health Program (WYCCHP)

Early Parenting Counselling Service

Social workers offer services for parents and families experiencing emotional, social and psychological difficulties that may have an impact on the health and well being of the children and family.

Services include:

- Individual counselling and therapeutic interventions with parents; and
- Information, advocacy and support including referral to and liaison with other support agencies and services as appropriate.

Families in the antenatal and postnatal period and/or with children under school age are eligible. Referrals include:

- Parental distress, anxiety or depression (mild to moderate) in the antenatal or postnatal periods;
- Childbirth related issues such as difficult/traumatic birth, stillbirth or recent miscarriage;

- Where there are concerns about developing a secure attachment relationship with a baby or a young child; and/or
- Where there is an anticipated or known challenge in developing and maintaining a positive and healthy environment for an infant or child under school age.

The Junction Youth Health Service

Food Baby

The Junction Youth Health Service created a support/educational group for young parents and young pregnant women called 'Food Baby'. The purpose of this group is to provide a safe environment for this target group to learn about healthy eating and parenting tactics as well as keeping them connected to The Junction for their mental and physical health, and the care of their babies.

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service

The Aboriginal Midwifery Access Program (AMAP)

AMAP aims to improve the health and wellbeing of pregnant women and their infants, including but not limited to:

- Reduced rates of smoking during pregnancy;
- Reduced rates of alcohol and other drug use during pregnancy; and
- Reduce rates of low birth weight babies.

The program provides antenatal and postnatal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents through:

- Clinical and non-clinical assessments at the premises;
- Outreach clinical and non-clinical assessments at home;
- Referral to, and support in accessing mainstream and specialist services; and
- The provision of information on mainstream services.

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

Young Parents Playgroup

Young parents who attend the Young Parents Playgroup Program will have an increased understanding of health and wellbeing for themselves and their children. The program will also provide an opportunity to increase the participants' support networks and develop and enhance their parenting skills.

Community Services Support for Young Parents and their Children

Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS)

The ACT Government through *A Step Up for Our Kids* has introduced a suite of innovative new services aimed at keeping high risk families together, and providing them with the tools and knowledge they need to sustain a safe home environment for their children.

Karinya House is a community based organisation that provides supported accommodation, transitional housing and outreach services to pregnant and parenting women and their families in crisis; with a focus on young women aged 16 to 25 years. The Mother and Baby unit at Karinya House provides services to support pregnant women, mothers and families whose children are at risk of entering care. The unit provides 24-hour supervised support for up to three months, reducing the likelihood of these children coming into care. Engagement with services provided by Karinya House is voluntary.

Karinya House allows mothers to remain with their babies while they are supported in learning parenting skills; reducing the likelihood of these children coming into care and improving the health and wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable infants. For many Service Users referred by CYPS, living at Karinya provides them with a real opportunity to parent successfully and develop related life skills.

Karinya House is also funded by Housing and Community Services under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) under the specialist homelessness support program. This funds support services, including supported accommodation and transitional housing to six young pregnant women or mothers with their babies at any one time, and a part-time health professional.

Services delivered by Karinya House will be evaluated as part of the implementation of the *A Step Up for Our Kids* reform program.

Case Study

Zana was a young woman who gave birth to her first daughter, Emily. Zana was discharged from hospital with Emily and returned to their home, shared with Emily's father, Declan. After reports of domestic violence, Emily was taken into emergency care.

CYPS referred Zana to Karinya House to undergo a parenting assessment. As there were no vacancies at the time of the referral, Zana became an Outreach Client and was placed on the waiting list for accommodation.

Due to their drug history, Zana and Declan were required to undergo urinalysis and obtained support from Youth Drug and Alcohol. Zana was aware that her drug use had to cease before she could be accommodated at Karinya House.

When a room became available at Karinya House, staff assisted with transporting Zana and Emily to and from contact visits with Declan. Transport was also provided for numerous medical appointments, counselling and other meetings.

Zana spent time with the Karinya House Health Professional and was receptive to all advice received in regard to parenting Emily. After a period of eight weeks, it was evident that Zana had made significant changes in her capacity to care for her daughter and there was no longer a need for concern.

With this information, CYPS permitted Zana to return home with her partner, and they both had supports in place. Her Caseworker visited once a week and Zana continued to attend Karinya's social and educational groups, including the Parents As Teachers course.

