



Research & Evaluation of the  
Young Mothers Transition  
Program (YMTP) 2021-2023

Dr Penny Round

March 2024

---

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



We would like to acknowledge the support of all those involved in the research process; the young parents, the educators, parenting support workers and the members of the consortium. YMTP is funded by the Women's Leadership and Development Program (WLDP) of the Office for Women in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

This report was compiled by Dr Penny Round Monash University.

---

<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>COMPANY</b>
Dr Penny Round	Monash University

---

---

# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
CONTENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	5
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	7
RECOMMENDATIONS	9
METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW	10
FINDINGS	11
CONCLUSION	13

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Young Parents Education Program (YPEP) Learning Hubs provide pregnant and parenting young people, aged between 15 and 22, with an opportunity to complete their education through studying the Vocational Major in a supported and inclusive learning environment. The South East Region of Melbourne has been profiled by the City of Casey as an area of disadvantage. Communities in this region (Cities of Casey, Cardinia, and Greater Dandenong) have recorded low rates of Year 12 completion (16.9%) when compared to the greater Melbourne area. Teenage parents present as a vulnerable population and are at risk of becoming socially, economically, and culturally disadvantaged. In 2022 the Young Mothers Transition Program (YMTP) was added to the YPEP, with the aim of bridging the gap for young mothers across the South East Region to access education and the labour market through qualified and highly skilled Wellbeing and Transition Coaches (Transition Coaches) that assist and support them to complete post compulsory education, develop foundational parenting skills, build knowledge of industry, employment, training and life skills to equip them to compete equitably in the employment market and secure employment. The Transition Coaches meet with young mothers regularly and use the principles of coaching to support young mothers in reviewing and actioning their individual Education to Employment Plan (Etep) – this approach helps participants develop sound problem solving, navigation and resourcefulness skills. Young mothers often need guidance to be linked with appropriate agencies that support them to meet educational and employment goals. The Transition Coaches work with each young mother to address barriers to these, such as challenges with transport, mental health, housing, childcare, developing the Etep with goals toward addressing these challenges. This Report explores the impact of the Transition Coach role and approach to engage, retain and assist young mothers across the region to complete education and gain employment, including young mothers enrolled at a YPEP site. This Report also explores what is required for sustainability of the YMTP.

This evaluation utilises a qualitative approach. This method was valuable in understanding how the various stakeholders perceived the role of the Transition Coaches. Interviews were conducted with collaborative partners, administrative staff, and educators, and the young mothers in the Program participated in either individual or focus group interviews. Data arising from the interviews were analysed using the process of identifying and coding characteristic patterns or themes emerging (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Thematic analysis of this nature allowed for the identification of specific concepts to guide future iterations of the YMTP.

Three significant, overarching findings emerged from the evaluation. Firstly, the responsiveness of the Transition Coaches to the needs of each young mother was important to enable the young mother to provide individualised support for the educational needs, life needs and general needs of their child. Secondly, the ease of accessibility of the Transition Coaches was a key factor in the engagement between the young mothers, Transition Coaches and educators at YPEP sites. The layer of the Transition Coaches as advocates worked to cement the efficacy of the role in supporting the young mothers but also as a gradual release of responsibility model by equipping and empowering the young mothers to manage what can be complex bureaucratic systems. Thirdly, the educators at the YPEP sites occupy a key role in the success of the young mothers educational outcomes and the communications between the Transition Coaches and educators and the young mothers allowed for a wrap-around of support for the young mother while also enabling the educators to focus on their role. The wellbeing of all involved benefitted, including the wellbeing of the educator.

To ensure continuity of the role of Transition Coach, sustainable funding from government, local, state or federal, or philanthropic partnership will ensure that the young mothers always have access to a Transition Coach. In considering the future sustainability of Transition Coaches, clinical supervision and support must be mandatory.

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In the South East Region, there are 1110 (Census 2016) young people with parenting responsibilities, many of them without family or other supports to assist them with continuing their education and obtaining a Year 12 qualification. While the birthrate of teen parents is dropping there is a disproportionate number born to teen mothers who 'live in areas of greater socioeconomic disadvantage (21 births per 1,000 compared with 1.7 births per 1,000 in areas of least disadvantage)' (AIHW, 2020, p. 47). Young parents are a vulnerable population often linked with poorer health outcomes and wellbeing for the child and the mother. Without a benchmark level of education, young parents will find it difficult to compete equitably in the labour market, thereby increasing the likelihood of welfare dependency, homelessness, lower levels of health and wellbeing, etc., together with their baby's life chances being negatively impacted. Young Parents Education Program (YPEP) Learning Hubs provide inclusive learning for young parents that increase the possibility for them to re-engage with their education and work toward obtaining an equivalent Year 12 qualification.

