



Ms Megan Mitchell
National Children's Commissioner
Human Rights Commission
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Ms Mitchell,

My name is Corinne Harper and I am the Program Manager for Young Families Connect (YFC) Flexible Learning Program based at Ipswich State High School in Queensland. I have been working for the Department of Education and Training [DET] for approximately 11 years supporting young teenage parents in schools in the Metropolitan Region.

I was recently on extended leave and missed the Young Parent round table discussion held in Brisbane on 12 June 2017. I would like to take this opportunity to give you some information regarding the Young Families Connect Program and would love to work with you regarding the Children's Report.

Young Families Connect, formally known as the Pregnant and Parenting Students Program, was previously based at Redbank Plains SHS supporting pregnant and parenting students in schools in the Moreton Region of Queensland's Department of Education and Training, servicing schools as far apart as Boonah, Laidley and Yeronga. The program was originally established in 2002 under the State Labour Government's 'Earn or Learn' funding model.

In 2011 Education Queensland ceased funding of this program. After many months of sourcing new funding, a partnership between Mission Australia Communities for Children Inala – Ipswich (DSS) and Ipswich State High School established the Young Families Connect program in order to continue supporting pregnant and parenting students in a program of excellence at Ipswich State High School.

Young Families Connect has a clear focus – to remove the barriers to learning for pregnant and parenting young women. The program works to implement the DET State Schools' Division Pregnant and Parenting Students Policy to create a welcoming environment for pregnant and parenting students and their babies. The program is designed to increase the participation rate of pregnant and parenting students in education and to support them to complete education to senior certificate level or successful transition to work, university or TAFE.

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Low rates of school completion are associated with the very limited support available to pregnant and parenting young women to complete their education. Young Families Connect encourages and supports all pregnant and parenting students to complete their education. Young parents are far less likely than their peers to complete secondary education or to engage in post-school education and training without an initiative that meets their needs as new parents.

Continuing education throughout the pregnancy, maintaining a relationship with the school after the birth and re-engaging as soon as practicable all have enormous benefits for both the mother and her child/ren.

The program supports young parents through both academic and parenting education and facilitates their re-engagement into education by targeting the education and support needs of young families, addressing social inclusion and reducing the isolation of disadvantaged families.

Flexible learning options and timeframes and on-site adjunct child care are available, as well as providing a holistic health service provision in partnership with KAMBU Health and Queensland Health. In partnership with many other Government and Non-Government organisations we also deliver programs such as Playgroup, Library programs and Sing & Grow.

The program has established strong partnerships both locally and nationally to support young people in maximising their opportunities. YFC Students are connected to services, including Mission Australia Communities for Children, Kambu Family & Child Health, Ipswich Community Youth Service, Queensland Health School Based Youth Health Nurse, Ipswich Hospital, Mater Mothers Hospital, Child Health Nurses, Midwives, local childcare services, Goodna and Ipswich Youth agencies, Legal Aid, Centrelink, Child Safety, Mercy Family Services, Playgroup Queensland and Ipswich Women's Centre Against Domestic Violence.

To continue our funding agreement with Mission Australia we need to become an evidence-based program. To facilitate this we have recently contacted the University of Queensland's Human Services Faculty to assist us in measuring our success and to help us with engaging and reengaging young parents in our community. We look forward to working with Professor Martin Mills and his team in the very near future. However I am concerned it will be too little, too late. Without further funding, programs like Young Families Connect will not survive.

We are doing some amazing work here at YFC but we do face many challenges. We need particular help with the following challenges to continue this great work.

- **Funding:** we operate out of a two room demountable building provided by Ipswich SHS. We have one teacher 3 days per week. Mission Australia is our only funding body providing us with minimal funding that is absorbed in wages for the Program Manager.
- **Engagement:** it is very difficult to engage young parents with our program when there is no incentive for them to do so. Parents as young as 14 – 17 years do not understand what a future without an education looks like. They are a generation that is living in the moment. We know that there are approximately 115 births to young parents aged under 18 years of age each year at the Ipswich Hospital and we are only engaging a small percentage of these young parents.
- **Staffing:** our two staff members are spread very thin and are not skilled in all areas necessary to address the complex issues our student's experience. We desperately need a social worker/counsellor on staff to help our students with their very dramatic and complex lives. We also need child care workers to assist in our nursery while our students are in class.

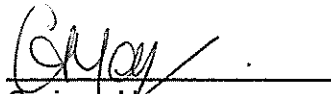
I am a great supporter of the Federal Government's proposed trial experimental initiatives aimed at getting young parents off the public books and into employment. Programs such as Young Families Connect are a cost effective initiative and would work in any region across the country yet we are constantly overlooked by funding bodies.

I was recently involved with the Department of Social Services Hack that was held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in February 2017. The Hack was a discussion looking at creating new programs in support of young parents however the event did not show any interest in what was already working in regional areas like Ipswich.

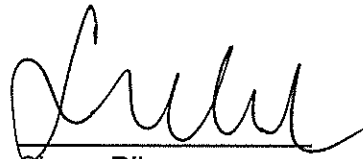
I would like to invite you to visit the Young Families Connect Program to discuss the welfare issues that you are currently addressing and how we could make this program an even greater success.

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future. Should you have any questions or if you would like to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED]

Kind regards



Corinne Harper
Program Manager
Young Families Connect



Simon Riley
Principal
Ipswich State High School