

## **Inquiry into teenage pregnancy**

### **One Parent Families Scotland**

One Parent Families Scotland has been operating in North Lanarkshire since April 2009. With Welfare Reforms imminent OPFS staff undertook research in local nurseries in North Lanarkshire in 2010. The aim of this research was to identify the barriers and issues lone parents faced in planning for the future and moving into employment, training & education. Over 300 lone parents were surveyed, 80 of whom were young lone parents aged 16-25 years. It became clear from the results that young parents faced many additional issues such as homelessness or sustaining tenancies, issues around drugs/alcohol, lack of money management, family and relationship breakdown and a lack of positive role models. (One Parent Families Scotland, Survey Results, 2010).

The research also identified that young parents often feel stigmatised as the media frequently inaccurately portrays them as risk-taking, disaffected youths with little or no interest in improving their lives for themselves or their children. Although several parenting programmes have been developed they are often geared towards services for adults and are often unable to reach teenage parents who require a tailored approach to take account of their very particular needs. It was clear that an integrated partnership approach to delivering specialist services for young lone parents needed to be developed.

A high number of the young parents identified highlighted that had very little or no support throughout their pregnancy and often felt stigmatised and through this did not take up local services available to them. In response the following pathway of support has been developed:

- Teen Parent Mentoring Service
- Young Parent & Child Transitional Groups
- Transforming Lives Programme

#### **1. Teen Parent Mentoring Project**

This service, funded by North Lanarkshire Council Early Years and Childcare, provides an integrated, person centred package of support tailored to the needs of pregnant teenagers aged 13 – 19 (21 years if been accommodated in care) living in the North Lanarkshire.

#### **Project Aims:**

- To provide tailored lone parent advice & a holistic, supportive peer mentoring service designed to engage and support pregnant teenagers who face multiple barriers to actively engage with local services.
- To train and support a group of young parents to work as mentors supporting pregnant teenagers/ teen parents to provide positive support and role modelling.

The service includes:

- Initial engagement through access to tailored advice, information & support services through OPFS, NHS and NLC.
- One to one peer mentoring support as and when required.
- Working with families and partners where appropriate
- Access to a range of short workshops and peer mentoring support.
- Support to look at options & plan for the future

The project staff work closely with existing local partners and a multi-agency referral route is in place which includes Social Work, First Steps NL, Schools, Midwives, JCP, SDS as well as self-referral. OPFS is working with partners to maximise a joined up approach through

- Single Agency Assessments linked to GIRFEC model
- Quarterly Meetings to discuss case management
- Membership of the steering Group for the NHS Young Persons Pregnancy Service
- OPFS service is part of the “Pathways of Care” for Pregnant teenagers & Teenage Mums and their child

Using an early intervention model the Teen Parent Peer Mentoring Team is available to respond flexibly to meet the individual needs of pregnant teenagers who are experiencing difficulties. This engagement allows the teenagers to establish a strong, trusting relationship and gradually introduce other support services such as health, education and social work at a pace that suits the personal needs and circumstances of the teenager. Benefits accrue for children when their parents and families are supported pre- and post-birth through tailored personal and social development services that will provide intensive support and address additional barriers. The Project has received an extremely positive evaluation from Professor Gil Scott (Caledonian Univ.) – attached .

## **2. Young Parent & Child Transitional Groups**

These groups, funded by North Lanarkshire Council, provide weekly group based activities for young parents who face multiple barriers and who do not have the confidence to actively engage and attend local community provision – for example parent & toddler groups, playgroups, Book Bug, Rhyme Time etc. The project has devised and developed a progression route for disengaged teen parents by providing positive support and role modelling until babies are around 18 months old. Through this delivery we aim to:

- Improve parenting capacity
- Improve health and well-being of parent
- Improve health and well-being of child

- Promote bonding/attachment
- Improve partnership working

### **3. Transforming Lives Young Parents Project**

This project, funded by the **STV Appeal & Scottish Government**, has developed a holistic and supportive programme designed to assist vulnerable young lone mothers to prepare for the future, take control of their lives & provide a better life for themselves and their children. (Report attached)

