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THE YOUNG PARENTS’ ACCESS PROJECT

CORIO BAY SENIOR COLLEGE
GEELONG VICTORIA AUSTRALIA

A RESEARCH REPORT
From the Taking Your Baby to School Project

Dr Jennifer Angwin
Dr Lyn Harrison
Ms Annelies Kamp
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LOCAL LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT NETWORK INC.

SMART GEELONG REGION

Working with the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission
THE YOUNG PARENTS’ ACCESS PROJECT

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GEELONG, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

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GLOSSARY

ACFE  Adult, Community and Further Education
ANTA  Australian National Training Authority
CAT   Crisis Assessment Team
COGG  City of Greater Geelong
CBSC  Corio Bay Senior College
DE&T  Department of Education and Training
DHS   Department of Human Services
LLEN  Local Learning and Employment Network
SEU   Social Exclusion Unit
SGR LLEN  Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network
TAFE  Technical and Further Education
VCAL  Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE   Victorian Certificate of Education
YPAP  Young Parents’ Access Project
RESEARCH TEAM

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- Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network (SGR LLEN)
‘Those involved in working to establish a childcare facility at Corio Bay Senior College are stringently adhering to the language of service provision and community building in all forums to ensure positive engagement of the young parents. This is based on a deep respect for young parents as individuals and a genuine desire to assist young parents to achieve positive educational outcomes and career pathways commensurate with their peers.’

‘I don’t know what I want to do. I want to be a good mum, that’s what I aim to be. A successful family more than anything. I don’t know if I want to study. I don’t know.’

‘They’re doing a great job and I take my hat off to all of them because they’re really energetic, they’re passionate about what they want to do. Their ideals of where they want their life to go and the life they want to have … for their children, is just amazing.’

‘…the crisis is the difficulty of just trying to juggle their education with managing a child. I think most of the girls do have ambitions and want to move forward in their lives but they find the realities of a young baby just too great for them.’

INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the Young Parents’ Access Project (YPAP) at Corio Bay Senior College (CBSC), a State senior secondary school situated in the northern suburbs of Geelong, Victoria, Australia. The Project has a number of objectives:

- re-engage, retain and support young parents in completing their secondary education
- improve their education levels and thereby their future educational and employment opportunities
- nurture their parenting skills
- provide positive role modelling for teenage parents and their children, and
- develop the opportunities for CBSC childcare students to use the centre for their work placements.

The report includes a description of the establishment of an on-site childcare centre at CBSC, an account of the significance of educational provision for pregnant and parenting young people at CBSC, an analysis of the roles and risks of YPAP stakeholders, and a discussion of issues generated by the Project.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This report on YPAP has been compiled from information collected at CBSC, Geelong, by a Deakin University Faculty of Education research team during 2002-
2003 as part of the *Taking Your Baby to School* research project. The research project undertook the following:

- A review of the literature on pregnant and parenting young people and their educational participation
- Interviews with young parents
- Interviews with key school personnel
- Observation of school activities

### DEMOGRAPHIC AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

CBSC is located in Corio, a suburb of Geelong identified as one of the top ten communities of disadvantage in the Barwon South Western Region in 2001. It was also ranked 50th highest in the state of Victoria by the Jesuit Disadvantage Study. Corio has also been shown to have the lowest concentration of high-income earners and tertiary qualification. Research such as this confirms a series of risk factors including low income, low educational achievement and long-term unemployment leading to dependence of social security payments. These factors undermine the health and well-being of individuals which in turn has an effect on the community in which they live.

This community disadvantage is evident within the school population. CBSC has an independent student population in excess of fifty students. 52% of the CBSC population holds health cards and only 45% of students or their families contribute financially to the school. 2001 Census Data for the area indicates in excess of 92 births per 1,000 women aged 15-24; by comparison the 1998 figure for Australia was 18.5 births per 1,000 women aged 15-24. Corio Centrelink Data as at December 2001 indicates that of the 309 recipients of the Single Parenting Payment 63 (21%) were aged 15-19 and all but one were young women. A further 75 15 year olds received the Partnered Parenting Payment. Of these, 53% were young women and 47% young men (recipients in shared accommodation and not necessarily a ‘couple’).

For teenage parents the challenge involves being a successful teenager as well as being a successful parent. Not only do they face the challenges of teenagers in Australia at this historical juncture, that is, negotiating the risks of transition from school to sustainable employment, they also face the challenge of negotiating the transition to adulthood and first-time parenthood.

The economic risks of early school leaving are greater for girls than boys given the sharp contraction of the full-time labour market for young women since the mid-1970s. Added to this is a gender difference in the likelihood of further study or training for early school leavers: educational activity is much lower in those young
people who do not finish Year 11 (46% compared to 63% for those who do finish Year 11) and girls are much less likely than boys to go on to further study or training (66% compared to 53%). These gender differences are mainly due to the access boys have to structured workplace training.

As such, teenage mothers in Corio face the most complex risks. The Young Parents Access Project (YPAP) is a local response to this multi-faceted risk.

**KEY ISSUES IN TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND PARENTING**

Research into the effects of teenage parenting has only been undertaken since the late 1960s. For the most part this research indicated teenage parents, both fathers and mothers, were much more likely to experience economic hardship and family disruption in later life than those who bear and rear children when older. Teenage parenting does not, in itself, confirm a life of poverty and welfare dependence but prior disadvantage, combined with limited academic ability and aspirations, increased the odds of hardship for teenage parents and their children.

