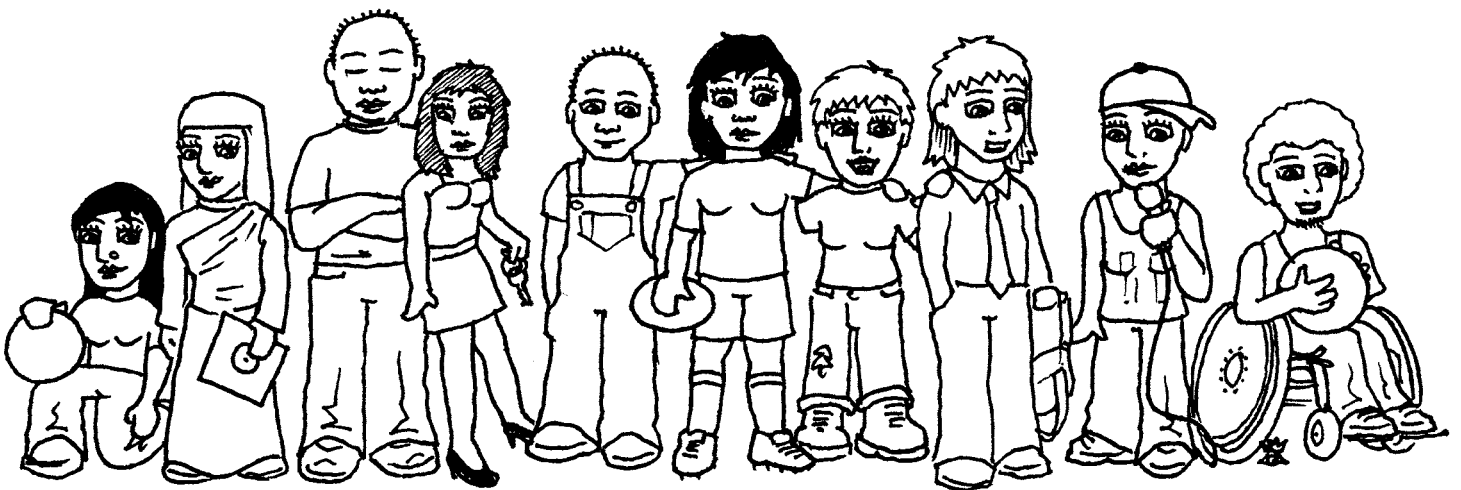


Opening the doors

*A 'Do It Yourself' Access and Equity manual
for working with young people*



*Produced by YAPA and the Access Project Reference Group
for the Nepean Better Futures Strategy*

Opening the Doors

This is one chapter of **Opening the Doors**. The other chapters are:

- What is Access and Equity?
- What does the law require me to do about Access & Equity?
- What does my funding body require me to do about Access & Equity?
- Young people with a disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender young people
- Early school leavers
- Rural and geographically isolated young people
- Young women
- Young parents
- Refugee and migrant young people
- Young people with mental health issues
- Young people involved with the juvenile justice system

Opening the Doors is only available online. You can:

- browse the publication in a series of web pages
- download individual chapters as PDF files
- download the whole publication as a PDF (large file: 2.4 MB – broadband recommended).

www.yapa.org.au/openingdoors

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Disclaimer: This manual is a general guide for NSW services designed specifically for the Nepean Region (Blue Mountains Penrith & Hawkesbury). The producers of the manual took reasonable care to ensure that all information was correct as of 2005. However government regulations, laws and standards are complex and do change over time. This document is not intended as legal advice. You should seek clarification on legal matters through other publications and authorities.

How to use the checklists

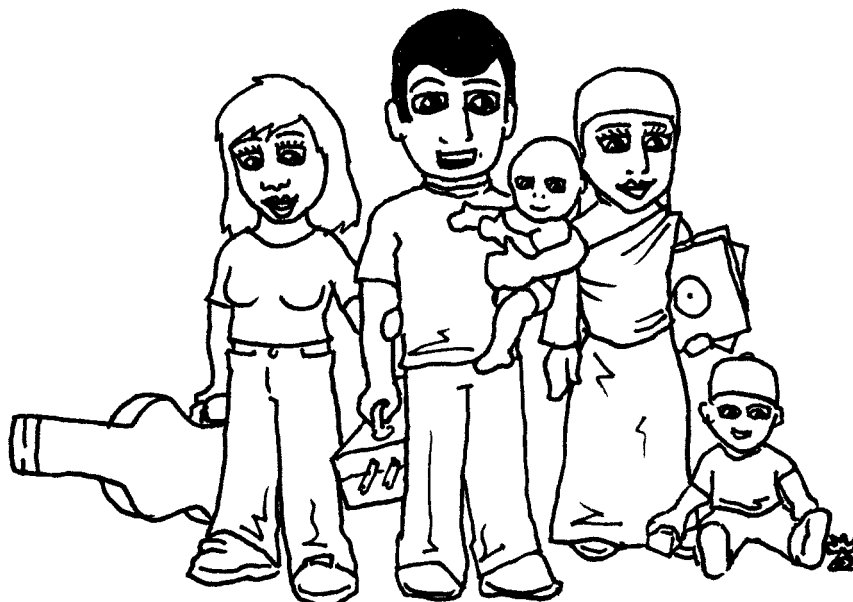
We have developed some checklists to get you thinking about how your service is performing on access and equity issues.