Names have been changed for privacy purposes.

Community Participation Group (GPG)

The Youth InterACT strategy on youth engagement and participation provides a platform and encourages young people aged 12 to 25 years from a range of backgrounds and experiences to have their say about the issues that affect them in Canberra.

The Youth InterACT strategy represents the ACT Government's way of involving and consulting with young people from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, and aims to:

- Actively involve young people in decision making processes about topical issues that affect and interest young people;

- Engage young people in meaningful ways in all areas of life at an individual, organisational and community level and they have a voice within the government;
- Ensure young people experience elements of citizenship and democracy in their everyday lives, in realistic and holistic situations, with meaningful outcomes and actions resulting from this participation; and
- Provide funding to young people who wish to attend an activity of a learning capacity, sporting, conferences, personal or career development through participation in various activities, or who wish to put on an event or run a project for young people.

Strategy, Participation and Early Intervention

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2015-18* was signed by the Chair of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, the Chief Minister, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Head of the ACT Public Service in 2015.

The Agreement pursues equitable outcomes for members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT and supports young parents and their children through the articulation of the following key focus areas, by:

- Delivering focused and effective services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People by ACT Government Directorates and services partners to collaborate to provide culturally appropriate holistic service delivery;
- Improving family and community safety, and families' and communities' perceptions of feeling safe through embedding prevention and early intervention and family and child support services;
- Connecting community to strong family, social and support networks by incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes into service funding agreements for service providers on behalf of the ACT Government;
- Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in life-long learning and positive generational experiences by supporting community members and families to navigate avenues for education and real skill development; and
- Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, creating confidence and self-esteem by supporting and facilitating the development of youth representation and leadership.

A number of services provided across the ACT Community Services Directorate support young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, including programs like Growing Healthy Families and other services provided at the Child and Family Centres.

Case Study

Jessica is a mother who attends the Strong Women's group at [REDACTED] Child and Family Centre. Jessica discussed with a Child and Family Centre worker her need to enrol her daughter, Rebecca, at [REDACTED] School to attend the [REDACTED] Preschool. A Growing Healthy Families Early Years Engagement Officer supported Jessica with the enrolment for Rebecca including gaining important identity documentation and providing facilities for Jessica to complete the enrolment.

The Early Years Engagement Officer attends the [REDACTED] Preschool weekly, and was able to introduce Jessica and Rebecca to the preschool and assist in supporting a smooth transition. Rebecca is now successfully enrolled and settled into the [REDACTED] Preschool, making new friends and working towards her transition to primary school.

Names have been changed for privacy purposes.

Social Housing and Homelessness Services

Social Housing and Homelessness Services for Young Parents

All Social Housing and Homelessness services funded by the Community Services Directorate (the Directorate) operate in line with national homelessness agenda priorities of prevention, early intervention, and breaking the cycle of homelessness, as well as other relevant legislation such as the ACT *Human Rights Act 2004*.

In 2016-17 the Directorate is providing funding of \$4,613,792 across six services, delivering eight programs for young people (aged 16-25) experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. ACT homelessness services for young people operate under a personalised case management approach. Case management is defined as the process of supporting Service Users to identify specific needs and goals, and the development of flexible strategies to assist the Service User to achieve these goals. This includes goals of obtaining and sustaining alternative long term accommodation.

Support Services are defined as any form of general or specialist service(s) provided by an Organisation to a Service User, which helps to address their homelessness or the factors contributing to them being at risk of homelessness. This support is tenure neutral: independent of the Service User's accommodation/tenancy status.

Tenancy/property management is undertaken in line with the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* in relation to Service Users accommodated in properties managed by the

Organisation. Other on-site support provided to service users includes life skills training, advocacy, mentoring, encouragement and support to participate in education, training, employment and community; and support to obtain/sustain private rental tenancies.

The St Vincent de Paul Society (SVDP) is funded \$205,492.76 (excl. GST) to deliver the Young Parents Accommodation Support Program. This program provides supported accommodation, outreach and tenancy management support for young parents and their children. Accommodation for up to four families including tenancy and property management and support services is provided. The program also provides outreach support services for a further 20 young parents to assist them to maintain their accommodation and engage with education and training programs.