**Consequences for teenage parents**

Research in Britain indicated a potential direct link for young women of teenage parenting through limiting opportunities and choices and thereby increasing the likelihood of adverse outcomes in later life. Teenage mothers were less likely to find stable and remunerative employment and, as such, they were more likely to become reliant on welfare and to suffer poverty to lack school qualifications and to live in public housing. Several studies indicated that teenage parents ultimately had larger families and this also had an impact on their ability to find stable and remunerative employment, as did marital instability that lead to a high incidence of single-parent, one-income families.

The transition to parenthood is a major developmental period with implications for both parents as individuals and as a couple. The success of the transition has implications for the development of interaction between parent and child and for the development of the child. The interaction of the two development crises of adolescence and pregnancy can lead to a ‘developmental ‘double whammy’. The meaning of a teenage pregnancy will reflect the specific tasks and conflicts of the mother’s psychological, physiological and cognitive age rather than her chronological age.

**Consequences for the children of teenage parents**

The demands faced by teenage parents in attempting to overcome the additional challenges to economic security they face affected the environment in which their children were reared. Consequently, the children of teenage parents also bear the social and economic costs. Research in Britain indicated that the worst consequence of teenage parenting is that it makes the impact of clear childhood poverty worse.
Teenage parenting and poverty
A wealth of research indicates that teenage parenting arises from poverty and while young women from all backgrounds become pregnant, it is women from poor backgrounds who are more likely to become adolescent parents and to repeat the cycle of teenage parenting\(^21\).

If a young woman is from a financially and emotionally secure background and has aspirations for her future then she has something to lose by teenage pregnancy and parenting. If a young woman is from an impoverished and emotionally lacking background and doesn’t have aspirations for her future then pregnancy may be a better alternative than others she perceives. Not only is she more likely to become pregnant, she is more likely to become a teenage parent\(^22\).

While ‘successful’ teenage parents are not socially visible, ‘unsuccessful’ ones are frequently brought into view, particularly if they are dependent on welfare. However while many teenage parents will break out of the ‘seemingly inevitable cycle of poverty’ the majority will not make out as well as they would have had they not been teenage parents\(^23\). teenage parenting does not, in itself, ‘doom even disadvantaged mothers and their children to a life of poverty and welfare dependence’\(^24\). However, when combined with limited academic ability and aspiration, the odds were increased.

Responses to teenage parenting
Many teenage mothers are pleased about becoming pregnant and experience satisfaction in their parenting role despite the numerous external pressures they face\(^25\). For some, the arrival of a child was an opportunity to give and receive unconditional love and was a spur to get serious about life and start valuing education\(^26\). However the sense of satisfaction may be superficial and a repeat pregnancy may be indicative of repeated efforts to resolve internal conflicts. Research indicates low self-esteem and a tendency towards depression in pregnant and parenting teenagers\(^27\).

I don’t know if I want to study. I don’t know. I don’t know what I want to do. I want to be a good mum, that’s what I aim to be. A successful family more than anything.

(Young mum #1, August 02)

For some teenage mothers regular employment and participation in development activities was perceived as ‘interfering with their parenting responsibilities’\(^28\). Preliminary findings in the Taking Your Baby to School research also strongly emphasise the need to recognise the expertise of these teenage parents and the priority they give to their role as parents. This reinforces a need in policy and practice to construct teenage parents as informed and able to make choices\(^29\).

Research in Australia highlights the difference low socio-economic background makes in terms of the aspirations young woman envisage for themselves and the choices they make when confronted with a teenage pregnancy. ‘At risk’ teenage mothers held ‘traditional views on the role of women and held very high standards for themselves as mothers’\(^30\).

For some young women, exclusion from heterosexist forms of teenage desirability and relationships is seen as at least as high risk as exclusion from the labour market and economic dependence on the State\(^31\).
School participation and teenage parenting

Early parenthood is the greatest single cause of dropping out of school for teenage girls and the younger the pregnant teenager is, the more likely it is that she will never complete her secondary school. To a lesser extent, early parenthood is also linked to dropping-out of school for teenage fathers. Teenage mothers did not achieve as much education as older mothers: they were pressured to leave school and found it difficult to perform their schoolwork. Students who were not succeeding at school were disproportionately likely to become pregnant and to drop out of school when they did become pregnant. In general, teenage pregnancy usually preceded dropout but a substantial minority of teenage mothers dropped out before becoming pregnant and their chances of ever graduating were worse than those who were still in school when they became pregnant.

Educational competence and motivation leads to higher educational aspirations and commitment and those reporting higher aspirations were more likely to remain in school throughout their pregnancy and to complete high school. In addition, school experiences during pregnancy and immediately after childbirth were important predictors of economic status in adulthood.

The provision of in-school childcare enables a minimal delay in a return to study after childbirth and ensures the sometimes fragile personal resources of teenage mothers do not erode.

In-school programs for teenage parents

A review of the literature suggests that a successful program for parenting teenagers is one that adopts a multidimensional approach that provides childcare, fosters high aspirations and supports opportunities to graduate through negotiated, realistic, supportive academic programs, equity in treatment, health services including contraception, prenatal care and nutrition, social support including transport and case management including mentoring and counselling.

