



B R A V E

Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) Program

**Tasmanian Youth Wellbeing Strategy
Consultation Submission**





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Brave Foundation respectfully acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our organisation is located and where we deliver our support programs across Australia. We pay our respects to their ancestors and Elders, past and present.

Brave's work also brings us into daily contact with many people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. We are committed to respecting the culture and heritage of each person we encounter, both inside and outside our organisation.



About Brave Foundation

Brave Foundation is a charity that is dedicated to mentoring and supporting young expecting and parenting Australians. Established in 2009, our focus is supporting mental and general health, wellbeing, education, workforce participation and parenting and general life skills of the young people which we serve. We do this by providing information, advice, mentoring, and referrals and connections to existing services in their community.

Brave also seeks to improve the quality and availability of services provided to young parents, by supporting the development of public policy and positively influencing community attitudes towards expecting and parenting teens through advocacy, partnerships, and political engagement.

About the Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens Program

Funded under the first tranche of the Try, Test Learn (TTL) Fund, which identified young parents as a priority cohort requiring new and innovative solutions to welfare dependence, Brave's SEPT trial program has been delivered in Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, and the Northern Territory since July 2018.

SEPT enhances and complements existing health, wellbeing, education, and workforce participation initiatives provided by federal, state, and non-government organisations by providing mentoring, information, and resources, assisting participants to navigate the complex landscape of service providers, ensuring they access the services that are right for them, and supporting and guiding them through their various challenges to complete support programs.

The heart of the SEPT program is the network of professional mentors based at community hubs who provide early intervention assistance and work with program participants to help them identify their own goals and develop strategies to achieve them. These are set out in individual Pathway Plans that focus on goals in the areas of peri and post-natal mental health and wellbeing, education and workforce participation, goal setting and career advice, navigating financial and housing assistance, and help with parenting and everyday life skills. The Pathway Plan is informed by the First 1,000 days framework and is designed to ensure support is coordinated, comprehensive, and culturally informed.

The program is delivered by professional mentors, is voluntary and personalised to each participant, and considers the context of the local community and the participant's individual circumstances to provide support that is inclusive, safe, and accessible. By establishing a supportive relationship early in the process, and by creating connections to appropriate support services, mentors ensure these young people are accessing the resources they need to improve their mental health, continue their education and training, increase their ability to participate in the workforce, build their economic security, create happy, healthy, and skilled families, and stop the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage and poverty.

Since implementation, SEPT has achieved great success in Tasmania— assisting 70 expecting and parenting teens and facilitating referrals to 78 local community organisations.

A 2020 study by the Peter Underwood Centre of Tasmania found that 65% of SEPT program participants nationally have met at least one of their goals in the areas of health, well-being and parenting, education and workforce participation, and financial security.



SEPT within the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

SEPT complements and is aligned with the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy currently being developed by the Tasmanian State Government.

Tayla, 15, was experiencing distress with news she may be experiencing complications with her pregnancy. Tayla's mentor, sensitive to her diagnosis of ADHD, depression, and Reactive Attachment Disorder made herself available to attend the follow-up medical appointment at Tayla's request.*

The mentor was able to assist with emotional support and by ensuring Tayla understood the information that was being communicated to her by the medical professionals.

Tayla, although originally reluctant to trust or engage with social supports, expressed how beneficial the support and assistance was to her at such a distressing time.

In 2019, 5,741 births were recorded to Tasmanian mothers. Of those, 12.9% (740) were aged between 15-19 years and 59.4% (over 3000) were aged between 20-24.¹

A 2017 report by the Australian Human Rights Commission into Children's Rights highlighted that young mothers face major barriers to completing their education and therefore have lower levels of educational attainment than their peers. This results in lower levels of labour market participation, lower paying jobs, and in many cases, welfare dependency.²

A study conducted by the Department of Social Services (DSS) in 2017 indicated that 79% of mothers who have their first child before the age of 20 will rely on long-term unemployment benefits.³

The report found, 'Young mothers tend to be the most socio-economically disadvantaged of all mothers. This is associated with poor educational qualifications, pre-existing socio-economic circumstances, and the impact of raising children as young mothers.'

A 2013 study found that "teenage mothers are three times more likely to get postnatal depression than older mothers and are at increased risk of poorer mental health for up to three years postpartum."⁴ The same study highlighted:

- the stigma experienced by teenage mothers;
- their lack of support networks;
- the lack of relevant and appropriate information targeted at teenage mothers; and
- the need for tailored services and innovative methods of delivery.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Births, Australia*, 2019

² Australian Human Rights Commission. *Children's Rights Report* (2017).

