



Promising Practice Profiles

Project title	Young Mums Education
Project practice	Producing an educational booklet and DVD for young women about pregnancy and parenting appropriate and appealing to a youth audience
Project undertaken by	The Salvation Army Ingle Farm (SA)
Start date	November 2006
Focal areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy young families • Supporting families and parents • Early learning and care
Program	Communities for Children
Issue	<p>The Salisbury Communities for Children site is located in the eastern part of the City of Salisbury in South Australia, approximately 20 kilometres north of Adelaide. The site targets families with children 0–5 years living in the suburbs of Ingle Farm, Para Hills, Para Hills West, Pooraka, Brahma Lodge, Para Vista, and Salisbury East.</p> <p>In 2006, the suburbs targeted by the Salisbury Communities for Children site had a total population of 34,918 of whom 2,569 were aged 0–5 years (ABS, 2006a-e). In 2006, the City of Salisbury was the third most disadvantaged local government area in the Adelaide statistical division and 4 out of the 5 suburbs in the Salisbury Communities for Children site were below the Socioeconomic Indexes for Area [SEIFA] average (City of Salisbury, 2009).</p> <p>The Salisbury Communities for Children initiative is facilitated by the Salvation Army Ingle Farm and operates through the FamilyZone Hub at Ingle Farm. An education program for young mothers (the Young Mums Group) which is open to girls and women aged from their early teens to mid-twenties has been in operation at the Salvation Army Ingle Farm since the late 1990s. The program was started after a worker in a different program noted that a significant number of attendees at Salvation Army Ingle Farm were young mothers with few resources and little support.</p> <p>In 2005, staff at Salvation Army Ingle Farm identified a lack of information and educational resources for parents about the needs and wellbeing of young children. They also identified that many of the available resources were outdated and not relevant to young parents, especially those with low literacy and vocabulary levels (Nechvoglod, 2005).</p> <p>A lack of age-appropriate resources was identified as a problem considering the poor outcomes that the children of young mothers already face (see Bradbury, 2007; Furstenberg, Levine, & Brooks-Gunn, 1990; Pogarsky, Thornberry, & Lizotte, 2006). Without adequate information about parenting these outcomes are unlikely to improve. Furthermore, teenage fertility rates in South Australia increased during the 2004–07 period, thereby providing a strong incentive for producing youth friendly information and educational resources for young parents in the region (ABS, 2007).</p> <p>In response to this problem Salisbury Communities for Children developed a DVD (entitled <i>The Way It Is</i>) and a CD-sized booklet (entitled <i>How It Is</i>) targeted towards young women and launched the resources in 2008. Both resources were designed to be “youth-friendly”. As well as providing information about parenting the resources include information about related issues including sex, sexual health, pregnancy and birth. The DVD features interviews with young mothers from the Young Mums program talking about parenting issues and early childhood. In addition to the product that was developed, the process of making the DVD served as a tool for engaging young parents in the suite of activities provided through The Salvation Army Ingle Farm.</p>

Program context

The Salisbury Communities for Children initiative seeks to enhance the ability of parents within the local area to provide safe, supportive and nurturing family relationships for children in their early years. The integrated services hub through which the initiative primarily operates (the FamilyZone Ingle Farm Hub) runs a suite of activities for local families with young children (0–5 years) including supported playgroups; home visiting; parenting courses; craft and cooking groups for parents; and Early Childhood Leadership training courses. The hub provides families with peer support and support from staff and volunteers in a child-friendly and parent-friendly environment.

The Young Mums Group has five broad objectives. They are to:

- increase the wellbeing of infants and children of young mothers;
- increase understanding among young people of what pregnancy and parenting might be like;
- improve the physical health and development of infants and children of young mothers;
- foster strong parent–child relationships between young mothers and their infants and children; and
- improve the social and emotional development of infants and children of young mothers.

