

Time is on their side

Providing services to young women and their
dependent children

Joanna Bock
Berry Street

Prevalence

25% of all referrals in the last financial year to the Berry Street TYSS program were young parenting or pregnant women

Factors thought to contribute to teenage fertility include family history of teenage pregnancy, violence and sexual abuse in childhood, unstable housing arrangements, poor school attendance and performance, socioeconomic disadvantage, and absence of a father figure*

When violence is a feature of a relationship pregnancy is a particularly dangerous time

While the rate of teenage fertility is declining overall the Indigenous teenage fertility rate was 5 times the non-Indigenous rate in 2005*

*MAKING PROGRESS: THE HEALTH, DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING OF AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Carly

Carly is 21 & pregnant with her second child

Kane is 2 and resides under a DHS managed kinship care arrangement with Carly's parents

The father of both children is violent and this was the primary reason for Kane's removal from her care.

Carly continues to see him despite taking out an intervention order against him

Carly developed a dependency on alcohol and drugs after leaving home at the age of 15

Who is Carly?

She is a young woman who has both rejected and been rejected by her family

She never felt that she “fitted in” at school or at home

She is a young woman who has experienced violence

She mixes with the “wrong sort” in fact she *is* the “wrong sort”, she drinks and smokes and takes drugs

She doesn't think that she is worth much but she is a fighter and a survivor and she knows her rights

She knows the welfare system and mistrusts it

She doesn't know how to cook, or budget but she knows how to get around

She doesn't read or write too well but she's not stupid

Hope

Hope is 18 and was born in Southern Sudan and raised in a refugee camp in Kenya

She arrived in Australia with her mother and brothers to join her father when she was 14

Hope was rejected by her family when they found out that she was pregnant

Since then Hope has moved in and out of refuges and temporary accommodation

The father of the unborn child disappeared once he became aware of Hope's pregnancy

Who is Hope?

She is a refugee with a family and personal history of immeasurable trauma, violence, loss and displacement as a consequence of war

She has little experience of sustained or formal education

She and her family have been subjected to racism in Egypt and Australia

She is isolated from her family and she has no friends

She has experienced violence and rejection within her family

She doesn't speak English too well but she speaks three other languages fluently

She fears the Government and the "authorities" but she has no-one else to trust

She is unaware of her rights and knows little of the Australian welfare system

She doesn't drink or smoke, she can cook and budget and she cares for herself well

She knows how to care for a child because she helped raise her brothers

Common experiences

- Violence & Trauma
- Racism and Prejudice
- Isolation from family and community
- Educational disadvantage
- Fear and distrust
- A desire to be a good parent

Keys to meaningful intervention

Engagement – taking time to find the points of connection through the mistrust

Assessment – recognising and responding to trauma and finding the right services

Flexible, Responsive and Assertive outreach

Building on your own and your client's
Tenacity and Resilience

Health and Wellbeing

- Berry Street promotes and provides opportunities for young people across all our programs to adhere to the minimum guidelines for healthy eating and physical activity as set out by the Australia Government.
- The minimum standards indicate that young people between the ages of 12-18 years need to complete 60 minutes of moderate, vigorous physical activity every day in order to maintain or lose weight and to reduce fat, to decrease stress and tension, to increase confidence and to facilitate the development of social skills, to build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, to develop efficient function of the heart and lungs and to help control feelings of anxiety and depression.
- Berry Street offers weekend and evening activities such as shopping, cooking, swimming, gym and walking programs as well as activities during school holidays and interstate camping adventures.
- The effort is a whole of organization approach with an equal emphasis on staff Health and Wellbeing.

FIRST STEPS Program

The First Steps program is an early intervention group work program designed for young people aged 12 – 25, who have already become parents or are at risk of becoming parents in their late adolescence or who have a significant role in caring for younger siblings

Aims:

- ✓ To provide an orientation towards the basic knowledge and understanding required to care for children;
- ✓ To utilise an experiential mode of learning to build greater awareness around caring for children;
- ✓ To create an awareness of the impacts a significant person can have on a child's development;
- ✓ To enhance the connection young people have with their local community;
- ✓ To provide young people with facilitated support within the group work setting; and
- ✓ To enhance peer support networks for young people.

Early Learning is Fun Program

ELF Book Bags – are distributed in partnership with Maternal & Child Health at the four key developmental milestone ages of 4 weeks, 8 months, 18 months and 3½ years.

ELF Book Swap Boxes – are hosted by local businesses at community venues and contain donated books that are freely available for children to swap.

ELF Reading at Immunisation Sessions – community volunteer readers from local service groups read short story books and chat to children about their interests and books.

ELF Community Reading Days – are a celebration of reading involving the whole community, including local business owners, community groups and services taking time out to read to groups of children dressed as their favourite book character.

The current ELF resource materials were developed in 2006 in partnership between Berry Street and Melbourne University Early Learning Centre and published as a comprehensive resource for communities adopting ELF.

ELF Outcomes

- ✓ Positive changes in family interactions and early learning experiences for children
- ✓ Increased awareness and appreciation of the importance of home and family in early learning
- ✓ Increased parent confidence as the child's first educator
- ✓ Positive engagement in early years services and at school entry
- ✓ Increased community connectedness