#### **Child Poverty**

The factors that trap young Lone Parents in poverty are very much the same as those affecting all lone parents. These include:

- The high level of economic disadvantage amongst out of work lone parents
- Isolation, low self-esteem and therefore depleted self-confidence.
- Financial insecurity including high levels of debt and limited access to mainstream credit facilities.
- The shortage, costs and inflexibility of childcare
- The “poverty trap” caused by the interaction of tax and benefit systems.
- Barriers to training and education.
- A system of child maintenance which fails lone parents
- A low pay-high turnover economy which doesn’t enable work-family balance
- Living in areas with few local employment opportunities.
- Lone parents and their children frequently suffer poor health.
- Lone Parents often experience overcrowded accommodation or have been forced into insecure, expensive and poor quality, privately rented housing

The issues facing young parents living in deprived areas are well documented resulting in them often being trapped in poverty, facing isolation and lacking confidence, which makes it a challenge for generic organisations to reach them. In the under 20 age group, the most deprived areas of Scotland have approximately ten times the rate of delivery as the least deprived. (NHS, Teenage Pregnancy Publications Report, June 2011). The resulting impact affects not only the young mother; it has far reaching consequences for young dads & both sets of families.

Young lone parents often feel stigmatised as the media often inaccurately portrays them as risk taking, disaffected youths with little or no interest in improving their lives for themselves or their children. Pregnant and Teenage Mothers challenges include:

- Overwhelming responsibilities
- Planning for the child’s needs
- Balancing school/college and home
- Being independent

- Finances
- Being judged and disrespected
- Feelings of guilt
- Social Inadequacy
- Ostracism

Although several parenting programmes have been developed they are often geared towards services for adults and do not seem to be able to engage with 'hard to reach' teenage parents. A high number of the young lone parents identified highlighted that had very little or no support throughout their pregnancy and often felt stigmatised and through this did not take up local services available to them and were then disengaged from mainstream employability & education.

The Westminster Government's Welfare Reform programme is increasing the requirements on lone parents to prepare for and look for work. Lone parents whose youngest child is 5 years or over are no longer be able to claim Income Support as a lone parent. Instead they have to apply for Jobseekers Allowance and actively seek employment. This will now affect lone parents from as young as 18 years old.

Extensive research shows that poverty both damages children's experience of childhood and impacts on their future prospects. Although poor outcomes are not inevitable for poor children, according to a recent research report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, children who grow up in poverty are more likely to experience health problems, more likely to leave school early and about six times more likely to leave without qualifications and more likely to experience unemployment and low-skilled jobs when they are adults. Over half of children living with a lone parent in Scotland are currently poor. Although economic factors cannot explain all of the differences in outcomes for children brought up in lone parent families, they clearly play a major role.

Many more parents need to combine paid work with caring for children and this is particularly true for young lone parents as welfare reform means a young parent will required to take up paid work when their youngest child is 5 years of age. All families face dilemmas in balancing paid work with caring for children. However young mothers tell us that these issues are particularly acute for them, partly because they are parenting alone, but also because popular stereotypes often paint young parents either as 'scroungers' who are unwilling to work, or 'bad parents' whose paid work means that they are unable to properly supervise their children.

A tailored personal and social development programme is provided that offers intensive support, addresses additional barriers and provides parents with the core employability skills. Issues such as benefits, tax credits debt, housing are dealt with as an integral part of the approach. By doing this the project has created long term sustainable change in the lives of those young parents most at risk by offering positive support at key transitions in their lives: teenager to

parent; benefits to training learning, volunteering and employment, thus tackling the causes, as well as the effects, of poverty and disadvantage.