This qualitative study sought to understand how the young mothers, services and agencies working with young mothers and YPEP teaching staff, experienced the function of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach (Transition Coach) supporting the needs of young mothers, enabling them to reengage with their formal education and secure employment. Small group and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with young mothers and teaching and advisory/administrative staff involved with the Narre Warren Foundation Learning Centre site during 2023.

The South East Region (SER) has low rates of Year 12 completion illustrated in statistics noting that just 16.9% of young people in Casey, Cardinia, and Greater Dandenong Region (GDR) have completed Year 10 or less. In light of this, this research report intended to identify the efficacy of support provided by the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches in relation to supporting young parents in engaging with education. This aligns with the clear direction articulated by the Australian Government in its School to Work Transitions (<http://education.gov.au/school-work-transitions>) initiative that recognises the importance of education and encourages 'young people to complete school and successfully transition to further education, training or work'. This research will document the experiences of young mothers in the South-East Region, YPEP educators and others who interact with the YMTP to understand the impact of this role.

Since first involvement with the Young Parents Education Program in 2015, Monash University researchers have sustained a strong commitment to young parents across the south east region through conducting interviews, surveys, running literacy workshops in YPEP to support young parents in developing their child's literacy skills, membership of the consortium, and through both formal and informal meetings with staff involved at all levels of the Program. This report summarises the findings of this research.

## The YMTP aims to:

- Engage (or re-engage) young mothers into education and/or sustainable employment.
- Provide support via coaching and case management utilising the development of individualised Education to Employment Plans that considers the education/employment needs of the young mother and underlying/compounding needs that may impact achieving education and employment goals.
- Offer coaching in focus areas of education/employment, health and wellbeing of young mother and her child/ren, parenting support, respectful relationships and linkage and referral to community services.

**Anticipated outcomes** for young mothers include obtaining a Year 12 qualification, an industry certificate qualification and transition to further education or employment, and/or pathways to greater stability and opportunity for young mothers, their child/ren and family.

## **The Young Parents Education Program (YPEP) and the Wellbeing and Transition Coach in the Young Mothers Transition Program (YMTP)**

In researching the role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach, the consideration revolved around the efficacy of this role, its complementary nature to the role of the YPEP educator and what was needed by the young mothers and how they perceived this role. Prior to the YMTP commencing, the YPEP educators were performing a dual role; that of both educator but also counselor. While some YPEP educators had a background in wellbeing, none were qualified as counselors, social workers, youth workers or psychologists which led to 'compassion fatigue' (Berger & Nott, 2023) at times for the YPEP educator. The students need daily assistance, advocacy and information regarding relevant resources that were outside of the classroom. The Young Mothers Transition Program (YMTP) was introduced in 2022 with the aim to bridge the gap for young mothers (up to 22 years) across South East Region- Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia to accessing education and the labour market through qualified and highly skilled Transition Coaches using a case management model to assist and support young mothers to complete post compulsory education, develop foundational parenting skills, build knowledge of industry, employment, training and life skills to equip them to compete equitably in the employment market and sustain work.

### **Alignment to YPEP**

The YMTP is a case management model that works alongside the Young Parents Education Program (YPEP) at Cranbourne Secondary College and Foundation Learning Centre in complementary alignment of the education and employment goals of the young mother that may include linking with appropriate services/providers. The YMTP also works with all young mothers across the region seeking support with accessing employment or other supports. To date over 100 young mothers have registered with YMTP, with approximately 30% enrolled in a YPEP at any given time.

### **Purpose of the evaluation:**

This research report evaluates the role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach and will systematically examine, collect and analyse data associated with the perception of the activities and outcomes of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach, using qualitative data to draw conclusions about effectiveness, make improvements and inform future YPEP development decisions.

The Evaluation will clarify:

- Does YMTP support young mothers to re-engage with education and/or employment?
- How well is the coaching approach with young mothers in the YMTP working to engage, retain and encourage resilience and stability?
- Is the Education to Employment Plan the best method to map and action goals with young mothers?
- Can YMTP do better to engage young mothers, retain them in the program and offer a sustainable model of service support?
- What is needed for YMTP to be sustainable?
- Is the YMTP achieving its intended aims and anticipated outcomes?