The importance of establishing a sense of educational competence and self-motivation is central to curriculum provision for teenage parent students. Programs that focus on participation, whether voluntary or by cash incentive, rather than achievement and goals, did not lead to any meaningful chance in the life course of teenage parents. A sense of educational competence and self-motivation are required to allow higher educational aspirations and commitment that lead to school completion, qualifications and a career path leading to economic security and community participation.

In one view, there are several prerequisites to providing comprehensive programs:

- well developed local health, education and welfare services that can be made available to low income teenagers
- support from the local civic structure
- flexible funding from foundations and local government to provide administrative support and to plug ‘service gaps’
- local managerial and political leadership
- co-ordinating mechanisms and experience in using them
However, this research indicates that few communities possess all these resources.

It has been noted that policy has ‘consistently underestimated what it will take to significantly change the life course of pregnant and parenting teenagers’\(^1\). Consequently constricted financial resources and lack of priority will often result in only a small proportion of adolescents getting the integrated program that will prepare themselves and their children to contribute to their own needs, their community and the economy in the long term, effectively breaking them out of a cycle of poverty.

This literature also stresses a need for on-going collaboration between professionals in childcare, health, education, social services and government if in-school programs are to be successful. That is, ‘to be most effective, teenage parent programs that include childcare must be adequately funded, school based, prevention oriented, and multidimensional so that they can attack the many problems these special children and families often face’\(^2\).

**THE POLICY CONTEXT IN AUSTRALIA**

Responses to teenage pregnancy in Australia differ by State and are mostly linked to more general educational and social policy contexts. The majority of State education systems have developed a position on the question of how best to respond to teenage pregnancy and parenting however they vary in their comprehensiveness and in the materials and programs provided to support their implementation.

**Victoria**

In recent years, at Federal, State and Local government levels there has been a generic focus on the causes and consequences of non-completion of senior secondary school\(^3\). In Victoria, the *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria* (2000), commonly known as *The Kirby Report*, has fostered a host of recent policy developments.

Statistics presented in *The Kirby Report* indicated a gender difference in reasons for early school leaving with ‘health reasons’ being the motivation for dropping out for girls at over double the rate for boys\(^4\). However, there is no specific recommendation in *The Kirby Report* in regard to the specific issues surrounding teenage pregnancy and parenting despite teenage pregnancy being shown as the most likely and single greatest reason that young women leave school early\(^5\).

In Victoria, there is no detailed policy. The Department of Education & Training (DE&T) provides advice for schools in relation to pregnant and parenting students as part of the *Schools of the Future Reference Guide*\(^6\). The guide affirms the right of pregnant students to continue their schooling, but requires a medical certificate in relation to fitness to attend after the 34th week of pregnancy.

Schools are encouraged to modify the curriculum program if necessary, and provide ongoing support either through internal processes or through the Distance Education Centre Victoria for students whose schooling is interrupted due to pregnancy.
Due to a lack of specific policy recognition of the needs of pregnant and parenting teens who are attempting to complete their senior schooling, there is no allocated funding for the additional costs of providing for their in-school needs.

**New South Wales**
The NSW Department of Education and Training bases its support for pregnant and parenting students on its *Student Welfare Policy*, which states ‘it is important that schools develop proactive strategies to inform school communities about the ways schools can help pregnant women and young mothers to continue their education without discrimination’[^47]. This State’s response is framed on the basis of pregnancy or parental status as a form of sex-based discrimination.

**Australian Capital Territory**
The Department of Education and Community Services’ *Pregnant Student Policy and Implementation Guidelines*[^48] is underpinned by the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act which guarantees the right of pregnant students to attend schools. It specifies that ‘terms or conditions’ of admission to school should not discriminate against a student’s participation, and that a student should not be subjected to ‘any other detriment’. The policy states that all schools should establish procedures to respond to the needs of pregnant students, that students who are pregnant should be encouraged to stay at school as long as possible and to return to school as soon as possible and that special circumstances, including any special requirements of the student, should be taken into account.

**Tasmania**
The Department of Education addresses the issue of pregnancy in its equity in schooling policy as part of a focus on students who are at risk of leaving school early. The *Policy Statement on Pregnant Girls and Teenage Mothers*[^49] identifies the likelihood of early school leaving among girls who become pregnant while at school and who opt to keep their babies. The policy statement identifies the factors which impact on decisions to leave school or stay, factors, it argues, which schools can address. It is the policy of the Department to retain pregnant and parenting students in their usual school, these students are only enrolled in Open Learning programs if they are unwilling to remain at school with support. Information for schools is available as a result of a research project *Pregnant Young Women and Teenage Mothers* funded by the Department of Education in 1996.

**South Australia**
School practice is guided by *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, and by administrative instructions and guidelines which require schools to support pregnant and parenting students to complete their education. Schools are encouraged to develop responses which meet their local circumstances and the needs of individual young women. This may include the development of interagency linkages with district and community service organization. Two papers have been produced to assist schools to support pregnant and parenting students: *Pregnant Girls and Teenage Mothers: The Educational Implications*[^50]; and *Pregnant Girls and Teenage Mothers, the Social Justice Action Plan Discussion Paper No. 10*[^51].
Western Australia
The Education Department has no specific policy on pregnant and parenting students. Schools are guided by the policy and guidelines for gender equity in the Social Justice in Education Statements. One of the objectives of the policy guidelines is that girls and boys experience a school culture which meets their specific [physical and social] needs. This element of the policy specifically addresses harassment.