It is best if you can work through these activities with your management committee or staff team, but you can also do these activities by yourself.

Steps

1. Read through each checklist and answer yes or no to each question
2. You now have some guidelines for what you are doing well (your yes responses) and some goals for how you can improve (your no responses)
3. Prioritise each of your no responses
4. Choose 3 – 5 goals to work on in the next month and write a plan of how and when you will achieve them. You may want to include your plans in your work plan or strategic plan.
5. Once you have achieved one of your goals you can record your action as a new achievement and choose another goal from the remaining items on your list.
6. Keep other people, including your management committee, informed of your progress and share good ideas and examples with your colleagues and your youth network.

WORKING WITH ... YOUNG PARENTS



DEFINITION

This section refers to young women and young men who are parents.

DEMOGRAPHICS

There has been a steady decrease in the number of young women having children over the past three decades.

Proportion of young women who give birth each year - In 1971, 5.5% of young women aged 19 years or younger gave birth. In 2001 only 1.8% of this age group gave birth. ²

Proportion of births by young women - Birth rates vary widely across NSW. In 2002, only 0.6% of all births in Northern Sydney were to young mothers aged 12-19 years, while 14.1% of all births in the Far West were to young mothers aged 12-19 years. ¹⁸

In the Nepean area 4.8% of all births in 2002 were to young mothers aged 12-19 years. ¹⁸

Across Australia, the number of young women and young men becoming parents in 2003 was as follows: ³

Age	Number of Australian young women becoming mothers in 2003	Number of Australian young men becoming fathers in 2003
15 and under	375	62
16 years	949	168
17 years	1906	473
18 years	3001	993
19 years	4512	1688
Total number of teenagers	10,743	3,384

Around 12% of young mothers in NSW are married at the time of giving birth. NSW has the highest proportion of married young mothers in Australia. ²



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About half of all teenage births are to women who are married or living in a de facto relationship, and about half are to single mothers. ¹

Young women in rural areas are more likely to become teenager mothers, and more likely to be married or in a long term de facto relationship. ²¹

TERMINOLOGY

Acceptable words for referring to young people who are parents are *young parents*, *young mums*, *young mothers*, *young dads*, and *young fathers*.

OVERVIEW OF THE NEEDS AND ISSUES

Pregnancy confirmation and continuation

Some young women plan to become pregnant and some fall pregnant without planning to do so. ^{5, 7, 19}

A large factor contributing to teenage pregnancy is lack of knowledge about contraception and/or lack of access to contraception. About half of all young women who fall pregnant will terminate their pregnancy. ^{9, 15, 21}

In a study of over 1,000 young mothers (ie. those who continued a pregnancy) in NSW and ACT, 22% stated that their pregnancy was planned, 66% felt happy when they learnt of their pregnancy and 92% felt happy about the decision to continue the pregnancy ²¹

Young women who suspect they may be pregnant may delay confirming their pregnancy because they face barriers in accessing health services or have concerns about their confidentiality being maintained. ¹⁷

Young people may not realise that they are eligible for their own Medicare card from the age of 15 and may believe that they have to ask their parents to use the family Medicare card and face questions as to why they want to access a doctor.

There are lower rates of bulk-billing services in rural areas so young women may be required to pay the full cost of accessing a GP upfront. Many young women may prefer to see a female GP for advice, however it can be difficult to see a female GP in rural areas as they make up only a quarter of all rural GPs. There are also far fewer women's health services in rural areas. ^{17, 20}

It can be very difficult for young women in small or rural communities to confirm their pregnancy in a confidential way because they may be seen by others they know entering or leaving health services or purchasing a pregnancy confirmation kit from the chemist. ^{17, 21}

Some young women may fear telling their parents about their pregnancy and delay sharing this information until they are questioned about their weight gain or until later in the pregnancy. ^{6, 21}

The delay in seeking a confirmation of pregnancy or seeking pre-natal care contributes to poorer health outcomes for both mothers and babies. ⁶

There are many reasons why young women choose to have a child, these reasons may include:

- choice
- lack of information or access to contraception or pregnancy termination
- low career or educational aspirations
- unemployment, leading to a view



of motherhood as an alternative achievement

- lack of love and support from their own families leading them to have a child who they can love and who will love them in return
- peer or family modelling of young parenthood as a normal or positive decision.
- to feel a sense of worth or accomplishment.