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

'Pregnancy is a leading cause of high-school dropout for female adolescents. Reengaging them in their education is a crucial layer to improving theirs, and their child's, future outcomes' (Humberstone, 2018, p. 1). Pregnant and parenting young people can face marginalisation in society and in the education system (te Riele, 2007). Traditionally, teen pregnancy has been synonymous with school drop out (Humberstone, 2018), whether by choice or by exclusion, economic disadvantage and increased health concerns for themselves and their child. If returning to the education system, the challenges of sustaining that commitment can be overwhelming. The school environment can be unwelcoming and the structure of the system can be too rigid for a pregnant or parenting student. The young parent can feel self-conscious and different to other students. Timetabling can be an issue, as can excursions, as the parenting of their child takes priority over their own educational needs in a school that is established to cater for students without parenting requirements. Unconscious bias (or even conscious bias) can be prevalent and the school staff may perceive pregnant and parenting teens as having a negative impact on the school's reputation and teachers may feel unequipped to support their perceived needs (Morales, 2019). The role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach encompasses advocacy as they can work with the young parents and the school staff to address these issues. This advocacy plays a key role in the success of the young parent. Other economic variables may also be a prohibitive factor. These young parents need support both within the school system, but also external to the school, for their reengagement in education to be a success. In addition to the formal educational aspects, they need targeted pastoral support (Vaithianathan, et al., 2021) and mentors (Afolabi, 2021). For many young people, this pregnancy is actually the catalyst for them to want to change their life to enable them to be a good parent for their child and they need resources, guidance and advocacy to enable them to overcome any potential hurdles (AIHW, 2022; Humberstone, 2018; Morales, 2019).

The role of the educator is a critical factor in regular school sites or educational re-engagement programs. But, the educator can feel compromised if supports are required that go beyond their educational expertise and blur into the social, emotional and financial support the young parents require for them to be able to attend and engage with their education. Teachers who are exposed to working with students who experience trauma have a higher incidence of burnout, or 'compassion fatigue' (Berger & Nott, 2023, p. 6). While the educator in these programs should have experience in wellbeing (Subban et al., 2022), they may not always be able to find the balance between educator and what is effectively a role of counsellor, as their primary role is one of the facilitator to enable the students to meet the requirements of their curriculum. What is needed is the complementary role of a case management professional. The case manager, in this situation, the Transition Coach, is equipped to navigate and facilitate social and bureaucratic connections, which is an important element to develop school engagement and successful educational outcomes. These case managers can work with each young parent to identify their individual support requirements to help them overcome any barriers (Assini-Meytin et al., 2018, p. 734).

Case management is needed to link students to clinical and community services. Unplanned pregnancy is associated with lower educational attainment and employment opportunities and this can be cyclical within families and for the child born to a teen parent (Egan et al., 2020). With the addition of the role of Transition Coach, the educator is better able to focus on education for the young parent and develop a rapport without having to step outside of their role and offer counselling and advocacy support. The role of the Transition Coach also provides a clear person to whom young mothers can turn to in times of need outside of the academic realm. Key to the success of retaining young parents in programs is the rapport and trust between student and staff (Egan et al., 2020) and acts in a complementary role with the educator.

Case management is also essential, to allow for continuity of support and clear updates with key stakeholders about the progress and needs of the young parent. The Transition Coach often takes on the role of the key point of contact. This is important as the young person may not have the resilience or ability to contact and manage external agencies they need to deal with (Egan et al., 2020). The Transition Coach becomes the key conduit between education providers, agencies and the student and is easily accessible and accountable in their support for the young parent. Young parents recognise that the need to connect with external services is a barrier and too often is overwhelming, resulting in them giving up. The Transition Coach can be by the side of the young parent

as they navigate these bureaucratic systems. The centralised and accessible location of the Transition Coach leads to better student outcomes (Egan et al., 2020).