Case Study

A young woman, her husband and their three children (aged 12, 11 and 5) entered the outreach program after living with her mother in law for the last 13 years where all three children shared one room.

The father of this family is on a Disability Support Pension having been diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, sleep apnoea, diabetes and mobility issues.

At the time when the family entered the program, the father's brother was in gaol for sexual abuse and scheduled for release within the next six months. The impending release of this man had created safety concerns for the children as he had planned to reside at the same property where the family lived. The family had also incurred a large debt as a result of a former business relationship which ended badly. The stress of this debt had led to the deterioration of the father's physical and mental health.

The family was not approved for the Public Housing Priority waiting list as Housing ACT deemed they could afford private rental. SVDP provided support and advice to the family to support their application including acquiring letters of support from their counsellors for themselves and their children, and retrieving the Child Protection report and the police report numbers for the incident involving the brother in law. SVDP further supported the family to submit the documents to Housing ACT. Currently the family are supported by the SVDP outreach service awaiting the outcome of their most recent Public Housing application.

Case Study

A young, expectant Indigenous woman and her baby son entered the Young Parents Outreach program. The son had been diagnosed with chronic lactose intolerance which was being exacerbated by overcrowded conditions in the household where he was staying. The overcrowded condition created by a large extended family resulted in a sub-optimal feeding schedule for the child. To address these concerns, SVDP relocated the young family to a transitional property.

In addition the young mother had diagnosed depression and anxiety. Her case manager responded to her mental health concerns by referring her to Head Space for specialised assistance. She has since been engaging with that service regularly.

The young person had also never had a tenancy of her own. She received support from the SVDP team to manage her tenancy, including referral to the SVDP Energy Efficiency team for assistance to manage her energy usage. As a result, the young person was able to sustain her tenancy. To further improve her wellbeing, the young person has participated in the Young Interested Parents Planning Enjoyable Events (YIPPEE) service social inclusion program. She is also involved in the local netball community and has recently assisted with the running of a tournament.

The young person was also referred to the Ted Noff's Life Skills and mentoring programs. She participated fully and continues to meet with her mentor regularly. The young person also has gained a Diploma of Business Administration and plans to put her name down for primary school casual work in the near future.

Educational Support for Young Parents and their Children

The ACT Education Directorate currently has no specific policies or guidelines in the ACT for supporting pregnant students, or young parents or carers, within schools. Rather, support within ACT public schools for all students is guided by the Directorate commitment to the provision of quality education for all students and the obligations outlined within the *ACT Education Act 2004*, the *ACT Human Rights Act 2004*, and the *ACT Discrimination Act 1991*. There are several principles derived from these Acts which are used to support pregnant students and young parents or carers.

Firstly, every child has the right to receive a high-quality education, and schools, as well as the Education Directorate, share in the responsibility of providing this. Secondly, mistreatment on the grounds of being a parent or carer is discriminatory practice and unacceptable in all circumstances. Thirdly, every child has the right to education without influence of discrimination. These principles, and the legal obligations that underpin and guide them, ensure the provision of equitable support and access to education for people who are pregnant, or who are young parents or carers within the ACT.

Support within a school

Within government schools, young parents and carers receive in-school support based on individual needs and circumstances. This approach is guided by the above mentioned legal obligations, the principle of equity, and the commitment to supporting every child and young person's right to education. The Education Directorate takes this person-centred approach so that students can easily access the appropriate support, and relevant services that meet their unique needs and circumstances. In-school support may include transition support, flexible approaches to attendance, workload and assessment support, or pastoral and wellbeing support. This allows for collaboration with other groups such as areas of ACT Health, Housing, Child Youth Protection Services and non-government organisations in order to best support the young person. To date, a comprehensive review of this process has not been undertaken.

CCCares Program

The Education Directorate also supports the ACT CCCares program. This program was first established in 2004 and follows an internationally recognised best practice model for supporting pregnant and parenting students. The program offers its students flexible learning options that enable them to work towards ACT Year 12 Certificate and/or Vocational Certificates through flexible learning options based on their individual circumstances. The model has been developed through ongoing research and collaboration with the University of Canberra. In March 2015, CCCares moved to a new location in Phillip ACT and since the move has continued to offer a high quality of support to young parents and their children.