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**Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review - Community Organisations**

Young Parent’s Program (YPP) is a specialist organisation supporting pregnant and parenting young women and has been operating in the greater north Brisbane region since 1986. We support 250-300 young women at any time who are first pregnant as teenagers, up to the age of 23. The young women include good proportions, who are from Aboriginal and Torres St Islander backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (including refugees), have intellectual disabilities and many have complex needs. All of them are seen as “at risk” in the Child Protection system due to their young age. Many face issues such as homelessness, violence, social isolation, disengagement from education and employment. Most report stories of discrimination or stereotyping due to their status as young parents.

Workers from YPP have witnessed the experiences and heard stories from thousands of young women over many years. These include stories about the barriers they face in engaging and re-engaging in education and employment. For many, education is the pathway to employment. For others, the barriers relate directly to employment. We regularly refer young women to services as they come and go that have been specifically established to assist address some of these barriers. One recent such program that lost funding in Queensland was the Partners In Prosperity program. We also work in partnership with alternative schools which are responsive to the needs of young pregnant and parenting women to enable them to complete their education in flexible and innovative ways.

Common barriers included but are not limited to:

* Stereotyping and discrimination
* Lack of financial resources
* Lack of stable housing
* Social exclusion and lack of family and social support
* Domestic violence
* Not having a car or driver’s licence and the expense
* Being vulnerable to the child safety system
* Parenting issues eg post natal depression, difficulties with bonding or parenting in general, sick children or being sick themselves, shared parenting issues
* The dual responsibility and desire to parent full time as well as engage in education and employment
* Difficulties accessing childcare

Many of these barriers involve being a teenager at a particular developmental life stage which may include having lack of knowledge and resources and living “in the moment” and “learning” life skills. Others involve parenting responsibilities and challenges. Others involve discrimination.

I have just asked young women on our Facebook page for their comments and stories and received the following response which provides some case study context:

“After being at my full time job 2 years before falling pregnant with my first son, I was told I would be able to return to work part time. I took 1 year maternity leave. A few weeks prior to my return, my boss phoned me and told me that I could no longer return part time, it was to either return full time or resign. Being only 19 years old and in and out of support houses/programs this was very scary and I was caught off guard. My boss was not compationate about my circumstances, and I struggled to pay for child care expenses, on top of rent and car payments, other bills and being a single parent. My support system at the time wasn't existant. I stuck it out and just managed. Now I have had my second son, and currently on maternity leave again.. Although I would love to return to work after my maternity leave has ended, I just don't see that being a realistic choice and I am hesitant. The cost of childcare for my 2 children 5 days per week is more than the cost of my rent per week. I wouldn't even have enough money left over to actually pay my rent, and thats with the childcare rebate! My current partner and father to my second child does have a job but he is also studying full time, therefore our income is not consistent. This just makes it so hard to provide a great life for my children.. I mean its easier and cheaper to stay home with my boys until school age, and live off the doll, the only down fall is that when I do chose to return to work, I know it will be hard as I would have been out of work for so many years and my current skills out dated. I know employers like to hire people that have been in the work force. I don't want to have to rely on government funds and tax payers money, I like to earn my way but its just so difficult to do so. It's tough for young mothers trying to return to work, I wish there was a little more support and compation from employers and perhaps the government or something so that we can provide better for our future leaders, doctors, veterans, school teachers, sports stars etc.. (what ever they chose to be). Thanks for reading...”

As I am about to leave and away on leave for the best part of next week, I thought I would forward this to you now although other young women may respond. We do have other stories in our filing system which I don’t have time to research right now but I hope this gives you a snapshot.

Thanks you and please feel free to contact us for further information at:

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