The case-worker role could be in the form of a social worker or youth worker. In her 2020 doctoral thesis, Washington-Woods reported that pregnant and parenting teens do have challenges with continuing with their education for a range of reasons, including lack of support, resources, problematic relationships, the level of family support and the difficult transition to parenthood. Washington-Woods noted that the role of the social worker was often about helping to obtain resources and advocating for the students, facilitating and organising networks of support, linking them with additional services. They also recognised that many of the young parents didn't have a clear understanding of the responsibility of having a child and they needed support through that process. These young parents might also come from dysfunctional families and poverty and the social worker was connecting with the young mother to ensure they received appropriate counselling and engagement at school. These young parents need wrap around services to not only stay in school, but to finish school (Washington-Woods, 2020). Reengagement in their education is vital to improving the future outcomes for them and their child. Yet for many, pregnancy seems to act as the catalyst for an increased understanding of the importance of education and they need help with identifying their own specific needs, the barriers to achieving these and then support and advocacy to enable them to achieve these goals and also to facilitate their steps to self-sufficiency in these matters (Harding, 2020; Humberstone, 2018). The ability for the case-worker to navigate and facilitate social connections is an important element to develop school engagement and successful educational outcomes. They can also connect with appropriate agencies and act as advocates for the young parent (Mills et al., 2012; Van Pelt, 2012). The approach needs to be strength-based one-to-one. These case workers can act to infiltrate the armour many of these young parents have built up and act as a 'buffer against the stigma' (Leese, 2017, p. 1213) with a non-judgmental, caring, reliable, sustained, trusting and supportive relationship that offers emotional and solution focused practical support with an understanding of the needs of each parent and with this support, the teen parent can achieve the same long-term outcomes as non-teen parents (Leese, 2017; Mills, 2012; Rossell et al., 2010).



# RECOMMENDATIONS

---

## RECOMMENDATION

## RATIONALE

---

### Recommendation 1

Ongoing funding for the role of the Transition Coach

### Rationale

The Transition Coach plays a crucial role in the success of the education and goal of employment of parenting students and the support they need as a young parent. Without this role, the educators are compromised as they are drawn away from the role as educator, and the Transition Coaches have the expertise and network knowledge to support the emotional needs of the students to sustain their education but also to support them in their parenting. The role needs to have ongoing funding to ensure job security for those in the role, but also to enable employment of others in the role.

---

### Recommendation 2

Built in time for educators and Transition Coaches to meet regularly

### Rationale

With the complementary nature of the role of the Transition Coaches and the educators, it is important to the case management individualised approach of support that educators and Coaches have a regularly scheduled prioritised time to meet to communicate any concerns for particular students and develop a plan of support including the role each professional will take.

---

### Recommendation 3

Professional debriefing/counseling sessions for the Transition Coaches

### Rationale

The Transition Coaches are working with a vulnerable population and while there are many rewarding experiences, they are also privy to the complexities of the lives and emotions of the parenting student and this can take its toll on the Transition Coaches. As they are there to support the educators and the students, they too need support to ensure their ability to sustain their commitment to their position.

---

### Recommendation 4

The employment of further Transition Coaches

### Rationale

The overwhelming success of the current two Transition Coaches at both an educational, emotional and advocacy level for the parenting students has meant that the time of the two existing Coaches is being challenged and could potentially compromise the services they are able to deliver, or it could take a personal toll on those in the positions. As enrolments in the YPEP increase, so too will the workload for all involved, including the Transition Coaches. This role is a vital aspect to the success of sustaining the engagement with education and ultimate successful educational and employment achievement, with its complementary role with the educators, therefore more Wellbeing and Transition Coaches need to be employed to ensure the continued success of the young parents and their education.

---

# METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

In this evaluation the researcher sought to obtain a sense of how those involved with the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches experienced this new role and as such adopted a phenomenological position. This allowed the researcher to question the way in which individuals experienced the world (Van Manen, 2015). The intention was to try and understand how all the various stakeholders including the collaborative partners and administrative staff, educators, and the young mothers in the YPEP experienced and perceived the role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach and its efficacy in supporting them to sustain their engagement in their education and at a personal level. Interviews were conducted with the collaborative partners, administrative staff, and teachers at the Narre Warren Foundation Learning Centre site (FLC). The young mothers in the Program were interviewed using either individual or focus group interviews, depending on their preference. Individual interviews enabled participant confidence and a feeling of privacy and security and a more personal insight (Walton, et al., 2022). Focus groups allowed for observation, interaction, and more honest discussion among participants (Kane et al., 2013). The number of young women present at each focus group varied depending on attendance and group composition.