Northern Territory
The Department of Education does not have a policy specific to pregnant and parenting students. Its Equal Opportunities — Employment and Educational Access Policy requires head teachers to be responsible for equal opportunity matters and the development of mechanisms to prevent any possible discriminatory practices.

Queensland
Education Queensland released its Pregnant and Parenting Students Policy in 1999. The policy requires principals to identify and address aspects of schooling which lead to differential outcomes for pregnant and parenting students and that students in the Queensland state school system are not disadvantaged on the basis of pregnancy or parental status. The policy encourages flexibility in school policies and practices relating to curriculum design, teaching and learning strategies, assessment, classroom and school management, uniform and attendance requirements. It also directs principals to ensure that direct and indirect discrimination (including harassment) on the basis of pregnancy and parental status is addressed. School staff can access information which assists them to support pregnant and parenting young women to complete secondary education. Schools can obtain a booklet of advice and strategies on the retention of pregnant and parenting young women in education from Education Queensland.

ESTABLISHING THE YOUNG PARENTS’ ACCESS PROJECT

The need for a response to teenage parenting in the Corio area had been apparent to the staff at Corio Bay Senior College for many years. The school had always encouraged pregnant teenagers to focus on continuing their education regardless of their pregnancy and had developed flexible solutions to practically support them in this. Prior to the YPAP this included modified Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) programs, welfare support assistance with transport, interaction with childcare providers, flexible attendance arrangements, change and breastfeeding facilities and so on.
Although as a rule it was not supported because of the disruption caused to other students, many teachers would accept the presence of children in classes when a lack of childcare was a barrier to attendance for a teenage parent. This accommodation of children in classrooms had been problematic: it placed pressure on teenage parents to minimise the visibility of the child, it was distracting for teachers and other students and did not allow any attention to the needs of the ongoing childcare and developmental needs for the child.

Access to childcare can be the factor that makes the challenge of parenting and schooling too difficult, particularly for those adolescent parents living independently. By access, CBSC means not only availability but also feasibility – even if places are available in community childcare adolescent parents often live in the vicinity of the school and the logistics of taking up an available place without access to transport create a disincentive to school attendance.

In 2002, the extent of teenage pregnancy in Geelong was underscored with the issue of the SGR LLEN Environmental Scan. By this stage the CBSC Principal had come to recognise two specific support requirements: childcare and enhanced parenting skills.

At a meeting convened by SGR LLEN to discuss potential responses the CBSC Principal articulated the recognition that a ‘huge number of barriers’ would be cut down if a childcare facility was situated on site but perceived it as ‘just not possible, it’s just too difficult’. However, the seeds of the Project were planted: a Centrelink staff member recognised the long term benefit of the concept and stated that it was a good idea and asked why it couldn’t be done. Department of Human Services (DHS) were also interested given the prevalence of the children of teenage parents appearing in juvenile crime statistics. Shortly afterwards the Centrelink staff provided contact details for a Manchester (UK) school that had opened an in-school childcare centre and a visit to that school was incorporated into an already scheduled study tour.

Around the same time, CBSC was considering applying for an Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Skills Centre Grant. The Skills Centre would allow teenage parents to not only build their understanding of child development but would also enable assessment of that learning. The Centre would also allow other CBSC students and students from other schools to undertake childcare work placements.

These two ideas came together in one project: an in-school childcare centre that included a training room where all students, including those that were parenting, could pursue nationally recognised courses including parenting and Certificate III Community Services (Childcare). With the formation of a working party in May 2002 the concept began to evolve through the work of a local network who contributed ‘their knowledge, expertise, ideas, time, enthusiasm and experiences in a spirit of collaboration and goodwill’. Those who attended the first meeting included representatives from local, state and federal government agencies. Throughout the archives there is a continual theme that suggests the mining of networks, resources, knowledge and experience.

We need that facility so that we can say to the girls right if childcare is an issue we can provide it for you. Don’t let that be a barrier.

(Principal, July 02)
From that time to the present, that is early 2004, the concept has evolved into a reality. However, the context of implementation has shaped the development of the Project in specific ways. While the Skills Centre component of the Project rested easily within policy discourses articulated within the work of ANTA, and the Victorian government’s focus on skills development, the childcare centre lacked any policy anchor. Within the federal policy discourse of moral responsibility the provision of childcare created a tension between the federal government’s traditional values and the amelioration of the consequences of teenage pregnancy. At a state level there is to all intents and purposes a policy void: while schools are provided with an injunction to support pregnant and parenting students by ‘modify[ing] the curriculum program if necessary’\(^5\) this falls short of the innovation required to provide in-school childcare and long-term integrated multi-dimensional support.

This lack of policy articulation has created a context where, despite declared support from various Ministers and the use of the YPAP as an example of the innovation occurring in Victorian schools, there has been an inability on the part of government departments to collaboratively and simultaneously give policy priority to the Project. A policy priority across government departments would have enabled sufficient funding to be committed to enable the CBSC to cover the establishment costs associated with the project. Initially, there appeared to be a number of ways to approach this matter as both federal and state bodies fund different aspects of childcare. For example, in Western Australia the Balga State High School childcare centre was funded through Federal policy on *Building Better Communities* and WA State Lottery funds. In the absence of committed funding the focus during 2003, when the Project provided students with childcare under a Family Day Care model, and into 2004, at which time it had developed to a Long Day Care model within a licensed childcare centre, has made progress despite considerable financial barriers.

