



**Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission Consultation on:  
Australia's Progress Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child  
May 2018**

This submission is built around the Brave Foundation vision to better define and uphold the rights of expecting and parenting teens across Australia. Brave submits that while working to further embed and enforce the rights of the Child at a Federal, State and Territory level, Australia should consider a national charter of rights for expecting and parenting teens.

A consistent, uniform and strengthened rights based approach to supporting expecting and parenting teens will further reduce discrimination, foster equal opportunity and allow young parents to form healthy, happy and skilled families over time.

The primary author of this report and the Charter of Rights for Expecting and Parenting Teens (at Appendix I) is Brave Foundation CEO and Founding Director, Bernadette Black.

Brave Foundation is an Australian not-for-profit charity that aims to build a village of support and acceptance around expecting and parenting teens. Brave works with young parents to embrace and shape the future, join the dots to meet their needs and to celebrate the child. You can find out further information about Brave Foundation at [www.bravefoundation.org.au](http://www.bravefoundation.org.au).

This submission and the attached Charter of Rights for Expecting and Parenting teens has been co-designed with expecting and parenting teens. We acknowledge the work of others who have assisted Brave to develop this Charter.



## Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens in Australia

In Australia, expecting and parenting teens experience a high level of stigma/disapproval in their communities and alienation from their peers and family which reduces their self-esteem and worth. The experience of isolation, judgment and discrimination creates significant barriers for expecting and parenting teens seeking access education and services, despite aspirations of high hopes and dreams for their families and careers.

The evidence suggests almost a quarter (23.6%) teenage mothers do not complete year 10 and only 2.3% enter tertiary education. Children of teenage mothers are also less likely to commence/complete secondary/ tertiary education.<sup>1</sup> Currently in Australia, 80% of teenage parents are on welfare 7 years later, according to the Australian Department of Social Services, “based on actuarial and other analysis the lifetime cost of welfare dependence per individual is approximately \$16 million, equating to \$200,000 per year for 80 years”.<sup>2</sup> Expecting and Parenting teens also demonstrate higher risks of complicated pregnancies, low birth weight babies, premature births, postnatal depression, generational teen pregnancies and domestic violence”.<sup>3</sup>

Given the lack of support for expecting and parenting teens in Australia, Brave Foundation formed in 2009 with the aim of growing the village of support around expecting and parenting teens, reducing stigma and discrimination and empowering young parents to build successful, skilled and healthy families.

Across Australia, Brave offers advocacy, guidance and support to expecting and parenting teens to ensure they are connected to place-based services and a peer network. Brave foundation has recently been awarded a Try Test Learn grant through the Department of Social Services to co-design pathway plans with expecting and parenting teens to facilitate ongoing connections with education, training, perinatal, child and maternal health services and to improve emotional and social wellbeing.

However, even with new resources to support expecting and parenting teens, it is critical that there is a greater focus on recognising and realising the rights of expecting and parenting teens and their children. The Commission’s report to the Committee on the Convention on the Right’s of the Child must highlight the ongoing barriers faced by expecting and parenting teens to education, employment, housing and health services.

### Clusters of Rights

- Brave submits that there needs to be greater effort made to reduce discrimination (Cluster 3, Article 2), particularly in reducing the stigma around teen parents in Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> Deloitte Access Economics 2016, A practical guide to understanding social costs: Developing the evidence base for informed social impact investment.

<sup>2</sup> PWC/DSS 2016, Valuation Report, Baseline Valuation.

<sup>3</sup> As at Note 1.



- Brave submits that there is still a lack of support and appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and that access to child care to enable ongoing education and employment remains expensive and difficult for young parents to navigate without additional support (Cluster 6 Article 18).
- Brave submits that Australia should improve access to health services, income support and education, (Cluster 7, intersecting across Articles 18, 24, 26 and 27).
- Brave submits that there are still barriers for expecting and parenting teens to access secondary education, with inconsistent approaches across schools in supporting young parents to continue their education (Cluster 8, Articles 28 and 29).