Individual semi-structured interviews were held with teaching and advisory/administrative staff involved with the Narre Warren Foundation Learning Centre site during 2023 (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These semi-structured interviews were loosely directed by a set of questions, which allowed for relevant topics to be covered but allowed for incidental pertinent conversations, while also keeping in mind the desired outcomes of the discussion (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Individual interviews were conducted with the Transition Coaches. Questions contained in the interview guide were developed by the researcher, after a consideration of the research outcomes of the study. The interviews with Transition Coaches, educators and young mothers and conversations with other stakeholders, among others, illustrated a model at work and provided significant insight into how the role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach worked within the YPEP to best accommodate the individual needs of each young mothers and their unique learning profiles.

Data arising from the interviews were analysed using the process of identifying and coding characteristic patterns or themes emerging (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2009). The phases of thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clark (2006) guided the process. The researcher began firstly by familiarising themselves with the data from the interview transcripts. At this stage, initial ideas and thoughts were recorded. Following this, initial codes were generated from the interview data. This was followed by a systematic search for emerging themes. A thematic map was then constructed to double-check if these themes correlated with initial codes. Themes were then named, in relation to developing ideas. Finally, selected extracts from the interviews were drawn as evidence for use in the reporting of the study. Whilst the nature of this study was largely evaluative and related to collecting data that would assist both the Program designers and deliverers in the ongoing review and improvement of the Program, analysis of the data revealed an interesting perspective on how the role of Wellbeing and Transition Coach sat within the existing YPEP and worked to support young mothers engage with education and beyond into the workforce. The following presents a discussion of these findings which are useful for others considering designing or implementing similar such programs.

# FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to determine whether the YMTP supports young mothers to re-engage with education and/or employment and whether the role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach is effective in engaging with young mothers, assisting them to engage with education and/or employment while retaining and encouraging resilience and stability and the overall efficacy of the role in meeting its intended aims and outcomes. Additionally, the research sought to reflect on what is needed for YMTP to be sustainable. In doing so, the study explored the unique characteristics of an education program which positions the needs of young parents at the forefront with the YMTP based within it.

**Responsivity to the needs of the individual student:** It was evident that the role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach was overwhelmingly successful in sustaining re-engagement in education. When young mothers experienced issues outside of the educational program, the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches were able to work in a complementary role with the YPEP educator to address potential barriers to attendance and support the students with their parenting. *“There were many layers of what they organise and do for students.”* The responsivity of the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches was solution-focused, supportive and strength-based, enabling the young mothers to draw on the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches as a resource for physical needs of themselves and their baby but also their emotional needs. Students who are parenting face many complexities and these challenges can provide obstacles to the students’ ability to commit to their education (Vaithianathan, 2021). Within their role, the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches were able to act as a resource to provide support to young mothers and *“connect them with services to help when needed for external factors that are influencing their lives (ranging from financial aid, counseling, transport costs, baby equipment/clothing, etc.)”* The nature of the role enabled the YPEP educators to be able to focus on curriculum because the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches took on the support to young mothers who came with *“many complexities.”* The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches kept other staff current in their need-to-know information regarding the young mothers and their babies and advised on approaches of support. Importantly, the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches were an important connection, referring students to external resources and services and advocating with these agencies. The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches helped with referral to counseling, obtained essentials for the care of the young mothers children, such as a cot, money, petrol and grocery vouchers, organised therapies such as a child with autism and support for the NDIS process and resources for a child with hip dysplasia and another with an unsettled baby; the coaches were skilled to recommend appropriate agencies and then support the young mother to work with the agency. They provided emotional supports, were easy to talk to and help solve problems, *“not a teacher, so no teacher vibe,”* they were accessible, in the school often and were easily contactable with phone texts. *“They organised a brand-new car seat, clothes, essentials ...when I fell behind on money they let me know where I could get vouchers for money and petrol and stuff like that. If you need extra clothes, they would help you find places to get clothes and stuff... When anyone needs help, we always go to them...they are there when you need them.”*