³ Cobb-Clark DA, Dahmann SC, Salamanca N, Zhu A. Intergenerational disadvantage: learning about equal opportunity from social assistance receipt. (2017).

⁴ Boath EH, Henshaw C, Bradley E. Meeting the challenges of teenage mothers with postpartum depression: overcoming stigma through support. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology* 31, no. 4 (2013): 352-369



Of the 70 Tasmanian participants that have been engaged in the trial of the SEPT program

- 83% have been diagnosed with a mental health condition;
- 35% have a disability; and,
- 14% experienced distress after birth trauma, miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death.

More importantly, the children of young parents are also at high risk. They are at higher risk of not meeting key developmental milestones, and they are more likely to experience poorer health and other outcomes than most of their contemporaries. Children of welfare recipients are also more likely to end up on welfare payments themselves. Intergenerational welfare dependency is costly, devastating for individuals and their families, and has significant negative impacts on communities.

Early intervention is key to ensuring the best possible wellbeing, health, and mental health outcomes for young parents.

The objectives of SEPT align closely with the six domains of wellbeing as outlined in the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy as per below;

Being healthy

- SEPT improves access to domestic and family violence services and mental health and wellbeing support services by helping participants – many of whom have complex healthcare needs – in accessing available services;
- SEPT improves the physical health and wellbeing of both participants and their children by facilitating access to nutritional and health education providers, and;
- SEPT supports participants in accessing their local community healthcare centres resources to ensure they are kept up to date with vaccinations, child and infant health, and safe sleep recommendations.

Learning and participating

- SEPT helps participants progress towards self-identified goals by connecting them to existing local, state, and federal programs and initiatives;
- SEPT supports participants in remote or rural areas via digital engagement channels;
- SEPT encourages engagement with local community groups and peers, and;
- SEPT improves participants ability to participate in education and workforce participation opportunities by removing barriers such as issues with transport, childcare, or material goods.



Being loved and safe

- SEPT mentors offer a caring and non-judgmental support to our participants, in an environment supported by best practice guidelines, and;
- SEPT advocates on behalf of expecting and parenting teens, building awareness, improving public education, and reducing the stigma and exclusion faced – and by doing so, preventing the slide into further vulnerability.

Having material basics

- SEPT participants can access a scholarship and brokerage fund designed to assist them with the costs associated with education and workforce participation. In addition to this, SEPT mentors connect participants into other community organisations offering financial crisis support and relief.

Having a positive sense of culture and identity

- SEPT provides an inclusive and safe space for participants, stakeholders, and employees, regardless of cultural, gender, or sexual identification.



The SEPT Pathway Plan

The SEPT 'Pathway Plan' guides participant along an interactive and flexible mentoring program designed to help them pursue their goals – and connect to opportunities and support services – in the areas of workforce readiness and training, parenting support, health and wellbeing, financial and other life skills, and educational prospects within their local communities.

The aim is ultimately to enable them to pursue fulfilling careers, independent of reliance on long-term welfare.

SEPT facilitates effective and timely referrals ensuring that young parents are rapidly connected with relevant interventions and services, providing them with a secure base of meeting basic needs on which they can further build upon.

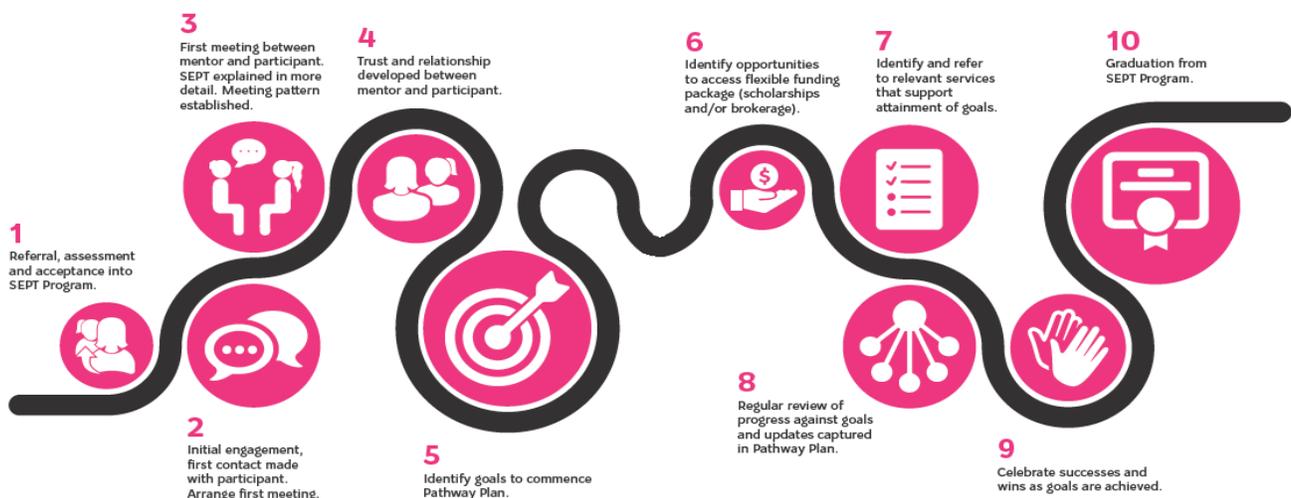
Since its launch in July 2018, Brave has worked directly with 70 Tasmanian expecting and parenting teens, to develop and achieve goals in the areas of health, wellbeing and parenting, education and workforce participation, and financial security.