The need to provide for the children of enrolled teenage parents has persisted despite the delay of any resolution on support from government. The staff at CBSC have waded through regulations for childcare services that are complex and rigorous and well outside the experience of school personnel. The achievement of progress despite the lack of financial commitment by any, or many, government departments has led to an incessant focus on cobbling together sufficient funding for the physical establishment of the childcare centre. This represents a shift from a primary concern with integrated and multi-dimensional provision to teenage parents as students, to a focus on how many children are needed to break even and a lack of progress on the Skill Centre component of the Project.

This situation persisted into 2004 and despite the pressure it has created for CBSC in responding to the government’s injunction to innovate in renewing neighbourhoods.
In its drive for an integrated approach to policy it was noted that the Project should sit within *Neighbourhood Renewal*, an initiative led by the Office of Housing in the Department of Human Services. *Neighbourhood Renewal* is part of the *Growing Victoria Together* agenda of the Victorian government. Ten projects have been initiated in communities with high levels of unemployment benefit receipt, health card holding, disability support pensions, crime rates, child protection notifications, one parent families and low achievement of Year 12 completion. Corio/Norlane has been identified as evidencing these characteristics and the YPAP clearly has potential to narrow the gap between the community and the rest of the State on a number of dimensions. *Neighbourhood Renewal*, is intended to:

Empower local communities to shape their own futures. The initiative builds on the strengths of each community and enhances local skills, capacity and leadership. Government will be more responsive to shared community goals.

The emphasis will be on working together. Government and community resources will be harnessed and better coordinated to improve housing, infrastructure, employment, education, safety, and health and wellbeing.

At a local government level there have been positive contributions to the Project. However to date the ideals of harnessing and better coordinating resources have not been experienced at a level sufficient to release the potential of the YPAP. The difficulties encountered with bureaucracy beyond the local level have been ongoing and remain unresolved at the time of writing despite the commitment of government personnel.

**YPAP STAKEHOLDERS – OBSERVATIONS ON ROLES AND RISKS**

There is a range of risks for various stakeholders inherent in their participation in the YPAP. These risks are associated with both Project inputs and outputs and impact on practice and perception. The following section considers the question of stakeholder risk from a number of perspectives: government, the school itself, the community and the young parents. It highlights possible tensions that exist between commitment, support and participation.
Government
At the level of government, broad political and ideological factors influence understandings about risk that affect the support on offer to programs such as YPAP. For example, sanctioned perceptions about the role of schools in promoting traditional values will possibly make it difficult for government to provide support for programs designed to meet the needs of a group - young pregnant or parenting students – not displaying traditional values.

Responses to teenage pregnancy and parenting advocated by the international literature may seem to be outside preferred policy solutions for the provision of childcare. For example, the establishment of a childcare centre on the school site is in opposition to current and preferred means for providing childcare and related services in a ‘hub model’. Consequently, the provision of childcare in the in-venue mode advocated by the school may seem to contradict or exceed current policy. As current policy drives the funding process, any application the school makes for funding through those processes may require a skewing of the Project to fit the boxes and, thereby, compromise its intent.

While government may be willing to give an abstracted level of support to the YPAP concept, as a good idea, it may also be reluctant to commit funds to the Project because of risks associated with the unknown and unpredictable consequences of new ways of working beyond the scope of existing systems. By avoiding such risk, government increases other risks faced by the school. This can be categorised as an instance of policy dissonance. While the innovation sits outside practices fostered by existing policies it, at the same time, aligns with the overarching policy discourses of innovation and joined-up government.

Projects such as YPAP create funding risks for government because they may continue beyond the budget timelines on which they are funded. While the YPAP has only sought establishment funding, and intends operating as a self-sustaining organization, a leap of faith is required on the part of the government that the school will be able to achieve its self-funding aim. As well, a commitment to funding in one location is likely to put pressure on government to fund similar programs in other locations.

School
Projects such as YPAP create expectations that are dependent upon contingent factors and unsecured resources that need to be delivered from outside the school. This creates a significant risk scenario for young people participating in the YPAP because their commitment to attendance and the objectives of the Project may not be rewarded if vital components of the Project are not deliverable due to funding disappointment. The establishment of this initiative without the confirmation of funding from government has required use of school funds to meet short term gaps in funding for the employment of essential staff, the provision of vital resources and the preparation of submissions for on-going funding. Non-success would mean that diverted funds may not be reimbursed and this, in turn, may jeopardise other school activities. The school has had to bear this risk.

The school, by making a major resource commitment for educational provision to a minority group that may be seen as transgressive by the rest of the school community,
could destabilise its educational status. This kind of commitment creates the risk of negative publicity and places pressure on the school to devote resources to promote the educational focus of the Project and the benefits of the approach for the school community.

In a climate where funding is problematic there is risk involved in attracting staff when employment cannot be guaranteed beyond the short term. Furthermore, uncertain funding creates tensions for staff who are left not knowing what they can realistically plan for or expect to achieve despite the high level of local commitment to the YPAP. This in turn affects the school’s credibility if it cannot deliver on promises made to students and the wider community and would reasonably be seen to affect the credibility of other future school initiatives. Significantly, this also creates a substantial personal and professional risk to the Principal as a leader capable of conceiving and implementing an innovative response to local needs.