**Accessibility and advocacy:** Aligned with the layer of responsivity, the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches were easily accessible to the students. For many of the students there were generational complexities and the prompt response, capacity and ability of the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches to assess the needs of the young mother and act quickly with their bank of networks and linkages to services and make referrals to address deficits was elemental in supporting the emotional needs of the young mother and their child. This also enabled the young mother to understand the resources and agencies that were available to them and how to navigate these independently – a critical skill. Young mothers felt comfortable approaching the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches as they were not the YPEP educator and had their own specific role of support. The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches also acted to capacity build other staff to ensure knowledge of resources was current and shared. The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches attended the educational setting regularly, holding individual chats with young mothers who noted they felt that while they had a designated Wellbeing and Transition Coach, they could approach either. The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches had a case management model of support, and this involved having an active Education to Employment Plan which would be co-designed with the young mother and reviewed together regularly for actions, achievements and new activities to be added. The Wellbeing

and Transition Coaches were advocates for the young mothers and able to challenge unconscious biases with a range of agencies. Wellbeing and Transition Coaches also provided young mothers with their mobile phone numbers and would proactively contact them if the YPEP educator had raised any concerns about an absent young mother. The case management model adopted by the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches included regular communication with each young mother to set goals with them, work with agencies and advocate for them with these agencies, empowering the young mothers to gradually take more responsibility for their own requirements in a *“really, really, supportive, caring way.”* A case management approach to support is needed to enable a sustained approach with a person identified the key point of contact, supporting the young mother to navigate complex and potentially overwhelming bureaucracies they need to deal with (Egan, et al. 2020; Humberstone, 2018).

The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches *“have an immense amount of knowledge based around student wellbeing and connections to a multitude of services that I know I would never be able to refer them to,”* said one YPEP educator. *“Their understanding of each individual student’s needs and how to approach them is a credit to the role they provide.”* Research surrounding the role of social workers or case workers working with pregnant and parenting teens recognises the challenges young mothers face and the need for support with resources, advocacy, and supporting them to develop external support networks. These young mothers need wrap around services to sustain their engagement with their education and to complete their education (Washington-Woods, 2020). They need this level of support to *“guide them towards self-sufficiency”* (Harding et al., 2020, p. 84). The 2022 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) noted that while becoming a parent can be positive and transformative for the young parent, they are a *“vulnerable population...and need support through a wellbeing team...a social worker or counselor”* (AIHW, 2022).

**Engagement with students and educators:** The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches attend YPEP sites regularly and *“greet everyone on arrival”*, checking in with young mothers individually to determine if they need any support. *“Their approach is personal and fits with the needs of the individual young mother.”* They provide them with information without being prescriptive and communicate with them in such a way as to engage trust from the young mothers. They have a strength-based approach, utilizing the experiences of young mothers about being a parent and support them in their role of parent. It’s a *“team approach with the young mothers, rather than someone of authority...telling this is how you do it.”* The ability to form connections with the young mothers is vital in sustaining their engagement. They need to be able to have honest discussions about their situations and needs (Mills et al., 2012). *“And they’re able to provide information about different areas around their education, supporting them to attend and to do the work that they need to do in terms of the education they’re seeking.”* Having the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches on site also provides a degree of stability for the young mothers. With their involvement acting as a constant in the lives of the young mothers, something that is fragmented in some other agencies the young mothers may deal with that can have a relatively transient staff. The role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coach for the young mothers *“gets the chance of forming a really supportive relationship.”*

These Wellbeing and Transition Coaches develop a rapport with the young mothers helping them to *“figure stuff out”*. They are an emotional resource but also staff. They motivate the young mothers to develop autonomy. *“They are very kind and I feel like some of these young women just haven’t experienced a lot of kindness in their life and just getting that kindness helps them feel better about themselves.”* They act as an important mentor to the parenting student (Washington-Woods, 2020).

The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches also support the YPEP educators and allow the educator to focus on teaching the Vocational Major curriculum knowing that the physical and emotional needs of the young mothers and their children are being supported by that role. This in turn adds to the sustainability of the YPEP educator in their role as it helps avoid some of the ‘compassion fatigue’ (Berger & Nott, 2023) that is embedded within a position working with such a potentially vulnerable population. The inclusion of students with diverse learning needs is one of the many foci of the Victorian Department of Education and this is one of the many important

partnerships needed to ensure that these vulnerable young mothers have their needs accommodated and can return to complete their education.

### **Improvements relating to the role of Wellbeing and Transition Coach**

Time commitment. As the role becomes more embedded within the Young Parents Education Program, young mothers are seeking more access to the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches and this places a strain on allocated time commitment.

The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches need to have their own clinical supervision and support.

There needs to be built in scheduled time for the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches to meet with the YPEP educators to enable case conferencing of the young mothers that ensures a wrap-around approach but also eliminating overlap between roles.