Participants engage in a range of activities that are designed to be fun, interesting and educational. Activities include play activities with children, “pamper sessions” and low-budget shopping trips. The group provides participants with opportunities to connect socially and develop friendships with other young mothers and access information and support. On average 30 young mothers visit the program every month.

The Way It Is DVD and *How It Is* booklet were developed as part of the Salisbury Communities for Children initiative. The booklet discusses topics such as:

- respectful relationships, sex and sexual health;
- pregnancy (e.g., being healthy, hospital visits, money, preparing for the baby’s arrival);
- birth;
- what happens when you bring the baby home (e.g., feeding, routines, isolation, support); and
- available supports.

The DVD features interviews with young mothers talking about parenting issues and early childhood. Topics include:

- how they reacted when they found out they were pregnant;
- what they knew about having babies before getting pregnant;
- what support they received from the baby’s father;
- missing being a teenager;
- housing;
- money;
- stereotypes and judging; and
- available supports.¹

The objective of these resources is to communicate information about issues relating to pregnancy and parenting to girls and young women (including those at risk of unwanted pregnancy, those who are already pregnant and those who already have children). In the long term it is hoped that these resources will lead to improved outcomes for children of young mothers. A follow up DVD/booklet focusing on the early years and targeted towards young parents (using a similar format) is currently being developed by the Salisbury Communities for Children site.

¹ In total the booklet and DVD cost \$15,500 to produce (including printing and duplication costs).

Practice description

Key ingredients

1. Identify the key issues for young mothers

In light of the lack of youth-friendly accessible educational resources for young women (especially those with low literacy and vocabulary levels) the Coordinator of the Young Mums program identified a range of issues relating to parenting that would be pertinent to and would resonate with young women. Those issues included:

- relationship issues;
- contraception;
- pregnancy and birth issues;
- accessing personal and practical support (e.g., pregnancy help, counselling, relationships advice); and
- dealing with negative stereotypes.

The planning group decided that the best way to communicate with the target group about these issues in a DVD format would be through the real-life stories of young mothers as told by those young women themselves. It was believed that drawing on the experiences of young mothers would result in a resource that would be more appealing to the target audience.

2. Engage with young pregnant women and young mothers who are willing to share their stories

The coordinator discussed with the members of the Young Mums Group the possibility of including some of their stories in a resource designed for young women. A number of members of the group decided to participate and voiced the belief that talking about their experiences would contribute to their own personal growth as well as being beneficial to others.² Although an attempt was made to include young Indigenous women in the development of the DVD resource this did not eventuate.

3. Work in partnership with local early childhood stakeholders

Relationships Australia, Centacare and The Salvation Army Ingle Farm provided initial funding for the project. When the first draft of the booklet was completed, key stakeholders were consulted to invite feedback and suggestions. Those stakeholders included:

- local agencies working with young mothers;
- local secondary schools;
- Child and Youth Health;
- Centrelink; and
- a maternity hospital.

Consultations were also conducted with school counsellors, school chaplains, Child Youth and Women's Health Services, and other service providers. A second round of further consultations were undertaken as the resources were nearing completion.

Given the sensitive nature of the topics covered in the booklet there was considerable debate during these consultations. One issue was the amount of information that the booklet should contain, especially because it was designed to reach youth with low literacy levels while at the same time providing accurate and comprehensive information. Other controversial topics included breastfeeding, baby routines, and options for pregnant teenagers.

Considerable patience and listening skills were required in order to successfully manage this process. Although the timeframe to complete the project needed to be extended in order to take into account the feedback, overall the consultation process was beneficial because it resulted in greater "buy in" from stakeholders and contributed to the development of a product that was appropriate for wider distribution.

² After contributing to the planning and development of the DVD, the participants went through the necessary consent procedures. The consent procedure involved participants consenting to themselves and their children being filmed as part of the project and being included in the resulting production. Each participant signed a written release form. Names of partners were excluded from the production except in one instance. In this case, written consent was given.