The desire and need to gain wide ranging support for a significantly different set of educational arrangements for a unique cohort of students, such as pregnant and parenting young people, can lead to a collection of disparate and unrelated affiliations which are time consuming and sometimes tangential to the task at hand. Having said this however the benefits accrued from the sense of community ownership and investment in the Project can be positive. On the down side, from the school’s perspective, small scale community interventions to support the Project are time consuming and only band-aid solutions in the absence of real government commitment.

One of the most effective contemporary strategies for bringing initiatives such as this to public attention is to use the media to publicise your cause. While the school may seek to use this medium to its advantage, the outcomes can be difficult to control. The media has its own agenda and is traditionally prone to sensationalised, often negative and deficit, portrayals of pregnant and parenting young people.

**Community**

The local community has embraced this initiative and individuals and groups have been involved in fund raising and practical activities designed to support the start up of the YPAP. The Project has played a positive role in cementing school/community links in a population that is often suspicious of schools and education and in generating support for a program that aims to make a difference for these young people and their children. Any failure risks a weakening of goodwill between the school and its community.

Given that a number of community organizations have made donations towards the establishment of the YPAP, failure to gain the sufficient establishment funds from government may jeopardise community involvement in future initiatives which the school may promote.

Success of the YPAP has wide potential for increasing links between families and the school. Not just in the immediate term, but over a longer period as young people and their children benefit from the child care and educational opportunities made available.
by the Project. The long term potential is that positive participation in, and expectations of schooling are passed onto successive generations with a sustained cultural shift towards the value of education. At the same time, non-success of the Project would place at risk the social and community building capacity that such a program can provide.

**Young People**
The immediate risk for young people who participate in YPAP is that they still may not have the necessary educational skills to succeed. Many potential participants have had long periods away from school and a turbulent involvement with formal schooling and may not have the necessary literacy and or study skills to complete their VCE/VCAL even with childcare provision. This reinforces the importance of the Parent Support Worker as an integral part of the YPAP. When coupled with the pressures of balancing parental responsibilities and the study load demanded at senior level the risk of feeling overwhelmed is high. The role of the Parent Support Worker is specifically focused on minimising this risk.

Failure of the YPAP may leave the young parent without the confidence or academic capital to make a successful transition into a conventional school setting in order to complete their senior studies. Further disruption to participation in education runs the very real risk of their non-completion of post-compulsory schooling. As the research suggests, for this cohort of young people, interrupted educational provision only heightens the likelihood of diminished opportunities for further education, employment and wellbeing.

**DISCUSSION**

The following section identifies and discusses important issues that emerge in the Report. Each issue refers to a likely barrier to the successful implementation and long term viability of the YPAP.

**Issue 1 – Funding delays**
Government needs to make decisions about funding on a much shorter time line than they seem currently able to do. It is not enough to suggest that this is a good idea, request a funding submission that does not match the Project’s intent, delay any decision for 15 months and then indicate that the Project is not able to be funded because it doesn’t fit established funding processes.

*I am tired of the rhetoric now. After eighteen months of this I just want to know.*

*(Principal, December 03)*

**Issue 2 – Policy vacuum**
In the Victorian context there is a policy vacuum around schools providing child care on-site. The lack of clear policy directions means that the YPAP does not fit easily into DE&T guidelines. As a result of this, support and funding needs to be sought within other policy frameworks. However, the Project does not easily fit in any specific departmental agenda given its multi-dimensional intent.

**Issue 3 – Limits to local networks**
Given a commitment to joined-up government there is a need for the bureaucratic centre to take responsibility for resolving the vexing question of how to fund the
Project and to address that question in a timely manner that accords with the operation of the school. While local school and community networks are effective in bringing people together to share information and build commitment in conceiving the YPAP they do not have the capacity to attract the amount of funding needed to support establishment costs and personnel. As well, because these networks rely on goodwill and volunteers it can be difficult for networks to have either the time or the range of skills required to access and manage information and resources beyond those immediately available to them.

**Issue 4 – Bringing joined-up government to fruition**
Networking between the community and the larger realm of government departments does not work effectively because of a range of issues including lack of lobbying skills, rationalisation of personnel in Departments and an absence of experience and/or authority with departmental staff in bringing the rhetoric and goodwill of community building to successful outcomes. While local networks can work effectively at the grass roots level, and governments have the potential to do so through policies such as *Neighbourhood Renewal*, bringing the potential for joined up government to fruition requires strategies for the creation of spaces of communication and participation and a willingness on the part of the bureaucratic-centre to shoulder the risk associated with working in innovative ways.

There has been a lot of discussion and a lot of work done by a couple of officers in Melbourne who are trying very hard to join up the government departments to multi-fund this if you like, or cross fund it. Now however, old habits die very hard and at the end of the day it seems to be falling apart.

*(Principal, December 03)*

**Issue 5 – Documenting local needs and successes**
The Principal and staff at the school maintain that on-site childcare is the most effective option for their students for a number of reasons. Transport for mothers and babies is an issue. If young parents are forced to travel for childcare, and then in turn have to transport themselves to school, this acts as a disincentive to regular school attendance. As well, it is important for the young mothers to have easy access to their children during the day. One young mother visits her child at recess and lunch times and situating childcare off-site with other services in a hub arrangement would make this impossible. Easy access to their children alleviates separation anxiety for these students whose family traditions often discourage childcare outside of the family. The parent support worker also pointed to the advantages of having children on-site because it allowed her to observe parent/child interactions informally and to then provide information on parenting skills, nutrition and so on when it became apparent that they were needed. This sort of informal life skills training was seen as an important part of her job.

