



8th September 2022

Submitted via email to workandcare.sen@aph.gov.au

Brave Foundation Submission to the Inquiry of the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care

Dear Senators,

We are making a submission to the inquiry to bring the Committee's attention to the young parents we work with and ask for this group to be viewed as critically important when considering childcare support in Australia. We request that you broaden the scope, and keep in mind, childcare as support for continuing education for young parents, as a pathway to their sustainable workforce participation, and an additional safety-net for their children.

Every year, thousands of Australian teenagers are giving birth and raising their own children. Many of these young people are parenting on their own, with little or no family support. Many have lived experience of trauma, abuse and inequality, and are now facing intergenerational loss of opportunities.

Brave Foundation is Australia's first national, not for profit organisation dedicated to assisting expecting and parenting young people. For the past ten years our organisation has been developing a nationwide village of support to equip young these very young parents with the resilience and resources they need to raise happy healthy and skilled families.

The program provides support to expecting and parenting teenage parents in the first 1000 days, spanning pre and post birth care, as well as supporting young people in their early to mid 20s who were teen parents and are now parenting young children. The primary aim is to empower young parents to pursue happy healthy and productive lives.

Brave Foundation provides each young parent with the support of a professional mentor to help them progress along their own tailored pathway. The pathway plan is individualised and the process was codesigned with young parents and other stakeholders.

Brave's program objectives are to improve the health and wellbeing of young parents and their children, connect young parents with appropriate support services, assist each young participant to develop and achieve goals that will set them on a path to a better future, increase engagement with and participation in, education and training, and, in the longer term, improve their readiness for the workforceⁱ.

We are confident that through this inquiry you will be provided with a substantial volume of evidence on the benefits of childcare - notably, how affordable and accessible childcare contributes to closing the gender pay and superannuation gap, and also has a strong and positive long-term impact on the economyⁱⁱ.

The more young parents, who access childcare to support their own educational and training goals, the greater are the economic and financial benefits to themselves and to the economy as a whole. The more access to affordable and convenient childcare that young parents have, the less barriers they will face in continuing education, continuing onto training, and ultimately achieving workforce participation.

A 2017 reportⁱⁱⁱ 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.

The report found young mothers tend to be the most socio-economically disadvantaged of all mothers. A study conducted by the Department of Social Services indicated that 79% of mothers who have their first child before the age of 20 will rely on long term unemployment benefits.

In addition, 55% of single parents without jobs have incomes below the poverty line.^{iv}, and the chances of securing future employment after poverty in childhood is up to 11 % lower compared to those who did not experience poverty as a child.

Of children who experience childhood poverty vs those who don't, the evidence is compelling - of inferior economic outcomes and poorer mental and psychological health throughout the life course. This is after controlling for age, gender, indigenous and ethnic background, future family status and education achievement^v.

The First 1000 days – Strong Foundations Report^{vi} highlights that the timing of interventions is key to improving child outcomes and provides the economic case for investment in targeted early intervention strategies. Throughout their lifespan, children from all contexts will have better outcomes in all areas if from the time of their conception to their second birthday they have been provided with the following:

- A carer/parent with an understanding of the child's everyday needs and development milestones,
- Warm and loving relationships,
- A sense of safety and security at home and in the community,
- Time to play and opportunities to be outside,
- A healthy and safe environment, and
- Healthy and nutritious food.

The positive outcomes that early learning and childcare has for children from families who are facing inequality and intergenerational loss of opportunities is well established. Childcare provides connection to communities, social interactions, early interventions, cognitive and psychical developmental monitoring, and stimulation. We know that many children who would benefit the most from access to early learning and childcare do not regularly attend. Around 1 in 4 children from the poorest fifth of households do not attend early learning^{vii}.

At Brave, we have had the opportunity to work with several educational institutions that are very committed to assisting young parents to continue with their educational goals and they provide examples of best practices. They have invested in on-site childcare with all the opportunities that such a model provides for the security and accessibility of the young parent and their child. When this is in place it is a wonderful example of 'what works. We would like to call the Committee's

attention to the scarcity of these facilities and encourage further exploration of how this model could be further facilitated at many more sites.

The scale of the economic return from targeted strategies like on-site childcare for young parents continuing their education will directly reduce their likelihood of remaining in poverty long term. This, along with a focus on childcare supporting the first 1000 days of the child's life, will have a significant positive impact, both on the individuals and the wider community^{viii}.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission to support increased childcare opportunities for our participants and their children.

Please see below a deidentified story of a Year 11 student who was one of our participants:

Participant entered the Support and Expecting Parenting Teens program in April 2021 as a 17-year-old, 8 months pregnant with her first child. This was an unexpected pregnancy and this young woman was worried about how it would affect her future.

While she had stable housing, she was living in overcrowded conditions with her mother, brother and partner in a small unit. Studying in this environment was difficult.

The participant was in year 11 and wanted to continue with her studies in 2021 and return in 2022 to complete a VET course in year 12.

The participant had casual job with a local retailer, but her hours were decreasing, and she was finding work increasingly challenging as her pregnancy progressed.

The participant had applied for government benefits to help support her financially, but these had been rejected for reasons unclear to the participant. This left the participant struggling financially.

Over the first 2 meetings, the Mentor was able to support the participant to explore what she would like her goals to be over the next 12 months. The participant identified they would like to

- Deliver a healthy baby
- Have her own accommodation
- Complete Year 11
- Get her Learners licence and then Provisional licence
- Improve her financial management skills

Participant gave birth to a healthy baby in May 2021 and Mentor supported her to link in with Maternal Child Health supports.

In July 2021 the participant successfully gained her Learner's license and is working toward gaining her Provisional license in August 2022.

The Mentor was able to link the participant in with housing support services, including Bond support and supported her with private rental applications and the participant secured accommodation for her family in November 2021.

The Mentor supported the participant to apply for the correct payment and concessions through Centrelink. Mentor also supported the participant to register her baby's birth and have the baby added to her Medicare Card so she could access medical care if needed.

Now that the participant was receiving paid parental leave and Family Tax Benefit, the Mentor provided support and resources around budgeting. The participant reported that they felt more in

control of managing their finances with this support by the programs end and felt more confident is accessing emergency relief services when needed.

The participant continued her study in year 11 and also commenced a course in Beauty Therapy. The Mentor was able to access a Scholarship payment through Brave to pay for this course. She completed Year 11 and is now enrolled in year 12 working toward achieving her VCAL.

The participant returned to her casual job in December 2021, but due to lack of childcare was only able to work 2 to 3 shift per week over the school holidays.

The Mentor also supported the participant to access mental health supports and relationship counselling during a difficult time. The Mentor was able to liaise with Child Protection around some concerns they had and provide insight into the participants protective factors. Child Protection did not continue to intervention.

When the participant graduated from the programs, she had achieved most of her goals and was on track to complete year 12 and gain a provisional license.

The participant reported that she felt more confident to navigate services should they need support in future.

ⁱ www.bravefoundation.org.au

ⁱⁱ [eS4W-Issue-Paper-Childcare-Affordable-and-Accessible-20201020-1.pdf \(security4women.org.au\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Children's Rights Report 2017 | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

^{iv} [BCEC Poverty and Disadvantage in Australia 2022 - BCEC](#)

^v [BCEC Poverty and Disadvantage in Australia 2022 - BCEC](#)

^{vi} [CCCH-The-First-Thousand-Days-An-Evidence-Paper-September-2017.pdf \(rch.org.au\)](#)

^{vii} [Giving vulnerable children a good start in life | Goodstart](#)

^{viii} [The First Thousand Days - A case for investment \(rch.org.au\)](#)