As of February 2020, nearly 90% of our Tasmanian participants have are long term unemployed or absent from education, however 92% are successfully achieving at least one goal in the target areas.

8% have gained employment whilst being part of SEPT Program and 74% of participants aspire to undertake education, training, or employment at end of program.

Once paired with their mentor, participants will have on average 24 tailored meetings addressing a range of priorities from education and workforce readiness to goal setting, health and wellbeing, finance and housing, and everyday parenting skills. With goals identified, the mentor supports the participant to connect with relevant support services. Participants also access services that directly contribute to workforce participation – such as career counselling sessions, and assistance with clothing, equipment, or police checks.

The figure below shows the journey of a SEPT participant from referral to graduation from the program:





Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) community members

Brave embraces diversity and aims to combat the prejudice which exists within our communities - this is reflected in our Values, Purpose, Mission Statement and Policies.

The SEPT program provides an inclusive and safe space for participants, stakeholders, and employees, and encourages the development of relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders so that our mentors and participants have access to the most relevant and appropriate supports.

Brave has developed referral forms that are reflective of the diversity among our participants and are inclusive, ensuring participants have a choice in identifying their cultural, sexuality and gender identity.

Several cultural factors also affected our ability to engage with some young parents, particularly among ATSI communities. The history of forced removals of children from ATSI families in Australia makes SEPT support both more complex and more important. The experience of the 'Stolen Generation'⁵ and the current over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Out of Home Care⁶ mean that ATSI E&PTs and their families are, understandably, wary of official services.

Tasmanian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births registered accounted for 618 births out of the 5,741 births recorded in Tasmania in 2019; 36 mothers were aged between 15-19 years and 109 were aged between 20-24.

Of the 38 Tasmanian participants that were engaged in the SEPT program as of February 2021, 18% identify as ATSI.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018a. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stolen generations and descendants: Numbers, demographic characteristics and selected outcomes*. Cat. no. IHW 195. Canberra: AIHW.

⁶ Australian Institute of Family Studies. *Child protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children CFCA Resource Sheet – January 2020* pg.1



Collaborating with existing services

Collaboration with existing government and community service providers is central to the SEPT model.

SEPT supports expecting and parenting young people to navigate multiple providers across the complex service landscape – especially important given the diverse backgrounds of the young women we support, many of whom fall into one or more groups at risk of heightened disadvantage.

SEPT is based on the principle of sustainable change. The emphasis on education, job readiness, parenting skills, and mental and physical wellbeing of young parents during a period of significant vulnerability will continue to deliver benefits, improve economic security and self-sufficiency, and reduce risk factors well beyond their engagement with the program.

Our free online Directory of Services details approximately 800 relevant community organisations across Australia. To date, the program has made 755 personalised outbound referrals to external organisations, with 196 of these relating to mental or physical health issues. The aforementioned Peter Underwood Centre study also found that SEPT participants engaged with, on average, an additional 3 community organisations which they otherwise would not have.

Maternal and child health centres have been a key referral partner during the trial period; 25% of participants came to the SEPT trial via inbound referral from a health provider.

63 Tasmanian organisations are listed on the Directory of Services.

ParentsNext Providers make up the majority of inbound referrals to the SEPT program in Tasmania, followed by Child and Family Centres and then Health Providers.

Parenting support is the major reason of outbound referrals to other organisations, followed by Counselling, DV&FV support and Mental Health Support.



The Importance of the First 1000 Days

The SEPT program aims to, primarily, engage expecting young people early in their parenting journeys. In doing so, SEPT intends to help to establish a more positive pathway for these young people as they transition into their parenting responsibilities, as well as into education and/or employment.

