

## Human Rights Commission

### 3 points impact on young parents

SMYL's ParentsNext program helps prepare disadvantaged parents prepare for employment. These parents recognize that employment experience and job readiness are the key disadvantage facing them in entering the workplace, and achieving economic independence. SMYL has proposed a strengths based mode of service delivery that will assist these parents with their career plan, preparing them for employment while addressing the perceived barriers that contribute to longterm welfare dependency. We currently have an active caseload of 425 at our Kwinana site of which 114 are young parents making them 27% of the caseload. Of the 114 young parents 31% are under the age of 21

For this group we run specific programs that directly target their needs and ensure that they are not placed in a position in which they feel judged or isolated due to their age. The young parents programs use a combination of parenting options, vocational options, self care options, life skills and formal education options. The combination of options are based on each individual's needs and supported through the allocation of a family case worker who remains with the young person throughout the time with us.

By helping parents overcome these barriers, we aim to mend a litany of attendant problems: homelessness, severe financial disadvantage, and children's behavioral and emotional problems.

We aim to achieve this through an ongoing series of information seminars and workshops, using a coaching model of case management designed to unlock a client's potential. Our clients are hard working talented individuals, we want to provide them with the skills and confidence necessary for them to meet their full potential.

Our seminars assist parents with:

- career guidance and participation planning;
- access to training opportunities;
- access to childcare and parenting support;
- development of employability skills;
- access to work experience;
- community connection;
- brokered job placement;
- job search training;
- overcoming barriers and challenges; and
- build strength and resilience.

We incorporate both scheduled and drop in programs that are designed to accommodate unpredictable parenting schedules, adapting to school pick up times as well as clients who need a little bit of extra motivation throughout the day.

The goal is to increase our client's self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-worth by equipping them with the ability to make informed decisions about their immediate and long-term futures. We achieve this by establishing a relationship built on trust and mutual respect. Through a combination of communication and confidentiality we are able to identify our clients' strengths and goals, helping them to self actualize their potential, enabling to enter the workforce with pride and confidence.

Additionally, we provide extra services such as family and parenting support, financial counseling, health or other interventions that have been identified as necessary through the coaching process. These secondary services are delivered from the same sites, when possible. This approach helps build an intimate relationship between client and coach, creating a culture of trust and progress that is key to developing the vocational and educational skills that SMYL and our clients strive for.

SMYL uses a range of seminars and workshops delivery models these include:

- Full Steam Ahead", a 5 week self esteem and motivational program aimed at engaging women and providing career pathways. Delivered through the family and community centre network and aimed at developing self confidence as a first step toward entry/re-entry to the labour market. Topics including the world of work, what is lifelong learning and career guidance.
- "Stepping Out" (with my baby) is another SMYL designed series of workshops specifically pitched at young parents and their babies. Essentially, it utilizes the principles of career development and lifelong learning pathway planning combined with Careers and Parenthood, Choices and Challenges awareness that includes advice on juggling the demands of parenthood with a return to study or work. Crèche facilities are included.
- Skills Café and semi structured job search program.
- Information sessions - insight to jobs, industries, entry requirements, resumes or mock interviews from the employers, peak body or industry representative perspective.
- Monthly workshops- cover employability skills, personal development, career planning, anger management, budgeting, effective communication, healthy lifestyle, job search and resume writing, interview skills and community resource information.

These workshops have been designed to standalone, enabling clients to rejoin immediately after any absences, be they due to non-vocational or personal day to day issues. All activities are supported by access to early child specialists, on sight crèche services, breakfast and lunch programs, transport, careers counselors, and dedicated support workers. This is crucial to the success the program. This not only "frees up" the parent to focus on the program, but it also provides the child with a positive socialising experience (Soriano et al., 2008).

SMYL's experience is supported by research that identifies connections between young parenthood and factors such as low levels of educational attainment and antisocial behaviour, negative experiences with school teachers or other authority figures and poor response to unidirectional or excessively authoritarian teaching styles, as shown in a recent study (Baker, Clark, Crowl, & Carlson, 2009).

This study, and others, showed that education with young parents works well when it is conducted in a reasonably relaxed and unstructured way, and when the young parents are allowed to have input into the content of the program (Malin & Morrow, 2009; Soriano et al., 2008).

Accessibility is an important consideration for many young parents. They are more likely to participate in programs or activities that are accessible by public transport or that provide transport to participants (Soriano et al., 2008).

We at SMYL recognize the challenges and obstacles faced by our clients and their families. These include:

- low, or non-existent vocational skills;
- low levels of education;
- minimal employability skills;
- little or no history of work;
- entering the workforce;
- workplace pressures;
- low esteem and lack of confidence;
- poor job search skills;
- limited positive role models;
- variable motivation;
- psychological and logistical barriers;
- family pressures;
- time constraints and lack of information.

Major local challenges are interrelated factors that include:

- level of job opportunities in areas of limited economies
- heavy industry reluctant to employ locally;
- limited training provision;
- poor health;
- problems with alcohol, drugs and gambling;
- aspirations to work and role models;
- transport and reluctance to leave the community to access services, training or employment;
- limited understanding by corporate sector of how socioeconomic disadvantage impacts on recruitment and retention;
- the challenges involved in balancing family and community obligations with the demands of work;
- generational unemployment ; and

- closure of previous initiatives that specifically focussed on young parents and families

In conclusion, SMYL's ParentsNext program provides a steady path of self actualization and improvement that would otherwise be inaccessible to young and disadvantage parents. Our courses and coaches equip them with the skills necessary to participate in the rapidly shifting workforce. We help them realize the self-worth that has been buried by a dehumanizing system, and that would otherwise go undervalued and untapped. By having access to our program, our clients will be able to grow and thrive as members of the workforce and community.