### **Creating New Rights**

Brave Foundation submits that Australia should consider a better and nationally consistent approach to defining, recognising and realising the rights of expecting and parenting teens in Australia. Brave has developed a draft Charter of Rights for Expecting and Parenting Teens at Appendix I. The Charter has been discussed with the Federal Children’s Commissioner, the Human Rights Commissioner, the President of the Human Rights Commission and some State and Territory Commissioners. Brave requests that the draft Charter form part of new efforts to enhance the rights of young parents in Australia.



## APPENDIX I

### Charter of Human Rights for Expecting & Parenting Teens

Every person is entitled to certain fundamental rights, simply by being human. These are called 'human rights'. This is the same for you as an expecting or parenting teen and for your children

Human rights are there to protect you from those that seek to discriminate against you or cause you harm.

Born out of the atrocities and enormous loss of life during World War II, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948 to provide a common understanding of the rights of every human. It forms the basis for a world built on freedom, justice and peace.

This charter highlights articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that are relevant to Expecting & Parenting Teens. This has been developed to help you, your family, friends, school, community or workplace understand your rights and the rights of your child. Please share this charter with them if the need arises.

### Charter of Human Rights for Expecting & Parenting Teens

#### **We Are All Born Free & Equal.**

We are all born free. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way

As an expecting or parenting teen, you have the right to be treated equally to any other teen and your child should be treated equally to other children.

#### **Don't Discriminate.**

These rights belong to everybody, whatever our differences

Discrimination against Expecting & Parenting Teens in any environment is not okay. Pathways to support their education should be provided to Expecting & Parenting Teens by schools, hospitals, community services and communities.

#### **The Right to Life.**

We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen your right to safety, and the right of your child's safety is paramount and should never be compromised.

#### **You Have Rights No Matter Where You Go.**



Whether you are in a bus mall, shopping centre, school or hospital, you and your children are entitled to be treated equally.

### **We're All Equal Before the Law.**

The law is the same for everyone. It must treat us all fairly.

### **Law Protects Your Human Rights.**

We can all ask for the law to help us when we are not treated fairly.

If you are treated unfairly as an Expecting & Parenting Teen you are entitled to the protection of the law. The Children's Commissioner or Anti-Discrimination Commissioner in your State or Territory will assist you in accessing legal assistance.

### **The Right to Privacy.**

Nobody should try to harm your good name. Nobody has the right to come into your home, open our letters, or bother you or your family.

Wherever you live, whether with family, friends or somewhere else, no one is entitled to invade your privacy without good reason.

### **The Right to Your Own Things.**

Everyone has the right to own things or share them. Nobody should take things from us without a good reason.

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen this includes your baby goods, schoolbooks, clothing or your own things.

### **Freedom of Thought.**

We all have the right to believe in what we want to believe, to have a religion, or to change it if we want.

### **Freedom of Expression.**

We all have the right to make up our own minds, to think what we like, to say what we think, and to share our ideas with other people.

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen you have the freedom to think and share ideas about how you would like to parent and continue your future as a family with your child.

### **The Right to Public Assembly.**

We all have the right to meet our friends and to work together in peace to defend our rights. Nobody can make us join a group if we don't want to.

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen you can meet anywhere any teenager or mother would normally meet. e.g. schools, playgroups, and parks.



### **The Right to Democracy.**

We all have the right to take part in the government of our country. Every grown-up should be allowed to choose his or her own leaders.

You can vote once you turn 18 and can enrol when you are 16 or 17.

### **Social Security.**

We all have the right to affordable housing, medicine, education, and childcare, enough money to live on and medical help if we are ill or old.

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen you have the same rights to financial assistance, support, secondary school education, maternity leave, ante/post-natal care and maternal help as any other parent.

### **Workers' Rights.**

Every Australian has the right to a fair wage for his or her work, and to join a trade union.

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen you have the same right to employment as any other Australian citizen, without being discriminated against for being an Expecting or Parenting Teen.

### **The Right to Play.**

We all have the right to rest from work and to relax. This applies to you and your child. You are still a teenager and time to socialise safely is important. Your growing child also has a right to play.

### **Food and Shelter for All.**

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen you have the right to food and shelter.

### **The Right to Education.**

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen you have the same right to complete your secondary school education as any other Australian teen.

### **Responsibility.**

We have a duty to other people, and we should protect their rights and freedoms.

As an Expecting & Parenting Teen we have a duty respect the rights of others.

### **No - one can take away your Human Rights.**