Using a mentoring model the project has proactively involved young people in the design and delivery of the project, as well as in decisions which affect them. The OPFS Progression Intervention model has enabled young parents to improve their self-esteem, parenting skills and life skills. This will raise aspirations and expectations and give participants the desire, confidence and skills to move on in their lives. Often local services don't have dedicated programmes that provide intensive ongoing support to the vulnerable young parents within the local community. There are several programmes available for young people but these programmes do not address the barriers faced by young lone parents and do not offer flexible hours, childcare provision or ongoing daily peer mentoring support. Programmes are often aimed at developing the employability skills of young people aged 16 – 18 years who are not in education, training or employment but do not take a holistic approach to addressing the complex needs of young lone parents.

A variety of short programmes and workshop delivered by NHS and Social Work Dept are available to parents and include parenting skills, Triple P etc but local uptake by young parents is extremely poor. Reasons highlighted by young parents include feeling intimidated and stigmatised by "older parents" and feeling "forced" to participate by Social Work .

**The Transforming Lives Project** works with young lone parents and their children who have been in the care system or who are in families that lead very chaotic lifestyles The project is designed to work with both the parent and their children to support the parent to prepare for the future & to ensure the child has the best start in life (social skills, child development, play at home etc).The project proactively recruits young parents who would not normally access available services or take part in group work activities.

### **What is the rationale for specialist service for young lone parents?**

Lack of statistical data amongst most service providers makes it difficult for those agencies to determine the needs of young lone parents, except anecdotally. Most agencies know that a number of their existing clients are young lone parents, but they have no specific targeting of information or services for teenage lone parents as a target group.

While agencies are often able to correctly identify priority issues for young lone parents, many of OPFS partner agencies have recognised that lone parents require specialist support, such as advocacy with public services; specialist benefits advice; dealing with legal issues around child support, child contact & residence; support to build the confidence of parents that enables them to build their capacity to combine the role of sole carer & wage earner.

OPFS staff have specific training not only on the skills required to help gain the necessary trust and co-operation of a target group which has in many cases been disaffected from mainstream services, but also with enhanced training on all the support services available to lone parents. In addition, a targeted approach allows for the development of specific measures which had the needs of young lone parents in mind, such as training provision which includes the offer of childcare facilities. This leads to individual action planning which clearly assesses and acts upon the needs of each client while addressing the barriers they face because of their sole parenting status.

### **Transforming Lives Project Case Studies**

#### **Teen Mentor Case Study**

I am a young lone parent aged 18 years. I have a daughter aged 18 months. I live in North Lanarkshire. I fell pregnant when I was 16yrs. My partner ended our relationship and I found myself homeless. My life had turned upside down. I was young, single, pregnant and homeless.

#### **Barriers:**

After I had my daughter I lacked in confidence and self-esteem because I had put on weight and had no one to talk to or support me through this difficult time I was facing. I felt isolated as I was always in the house with my new baby which led me to develop a severe case of post-natal depression. I couldn't face going outside alone with my daughter. My debts started piling up and now I was facing major debt issues. I didn't know where to turn. I felt completely stuck.

#### **Interventions:**

My health visitor put me in contact with an organisation - OPFS –that would help me build my confidence and self-esteem. I attended a lone parent drop-in which was in my local area. This gave me the chance to meet other lone parents. It was a great experience. I realised that I wasn't the only person in a difficult position. I got to meet new friends. This got me out of my comfort zone, which was mainly staying in my house watching Jeremy Kyle. I met with the finance worker and got all my problems with my debts sorted out. This really helped my stress levels. The drop-in's programme gave us the opportunity to take part in confidence building training and awareness sessions on budgeting, health, parenting skills, stress management and loads more. We also had information sessions from the Job Centre, Routes to Work, Childcare Services and other service providers in our area. It gave me a good insight of what other lone parents and myself were going through. Having no family support and being so isolated was difficult. The drop-in was life line for me. Feeling more confident, having more information on local services, being listened to and supported and making friends with people who had similar circumstances and issues to me. All of this helped me to get on track. Find a focus for me and my daughter. And to realise that I have a lot to offer!