## **CONCLUSION**

The YPEP has continued to evolve under the strong leadership of Mary Tresize-Brown and through the various iterations has continuously been improved. The many variables that are required for the success of the YPEP revolve around appropriate resourcing, both human and physical, and through continued advocacy for young mothers to have access to education and the supports that enable them to complete education and go on to further education or employment. The significant wellbeing requirements of the young mothers compromises the YPEP educator and their ability to focus on their teaching. Prior to commencement of the YMTP, the YPEP educator was the first port of call for the young mothers presenting daily with wellbeing requirements for themselves and their child and this was a heavy weight for the educators to carry, particularly as this was not their professional role or training. Returning to education can be complex and the wellbeing needs of the young mothers compete with their educational obligations. The role of the Wellbeing and Transition Coaches has had an immediate impact for the YPEP educators and the young mothers, enabling them to have easy access to qualified and experienced staff to support and equip them in their ability to sustain their educational engagement and experience success in their life beyond the YPEP. The Wellbeing and Transition Coaches had overwhelming support for their role, from the YPEP educators and the young mothers who state they have most definitely had an impact on them and engagement in their education, actually exceeding the intended aims; whether this is due to the role or the perfect fit of those who are filling that role. This role is an essential element to the success of the YPEP and as such there is a need for more positions of Wellbeing and Transition Coaches funded to support a vulnerable population of young mothers and their children leading to better life outcomes for them directly, and economically for society, breaking the welfare dependent cycle.

## References

- Afolabi, A. (2021). The role of social workers in the prevention of adolescent pregnancy in Oyo East local government area, Oyo state. *Journal of Social Issues*, 12(1), 113-127.
- Assini-Meytin, L., Mitchell, S. J., & Lewin, A. (2017). Support relationships and teen mothers' school retention at one-year postpartum. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 46, 734-746.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, Retrieved from, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats%5Cabs@.nsf/0/8668A9A0D4B0156CCA25792F0016186A?Opendocument>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). Australia's Children. Accessed from: [https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6af928d6-692e-4449-b915-cf2ca946982f/aihw-cws-69\\_australias\\_children\\_print-report.pdf?v=20230921161957&inline=true](https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6af928d6-692e-4449-b915-cf2ca946982f/aihw-cws-69_australias_children_print-report.pdf?v=20230921161957&inline=true)
- Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2014). Connecting young parents. Accessed from: [http://www3.aifs.gov.au/institute/cafcapppp/ppp/profiles/la\\_connecting\\_young\\_parents.html](http://www3.aifs.gov.au/institute/cafcapppp/ppp/profiles/la_connecting_young_parents.html).
- Bakhtiar, A., te Riele, K., & Sutton, G. (2020). Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) Trial—Independent Evaluation. Report for the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, University of Tasmania, Accessed from: [https://www.utas.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/1411009/Bakhtiar,-te-Riele-and-Sutton-2020.pdf](https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1411009/Bakhtiar,-te-Riele-and-Sutton-2020.pdf).
- Berger, E. & Nott, D. (2023). Predictors of compassion fatigue and compassion among Australian teachers. *Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice, and policy*. Accessed from: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0001573>
- Butler, K. (2015). Parenting Programs in the ACT. Report created for: Families.ACT, Accessed from: <http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/1338726/26230043/1431638890413/Parenting+Programs+in+the+ACT.pdf?token=sXZO55HQi9o10IAIxWbMDpSTEC4%3D>.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. *Organizational Research Methods*, 12(3), 614-617. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428108324514>
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- De Jonge, A. (2001). Support for teenage mothers: A qualitative study into the views of women about the support they received as teenage mothers. *J Adv Nurs*, 36(1), 49-57. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2001.01942.x>
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Educator*, 40, 314-321.
- Dickinson, P., & Joe, T. (2010). Strengthening young mothers : a qualitative evaluation of a pilot support group program. *Youth studies Australia*, 29(1), 35-44.
- Egan, J., Bhuiya, N., Gil-Sanchez, L., Campbell, S., & Clark, J. (2020). Engaging expectant and parenting adolescents: Lessons from the Massachusetts pregnant and parenting teen initiative. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 24, 191-199.
- Fram, M. S. (2005). "It's Just Not All Teenage Moms": Diversity, Support, and Relationship in Family Services. *Am J Orthopsychiatry*, 75(4), 507-517. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.75.4.507>
- Harding, J. F., Knab, J., Zief, S., Kelly, K., & McCallum, D. (2020). A systematic review of programs to promote aspects of teen parents' self-sufficiency: Supporting educational outcomes and healthy birth spacing. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 24, 84-104.