4. Utilise the skills of graphic artists and documentary film makers who understand youth culture

Critical to the development of the booklet and DVD was the contribution of a graphic artist and a number of young filmmakers who were enthusiastic in their approach to the task and able to complete the project despite significant budget limitations. Their skills were vital in ensuring high quality resources that are appealing and appropriate to the target audience. The DVD and booklet are packaged together in a CD sized box so they can be stored on CD/DVD shelves and can be accessed on a regular basis.



5. Get the information to the target group

The resources can only be effective if they reach the target audience. As financial capacity was very limited, a multi-faceted approach was taken to disseminating the resources. The primary dissemination activity involved sending copies to a range of relevant program/service providers in the Communities for Children site, including school counsellors, chaplains, program coordinators, and teachers. In addition, the DVD/booklet was disseminated widely through:

- placing the DVD/booklet in the Resource Library located at the FamilyZone Hub;
- distributing the resource to teens and young people attending other activities and programs in the Salisbury Communities for Children site; and
- placing brochures with information about the resource in highly accessible locations.

Further dissemination occurred through state/national conference presentations and seminars, and speaking engagements;

The DVD/booklet has been provided free of charge in the Salisbury site, although to offset some of the production costs a charge is made for orders from other agencies/service providers.

The process of getting the resources from the organisation/service to the target group relies partly on the professionals who work with young people. Because the material in the resource is relatively sensitive these professionals need to: (a) be able to identify young people who would benefit from the resource; and (b) have a relationship with the target group that would encourage them to utilise the resources.

The capacity of the DVD to reach its audience is also partly dependent on obtaining sufficient financial support to produce and distribute the DVD widely.

6. Include opportunities for support

A focus group with young mothers found that the DVD is more likely to be effective if it connects viewers to support groups, early childhood services and further education pathways. The booklet lists a large number of referral agencies & services.

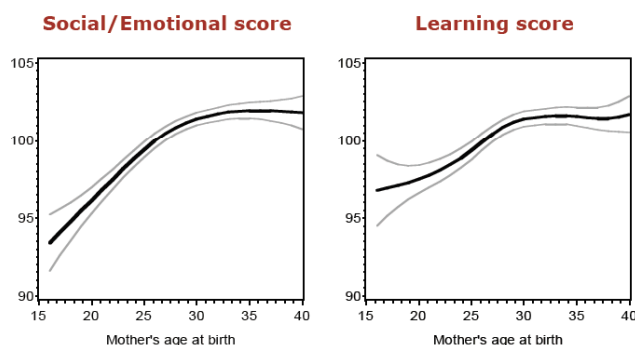
Research base

Outcomes for children of young mothers

Young parents are a socially excluded group (Boulden, 2000) and, in keeping with other socially excluded groups, outcomes for the children of young parents are poorer than average (Bradbury, 2007; Furstenberg, Levine, & Brooks-Gunn, 1990; Pogarsky, Thornberry, & Lizotte, 2006). The children of teenage mothers experience poorer educational, health, economic, and developmental outcomes than do children of older mothers. This is the case even after controlling for the fact that teenage mothers are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds (Furstenberg et al., 1990; Pogarsky et al., 2006).

As a further illustration of outcomes for the children of young parents Bradbury (2007) illustrated the significantly poorer learning and social/emotional outcomes of children of young mothers, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Outcomes for 4–5 year-olds by mother’s age at birth: LSAC



A recent Australian Institute of Family Studies study (Weston & Qu, 2009) found that young mothers tend to be more confident than older mothers about their ability to parent naturally and manage relationships. Asked whether they thought parenting and relationship skills came naturally, 58% aged under 25 agreed that good parenting skills came naturally while only 27% aged 45–54 years agreed. This finding could be viewed as a reflection of young mothers’ overconfidence in their parenting ability. Indeed, young mothers’ confidence in parenting ability is not reflected in the outcomes for their children. Research has shown adolescent mothers are less knowledgeable about child development than older mothers (Center for Law and Social Policy [CLASP], 2009).