**Outcome:**

Through the Community Jobs Fund Initiative I applied to work and train as a Teen Parent Mentor with One Parent Families Scotland. I was successful in my application! Through this contract I now work 25hrs per week. I am attending both formal and informal training. This is giving me the opportunity to develop my skills, further build my confidence and working experience. My role is to support pregnant teens in North Lanarkshire. Many of the issues that I have faced becoming a lone mum are similar to the issues faced by a lot of young mums. I have an understanding of the issues, barriers and isolation that can come with becoming a young lone parent. I also have the knowledge, information and experience of how the right support for each individual can make all the difference to a young mum and her child's everyday life. I am proud of myself and would like to thank One Parent Families Scotland for giving me this great opportunity!

**Client 1. Case Study**

I am an 18 year old lone parent living in North Lanarkshire with my two children aged 2 years and 1 year old. I became pregnant when I was 15 years old which made huge changes in my life. My partner became violent and the relationship ended leaving me on my own with my two kids. I live with my mum and dad and little sister. I don't get much family support as both my parents work. I was left in the house all day after I put my little sister out to school.

I found that being on my own with my kids all day was really getting me down. None of my friends have children. They are all doing their thing. I don't have any money and there hasn't really been anything for me to do with my kids. I feel like the days just drag by. My confidence is really low. I know that I'm supposed to have my whole life ahead of me at 18 but there just hasn't been anything to do that I can take 2 wee kids along to.

I saw an advert in my local supermarket for a course for Young Lone Parents. I wasn't really sure but decided there would be no harm in giving the number a call. The next day I met up with two of the staff from One Parent Families Scotland to find out more information about the course. They were really helpful and friendly. The course was everything that I needed. Having somewhere to go, building a routine into my week, meeting other people in a similar situation to me and having a crèche for the kids really helped me to build my confidence, find a sense of purpose and look forward to the next day in my life.

My children really enjoyed playing with other children their own age. I got a lot out of meeting young mums – my age. I feel like I can be a teenager again. Having time for myself to make new friends and learn new skills has really helped me to feel better about myself and my future. If I can organise nursery places for my children I would like to go to college. It would be good for me to build up my qualifications so that when the children are older I could get a job and go to work.

## **Client 2. Case Study**

For all of my childhood life I have lived in and out of care homes. I have never really been settled or had a place to call home. I fell pregnant when I was 18. I am now 22 years old and have a 4 year old daughter. I have always been part of the system but never really felt supported with how my future was going to be.

I came into contact with One Parent Families Scotland through meeting the staff at my daughter's nursery. They were doing a survey. I had time to answer the questions and the worker was really nice. She seemed interested in what I was saying. I then got a call from the staff asking me if I'd like to meet up. I wasn't really sure what to expect. I didn't show up for the first meeting and then I stopped answering the phone to them. I couldn't really see the point. My confidence was low. I felt a bit depressed and it was difficult to see what difference anything was going to make me.

The staff still sent me a wee text and a letter inviting me along to find out more about what they could offer. They had an 8 week Young Lone Parenting course that was starting. A worker met me at my daughter's nursery, we got on really well. She said that she would come along with me on the first day because I felt really nervous. I decided I'd try it.

At first it was really difficult for me. The course started at 9.30am, I wasn't used to getting up till around lunch time. The staff would call me in the morning at about 8am so that I was up and organised. I took this the wrong way in the beginning. I thought they were trying to boss me about. I wanted to go along to the course at lunch time – when it suited me. What I hadn't realised was that 'someone cared', I hadn't really had this before.

With the support of One Parent Families I was able to change my routine. I made a commitment to go along each morning for the course. This was really good for me. I started to make friends with people who lived in similar situations to me. A lot of them had the same issues. The course programme was really helpful. Taking part helped me to build my confidence, learn how to control my anger, get on with people and start to take an interest in myself.

I have a purpose to my day now. This gives me a sense of purpose for my future. I want my daughter to grow up happy, stable and ambitious. I now realise that I can help her to achieve this.

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**Choices - One Parent Families Scotland**

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