*When it’s all on site…I think it enables them to ease the guilt...because they know that when they’re at recess, got spares or at lunch they can access the centre and check on their child. I think it also in a way it assists the other students in the school to see what being parents is like. The stresses and challenges that it puts on your life.*

*(Parent Support Worker, September 03)*

**Issue 6 – Understanding what works in context**
The need for on-site childcare, as a response to a specific social and cultural situation, creates dissonance between current policy directions which advocate ‘hub style’ arrangements for community facilities effectively discouraging alternative arrangements that fall outside of these policy imperatives. There can be a disjuncture between on the ground assessments of what will work under local conditions for well
known cohorts of young people and more abstracted assessments of generic cohorts made by people at a distance. This can be frustrating and disempowering because what is possible (and allowed) under policy and funding agreements may not work as successfully under the specific conditions within which the school operates. Managing the tension between ‘what works’ and ‘what is possible’ in creative ways that do not ‘lock out’ practices is a significant and on-going challenge for school administrators and program managers.

**Issue 7 – Managing multiple policy discourses**

Locating and successfully appropriating relevant policy and practice discourses is essential to engaging other stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways. In order for a local school community to communicate effectively with personnel managing and implementing government policy school administrators need to be able to understand and use policy discourses around *Neighbourhood Renewal, Strengthening Communities, and Community Capacity Building*. Unless these skills exist in the local community, access to outside expertise to manage this is needed. For example, at CBSC in the establishment of the YPAP, discourses around childcare have become dominant at the expense of those discourses which deal with educational (including training) opportunities that exist through the location of a child care centre in an education setting. Enhanced skills in managing these sometimes competing discourses would ensure that conversations between practitioners and the policy sector remain open to broad interpretations of what works and what is possible.

**Issue 8 – Short and long term tensions**

A major issue throughout the planning, negotiation and implementation of the YPAP and its facilities and resources has been the consequences of the clash between short and long term views of the problem and its solutions. It has always been the intent that the Project will become self-funding however there is a significant amount of developmental work to be achieved for that to occur. In the short term establishing the Project and building the facilities has demanded intensive effort and funding. The provision of establishment funding would dramatically improve the progress that could be made towards self-sustainability. However, this alone is not enough to ensure the ongoing success of the YPAP. A shared long term view about how to sustain commitments, objectives and outcomes over a period of years thereby enabling the provision of multi-dimensional long term support of teenage parents and their children is needed to move this initiative beyond being just a flash in the pan. This is difficult given the relatively short term life span of policy direction, associated budget lines and personnel.

**Issue 9 – Student worth and legitimate learning**

At the heart of judgements about the success or otherwise of the Project and its capacity to generate successful outcomes in school completion are assumptions about the economy of student worth and what counts as legitimate learning. The students within the Project are engaged with VCE/VCAL programs because these are legitimised certificates that have currency in educational and employment markets beyond the school and community. It is important for students, community and the system to recognise that the development of skills
and knowledge within the YPAP is substantial in breadth, including social and life chance capital that goes beyond the traditional symbolic logic of formal post-compulsory certification. Judgments about the success of YPAP that depend upon the re-assertion of the primacy of universal outcomes alone obscures the value of the non-examinable learning undertaken by early school leavers who successfully re-engage with formal schooling.
POSTSCRIPT

On June 14, 2004 the Young Parents’ Access Project was officially launched by Jacinta Allan, Minister for Education Services and Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs.

At the time of the launch the Minister announced State government funding for the capital works of the Project. When received, this funding will enable the school to be reimbursed for the establishment costs it has borne to date as well; it will also fund the construction of the second stage of the childcare facility capital works. However the on-going challenge to fund the operating costs associated with the broader Project continues.
VOICES FROM THE SCHOOL

Students Speak About YPAP

I’ve grown up too quickly...I mean I could write a story. I could write about a 1000 page book on my life and it still wouldn’t make sense because I’ve gone from fifteen and being a rebel to sixteen and being a mum. Like wow, too much. If I could take back three years, yeah three years and live my life as a teenager it would probably be better but I can’t now so that’s it is just grown up too quick.

(Young mum #1, August 02)

I was sick of school but after spending three months at home by myself doing nothing, I figured out what I want to do so I thought I would go back to school, get my VCE, get a job, move out.

(Young mum #1, August 02)

I don’t know if I want to study. I don’t know. I don’t know what I want to do. I want to be a good mum, that’s what I aim to be. A successful family more than anything.

(Young mum #1, August 02)

...I dropped out of year 11 after the first CAT...tried working didn’t like it...[I] decided to go back after Alan” was born but had to drop out because he was teething. The Principal kept encouraging me to go back and promising he would get childcare. I tried the next year and lasted four or five months and Alan got really sick so I had to drop out again.

(Young mum #2, September 03)

I have less guilt putting Jackie in child care at school than at the other child care which was far away and for a really long day until 5 pm. I was always relying on lifts then but now I can see my daughter more often...I find this school more supportive than TAFE.

(Young mum #3, September 03)

I couldn’t have gone back to school without the child care.

(Young mum #4, September 03)
The Principal Speaks About YPAP

From the perspective of the school and putting on my principal’s hat how you support these girls is very, very problematic.