- Humberstone, E. (2018). Social Networks and Educational Attainment among adolescents experiencing pregnancy. *Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 4, 1-13.
- Kamp, A., McSharry, M., & Peter Lang, P. (2017). *Re/Assembling the pregnant and parenting teenager : narratives from the field(s)*. Oxford Peter Lang Ltd, International Academic Publishers.
- Kane, J. B., Philip Morgan, S., Harris, K. M., & Guilkey, D. K. (2013). The educational consequences of teen childbearing. *Demography*, 50(6), 2129–2150. [10.1007/s13524-013-0238-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-013-0238-9)
- Leese, M. (2016). Engaging on the 'front line': exploring how family support teams construct meaning in their work with young mothers. *Child and Family Social Work*, 22, 1207-1215.
- McDonald, L., Conrad, T., Fairtlough, A., Fletcher, J., Green, L., Moore, L., & Lepps, B. (2009). An evaluation of a groupwork intervention for teenage mothers and their families. *Child & family social work*, 14(1), 45-57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00580.x>
- McLeod, A., Baker, D., & Black, M. (2006). Investigating the nature of formal social support provision for young mothers in a city in the North West of England. *Health Soc Care Community*, 14(6), 453-464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2524.2006.00625.x>
- Mills, A., Schmied, V., Taylor, C., Dahlen, H., Schuiringa, W., & Hudson, M. E. (2012). Connecting, learning, leaving: supporting young parents in the community. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 20(6), 663-672.
- Morales, C. J. (2019). *Teenage pregnancy and education: An ethnographic study of the perceptions of former teen mothers who achieved academic success in Texas public high schools*. Doctoral Dissertation. Concordia University Texas
- National Research Council. (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' motivation to learn*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Niven, G., & Dow, A. (2016). Health visitors' perceptions and experiences of teenage mothers' support groups: A qualitative study. *Journal of health visiting*, 4(5), 258-263. <https://doi.org/10.12968/johv.2016.4.5.258>
- Rosell, R., Scarborough, M. K., & Lewis, C. M. (2010). Young, pregnant, and underinsured: growing demand calls for cost-effective collaboration between health and social workers. *Health and Social Work*, 35(2), 1-4.
- SmithBattle, L. (2006). Helping Teen Mothers Succeed. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 22(3), 130-135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10598405060220030201>
- SmithBattle, L. (2007). "I Wanna Have a Good Future": Teen Mothers' Rise in Educational Aspirations, Competing Demands, and Limited School Support. *Youth & Society*, 38(3), 348-371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x06287962>
- Stiles, A. S. (2005). Parenting Needs, Goals, & Strategies of Adolescent Mothers. *MCN Am J Matern Child Nurs*, 30(5), 327-333. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005721-200509000-00011>
- Subban, P., Round, P., Fuqua, M., & Rennie, J. (2022). Creating a R.A.F.T. to engage teenage parents back into education: a case study. *Frontiers in Education*, 7, [10.3389/feduc.2022.852393](https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.852393)
- Te Riele, K., 2004, The human face of 'effective schooling' for marginalised young women. Paper prepared for the Learning from the Margins Conference, July 2004, Melbourne. Published on-line by the Quality Learning Research Priority Area, Deakin University, Geelong. Paper accessed via [http://www.deakin.edu.au/education/quality\\_learning](http://www.deakin.edu.au/education/quality_learning)
- Vaithianathan, R., Maloney, T., Willson, M., Staneva, A., & Jiang, N. (2021). The impact of school-based support on educational outcomes of teen-mothers: evidence from linked administrative data. *New Zealand Economic Papers*, 55(3), 245-262.
- van Manen, M. (2015). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*, 2nd ed. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Van Pelt, J. (2012). Keeping teen moms in school - a school social work challenge. *Social Work Today*, 12, 1-3.

- Walton, Q. L., Kennedy, P. P., Oyewuwo, O. B., & Allen, P. (2022). "This person is safe": An exemplar of conducting individual interviews in qualitative research with black women. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221147776>
- Washington-Woods, L. L. (2020). Social workers' experiences with pregnant and parenting teens in Alabama. *Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies*. 8813. <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/8813>
- Watson, L. L., & Vogel, L. R. (2017, 2017/01/01). Educational resiliency in teen mothers. *Cogent Education*, 4(1), 1276009. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1276009>