Communicating information about pregnancy and parenting to young women

In regards to communicating information about parenting to young parents, there is a paucity of research regarding what types of parenting education works for this sector of the population (Barnados, 1999). Evidence suggests however that high-risk groups such as young parents benefit more from parenting education than low-risk groups (Barnados, 1999). General findings regarding parenting education suggest that some of the most effective approaches in enhancing parenting knowledge and skills are an interactive rather than a didactic approach and the utilisation of a range of media (Moran, Ghate, & van der Merwe, 2004).

Although evidence suggests that parenting programs for the general population are most effective when they are delivered by an “authority” (Moran et al., 2004) there is evidence to suggest that for young parents a peer education model (whereby young people teach other young people) is more appealing and effective in bringing about positive parenting outcomes (Kovatsseff & Power, 2005).

One factor to take into account when communicating information to young pregnant women and young mothers is the likelihood of lower literacy levels among this sector of the population. Bradbury (2007) pointed out that, statistically, young mothers have less education, are less likely to be a home owner, are more likely to be single and if partnered have partners with lower incomes because childbirth at a young age can disrupt the education and career formation of mothers (p. 2). Educational resources for young pregnant women and young mothers, therefore, will be less effective if they are not developed for a low literacy audience.

Overall, one of the most important factors to consider when communicating information to teenagers and young women is the importance of social context. In other words, teenagers and young women belong to a specific “culture” (i.e., young subculture) and just as communication strategies targeted towards CALD groups need to be culturally and linguistically appropriate (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001) so too do communication strategies for young people need to be reflective of youth subcultures and mindful of young people’s needs and preferences.

Outcomes

Currently it is not possible to determine whether these resources have or will in the future have an impact upon outcomes for the children of young mothers. However, in terms of the short-term impact of these resources, the outcome of the production process is a resource that:

- raises awareness of pregnancy issues for teenagers;
- is appealing to a young audience;
- is being utilised by other services and programs; and
- has been positively received by key stakeholders, including professionals who work with young women.

In addition to this outcome, there is some preliminary evidence to suggest that the process of producing the DVD was positive for the young women involved, increasing their confidence and contributing to the development of stronger peer networks.

Evidence of outcomes

The resources raise awareness of pregnancy issues for teenagers

A focus group was conducted with 16 female local secondary school students aged 14–16 to get feedback on the DVD from a youth perspective.

When asked if the resources increased their awareness of pregnancy issues or has the potential to increase the awareness of pregnancy issues amongst teenagers generally, 15 of the 16 participants said they did. Some relevant comments from participants included:

This could happen to any teenager and [this resource] shows how hard it can be.

[The resource] shows that having a baby takes up big responsibilities and a lot of time.

Only 2 of the 16 participants stated that the resource would not be effective in raising awareness of pregnancy issues because the DVD would only be sought out if the young person were already pregnant.

The resources are appealing to a young audience

In the aforementioned focus group, participants were asked if they would share the DVD with friends. Fourteen of the 16 participants said they would share it with friends. This suggests that the resource was appealing to them. When asked if they felt the DVD “connected” with them, 10 out of the total 16 participants agreed that it did. Some relevant comments included:

[The resource] helped me understand what you go through to have a baby.

It was good how you get to look at [the issues] from the mother’s perspective and not just from scientific views.

Other positive comments from participants included:

[I like] the fact that all the girls are open with everyone and just hearing what they go through.

[The DVD] has shown me that being pregnant at a young age can be hard but there is help.

Some comments from participants who stated that the DVD did not “connect” with them were:

I already was aware of this.

Not really, but if I was thinking of getting pregnant it would have helped me heaps to realise what type of things you would be facing.