Research shows the first 1000 days from pregnancy to the child's second birthday is an important stage for children's health, development, and wellbeing.

Engaging program participants during their antenatal stage provides more opportunities for the young people and their babies to build a stable support network over time. Parenting teens who enter the SEPT program while pregnant and begin receiving services from a professional before their babies are born build a relationship that turns into long-term and steady involvement in the program.

Connection with a mentor in the weeks immediately following a baby's birth also aids in keeping parenting teens engaged in the SEPT program and supports them in activities that aid in the development of their babies. The longer parenting teens are involved in the SEPT program, the greater the number of opportunities for their participation. The more often teens are exposed to knowledge about their babies' development and practice in parent-child interactions, the greater the chances are for successful outcomes for their babies.

This window of opportunity can improve access to health care and help to avoid adverse pregnancy outcomes which are more common among babies of teenage mothers⁷.

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018b). *Teenage mothers in Australia 2015*. Cat. no. PER 93. Canberra: AIHW



SEPT and Family and Domestic Violence

Expecting and parenting young people are relatively likely to be involved in unhealthy relationships, which may include domestic violence and/or sexual abuse⁸. This heightened risk, as well as additional factors such as relative poverty and social isolation, result in children born to mothers under the age of 20 are more vulnerable to neglect relative to those born to older mothers.

Violence does not only occur within romantic partnerships – SEPT participants also reported family violence, such as that between parent/stepparent and child, or between siblings, to be of concern.

29% of current Tasmanian SEPT participants are experiencing domestic or family violence.

By supporting SEPT participants experiencing family or domestic violence to connect in with relevant support services – including crisis housing and financial support, child safety services, and mental health programs – our mentors can assist these vulnerable young people and their children to begin to rebuild fulfilling, happy and safe lives.

Mindy has been in the SEPT program since August 2020. As a child, Mindy grew up in insecure housing, moving approximately 20 times (sometimes living in her mother's car) and experiencing periods of neglect. Mindy's mother was recently incarcerated.*

Mindy struggles with anxiety, considerable trauma, is currently experiencing family violence, and often has her siblings in her care. Mindy also has a child in kindergarten and with a severe hearing disability.

When commencing with the SEPT program Mindy shared that she was very keen to undertake training and to also gain her driver's license. Brave supported Mindy with professional driving lessons, a letter of support for exemption for Ps and her Ps assessment and provided scholarship to fund an Auslan course.

With the support of her mentor, Mindy was encouraged to apply for a Certificate 3 in Education Support, achieving a placement in the competitive course. Mindy has also been offered a potential position as an Auslan Teachers Assistant with several local schools.

⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission. *Children's Rights Report 2017*.



Our Recommendation

'Strong Families – Safe Kids' report⁹, emphasises that 'building strong families requires an all of service system and whole of community approach". This aligns with the SEPT program's core approach of collaboration and early intervention. We believe this approach, along with a lived expertise and co-design, has the potential to have meaningful, lasting impact – particularly we move into a recovery phase in a COVID normal context.

Our experience, knowledge governance and program approach puts Brave Foundation in the unique position of being ready to nurture, equip and train our Tasmanian communities to provide holistic pathways to assist young people to engage in educational pathways and workforce participation, as well as improving physical and mental health and wellbeing and fostering community participation.

Moving forward, we are using our experience and knowledge to develop the 'Brave Model of Mentoring' – a framework with supporting resources detailing our approach to mentoring, including the Brave Pathway Plan. This model will be adapted over time to support the changing needs of our current participants and to respond to the needs of other cohorts that we may support in the future.

Brave considers SEPT to be a valuable social policy initiative and welcomes the opportunity to work with the Tasmanian Government to implement these learnings for the benefit of our state.

Budget

The following proposed budget is based on our experience of the costs of the SEPT program during the two-year trial funded under the DSS TTL Fund

A full operational budget can be provided upon request.

	Total Cost of Program Per Annum <i>(based on number of participants at 28 participants per FTE)</i>		
	<i>45 participants</i>	<i>72 Participants</i>	<i>120 Participants</i>
Resourcing Costs	\$484,000	\$575,000	\$720,000
Administration Costs	\$185,000	\$185,000	\$185,000
Yearly total	\$669,000	\$760,000	\$905,000

⁹ Tasmanian Government Department of Health and Human Services, *Redesign of Child Protection Services Tasmania, 'Strong Families – Safe Kids', 2016.*