(Principal, July 2002)

...the crisis is the difficulty of just trying to juggle their education with managing a child. I think most of the girls do have ambitions and want to move forward in their lives but they find the realities of a young baby just too great for them.

(Principal, July 2002)

...I think those services tend not to come into the school. They’re dependent on the student going to those services and where you have students wanting to be at school you need that service in the school, you need it there available for the students at the time.

(Principal, July 2002)

We need that facility so that we can say to the girls right if childcare is an issue we can provide it for you. Don’t let that be a barrier.

(Principal, July 2002)

The hardest part of this program has been on the one level trying to get government to find a pathway to support us because on the surface they think it’s a wonderful idea ... that’s a major disappointment... We’ve got well documented evidence. We’ve got a clear process, a project I think well developed and thought through. We just haven’t flown off and decided to do this ... we’ve got a good solid program which will work and it is showing already this year that it is working in a significant way. Now given all that I still don’t understand why the government can’t make what is a very, very small investment.

(Principal, December 2003)

It becomes a tension all the time. And as you get closer to deadlines that tension builds and that’s where we are at, at the moment. Because we are desperately trying to get the Centre accredited so that we can accommodate the girls we have on our books for next year... It was that gamble all the way. Do you wait until you have got the funding before you do anything or do you do it, show the effects and the impact that it’s having and use that as a justification?

(Principal, December 03)
Project Staff Speak About YPAP

They’re doing a great job and I take my hat off to all of them because they’re... really energetic, they’re passionate about what they want to do. Their ideals of where they want their life to go and the life they want to have... for their children, is just amazing.

(Project Worker, December 2003)

I think DHS has been brilliant for their input and looking at how we can link this in... this is your project how can we link in. How can we help you guys, how does that assist other agencies in the area. Heaps of interest and we’ve had partnerships from the start with quite a few different agencies.

(Project Worker, November 2003)

They [government] are identifying it’s a great idea but they’ve definitely gone well we’re not really going to win it, that’s yours, you need to take responsibility...

( Project Worker, November 2003)

... It’s really hard I mean they’ll interview people and you say a lot of things... but then they choose to put what they choose to put in. And I guess there’s been times when we’ve... been almost misconstrued... and we have been very, very careful about how we want to portray these girls.

(Project Worker, November 2003)

They just might not have the study skills. Since they’ve left school at Year 10. I mean really up until Year 10 what sort of study did you really have to do and it’s really hitting Year 11 and 12 that you’ve got to put your head down. You’ve got to do homework, you’ve got to actually study. You’ve got to learn all those things. So a lot of them have come back as mature adults and you sort of mature in so many ways but maybe don’t have those certain skills. So you’re looking at where you are at and what can we offer.

(Project Worker, November 2003)

Even if...[move into further study] doesn’t happen these young women have grown and developed as people, as parents, so much in the last year...it won’t have been that they haven’t gotten something out of this and I am sure if they don’t this year they will return to try again.

(Parent Support Worker, September 03)

When it’s all on site ... I think it enables them to ease the separation anxiety ... because they know that when they’re at recess, got spares or at lunch they can access the centre and check on their child. I think it also in a way it assists the other students in the school to see what being parents is like. The stresses and challenges that it puts on your life.

(Parent Support Worker, September 03)
Notes

1 YPAP Briefing (nd)
2 Young mum #1 (2002)
3 Project worker (2003)
4 Principal (2002)
5 Brady (1999)
6 Brady (1999)
7 Mukherjee (1997)
8 Personal Communication Centrelink (2001)
9 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001)
10 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001)
11 Kirby (2000)
12 Social Exclusion Unit (1999)
13 Brindis and Philliber (1998)
14 Social Exclusion Unit (1999)
15 Hobcraft & Kiernan (cited in Social Exclusion Unit 1999)
16 Brindis and Philliber (1998)
17 Osofsky, Osofsky & Diamond (1998)
18 Osofsky, Osofsky & Diamond (1998, p.209)
19 Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn & Morgan (1987, p.141)
20 Social Exclusion Unit (1999)
21 Brindis & Philliber (1998)
22 Social Exclusion Unit (1999)
23 Furstenberg et al (1987 p.146)
24 Weatherley (1991 p.21)
26 Social Exclusion Unit (1999)
27 Barth, Schinke & Maxwell (1985 cited ibid)
28 Polit (1992 p.3)
29 Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie (1998)
31 Hey (1997)
32 Hardy & Zabin (cited in Brindis & Philliber 1998)
33 Boulden (2000)
36 Brindis & Philliber (1998)
38 Polit (1992)
39 Bos & Fellarath (1997 p.121)
40 Weatherley (1991 p.22-23)
41 Brindis & Philliber (1998, p. 245)
42 DeJong & Cottrell (1999 p.44)
43 see Smyth et al (2000) for example
44 Kirby (2000, p.55)
45 Hardy & Zabin (cited Brindis & Philliber 1998)
46 ABC (2003)
47 ABC (2003)
48 ABC (2003)
49 ABC (2003)
50 ibid
51 ibid
52 ibid
53 ibid
54 ibid
55 SGR LLEN Environmental Scan
56 YPAP Briefing (n.d.)
57 ABC (2003)
58 Office of Housing (2002)
59 ibid p.3
60 Office of Housing (2002, p.3)
62 Ball, Maguire & Macrae (2000); Dwyer & Wyn (2001)
63 All names are pseudonyms
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