The resources are being utilised by other services and programs

The resource is being used by other services and programs including: health care services, secondary schools, perinatal educators, children’s centres, training organisations, Family Relationship Centres and pregnancy advisory centres. Some comments from services and programs utilising the resources are listed below.

In talking with other support people in the school who I made it available to, including a youth worker and other school counsellors, it appears that it has been most useful when given to students who have a pregnancy scare and seek support or those in a relationship needing to make decisions about

the direction of that relationship. We find that where the DVD has been given to one young person initially, it then finds its way around amongst the friends and a number of young people both within and outside the school. (Secondary School Counselor)

I thought you might like to know that two of our students viewed the DVD last week and gave very positive feedback. (Teacher, Secondary School)

One secondary school counsellor who viewed the DVD suggested that the resource could also be used for students undertaking child-focused courses and for staff training and development.

The resources have been positively received by key stakeholders, including professionals who work with young women

Positive comments from a range of key stakeholders have been received. Some of these comments are provided below.

[I have] had a look at the DVD. I was very impressed. It gives a good balance of views and is very positive. It's really bright and modern and provides lots of support and ideas for where to get help in the community. I found the menu buttons easy to use ... I'll use it with my Young Mums Group. (Maternity Hospital Educator)

I have circulated the booklet to [our] Young Mums workgroup for comments. The workgroup consists of local staff who actively work with young mums. The feedback from the young mums workgroup has been amazing; all have been very impressed with the content, design and quality of the booklet. Congratulations on a great resource (Best Start Mildura Coordinator)

I am working in a school with teenagers. The first thing I want to do is to be able to use the DVD to show the girls what is going to happen if they keep doing what they are doing and the second is that if they are pregnant or have a baby they can get great support from young mums groups and still achieve something great in their lives. (Jodie Ey, Youth Worker involved in the development of the DVD)

I can see that this DVD designed to educate teenagers and young mums about the experience of being a teenage parent is going to be recommended viewing for a lot of people. It's terrific that young mums were used to develop the DVD which really shows the difference of having real people telling their real stories. (State Branch Manager, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)

The production of the DVD had positive outcomes for the young mothers involved

One of the key components of the process of developing the materials was the involvement of the young mums themselves. Positive changes in the individual mothers were observed by staff and project workers. The following feedback from the project manager highlights the impact of the DVD on the young mothers involved:

The process of young mums sharing their journeys with each other in a group context is very powerful in terms of their gaining confidence and understanding of raising children and parenting issues. The young mums have indicated that they clearly appreciate sharing with other teen mums who are negotiating similar issues. The process of sharing their experiences more broadly with others through being involved in the DVD project together, while somewhat daunting, has taken the relationships formed in this process to another level in terms of connecting more deeply with each other. In terms of an educational methodology the process is a very effective means of those participating gaining a much greater level of understanding and skills than they may gain from more traditional approaches to learning. (Karl Brettig, Project Manager)

Replicability

Shortly after the launch of the resource, the following request was received from the coordinator of a Best Start site in Victoria:

Thank you for forwarding the Young Mums booklet. On behalf of the Mildura Best Start partnership I am requesting permission to use your resource, and to make small alterations to contact phone numbers on five pages. (Best Start Coordinator)

Requests such as these point to the fact that the resource can be used in other regions and, therefore, that the resource is replicable. Importantly, in many cases the

resource would only require minimal adaptation—that is, the inclusion of local service contact details—in order to be relevant to young mothers in other regions. In Mildura, the suggested amendments have been made and this second edition of the resource (with local service contact details) is now available.

The Best Start site used their own process to evaluate the usefulness of the resource in their setting and concluded that the booklet needed minimal adaption for their community, and the DVD did not need any changes. Other communities may opt to engage with some or all of the eight elements of the process (outlined in Practice Description above) to develop new resources.

Project evaluations	External evaluation of wider Communities for Children project has been undertaken.
Project related publications	Young Mums brochure, available at < www.salisburyc4c.org.au >
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