15, 17

Young women at a higher risk of becoming young mothers

Young women who experience poverty, disadvantage or disengagement from education are far more likely to become young mothers than their peers.^{10, 15, 21}

Indigenous teenagers are five times more likely to become mothers than their non-Indigenous peers.^{6, 16}

Is young motherhood a disadvantage?

The outcomes of young motherhood vary depending on the age at which the young woman has her first child, her level of educational achievement and the level of support from friends and family.

Women who become mothers in their teenage years are far more likely to experience poverty, unemployment and low educational attainment than those who become mothers in their twenties.¹⁰

There is a tendency for people, including service providers, to see young parenthood as a negative occurrence, yet many of our own parents and grandparents had children

at a young age. Society's view of young parenthood has changed over time.

Despite the challenges that parenthood brings, the experience is a positive one for many young parents. They cherish their role as a parent and find joy and happiness from loving their child.

Best practice involves focusing on young parents who are isolated, experiencing poverty and disadvantage, or have limited education.

Negative community reactions

Young mothers can face negative stereotypes and harassment from other people in the community and fear that they will be seen as bad parents. They face both direct and indirect discrimination.^{6, 19}

Education

For young people the successful transition from education to employment is a critical one. Young parenthood often disrupts this transition and can lead to an increase in poverty and disadvantage in the future.

Young women who are pregnant often drop out of school due to reasons such as the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum, feeling out of place, not knowing about the support and flexibility that the school can offer, difficulty in securing child care and lack of support at home.⁹

In Western Sydney the retention rate of young mothers in school is around 37%. This figure varies widely depending on the level of support and information offered by the school and the time of year that birth takes place.⁹

Most schools do not have a policy on young mothers and a small number of schools



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may choose to keep the issue quiet, thereby encouraging the student to leave.⁹

Schools which offer basic support such as counselling, information on education options and general support have a retention rate of around 28%.⁹

Schools which offer proactive and additional support such as developing links and relationships with the student's family, allowing maternity leave for students with structured work goals and assisting students to find child care have a much higher retention rate of 88%.⁹

The provision of information to all students, not just pregnant students, about options and support leads to a much higher retention rate. Not all students will inform the school of the pregnancy, and students and their families may assume that the student has no other choice but to leave school. These students will be unaware of their options unless a system is in place to give information to all students.⁹

Many young women have already disconnected from school before they become pregnant.^{5, 10, 12}

The experience of motherhood usually leads to an increase in motivation and commitment to education and employment goals to provide a better future for children. However these goals become more difficult to attain without affordable and accessible transport and childcare.^{10, 12}

Pre- and post-natal support

Young parents may decide not to participate in *pre-natal* (before the birth) and *post-natal* (after the birth) classes and groups because of a fear of being judged by other participants for their age. When young parents do attend

they may find it difficult to relate to others in the group due to differences in their ages and life experiences.^{11, 15}

Information about services

It can be difficult for young parents to find out about services that are available to assist them. Regular points of contact such as doctors and hospitals may not have a system in place for distributing information about community services.^{11, 15}

Information about parenting

All parents need practical and accessible information and support about raising their child, on topics such as nutrition, health care and normal behavioural milestones. Usually this type of information is provided by family members, friends and health services. However many young parents may not receive this kind of support. For example, young women receive less advice about breastfeeding, and subsequently young mothers are less likely to breastfeed their babies than older parents.⁶

Support groups such as mothers groups and play groups typically provide a space where mothers gain baby care advice from professionals and each other. Young mums may not participate in these groups due to difficulties with transport, fear of being judged for their age or fear of being seen as a bad mother.¹¹

There are many baby care manuals but the cost and literacy levels required to use these puts them out of reach of some of the parents who need them most.¹⁵

Access to services

Many services only offer centre-based activities, services and appointments. Young



parents not only have to find out about what services are available but also have to make transport and child care arrangements in order to be able to use the service. There is a need for outreach services that go to places, services and communities where young parents already are.

Access to social support

Young mothers often find themselves socially isolated from their peers. Social support networks that existed prior to the birth may not continue to the same extent because young mothers cannot go out with their friends in the same way that they did before the birth. Young mothers, just like everyone else, need friends and peers to spend time with, unwind with and relate to. Your service can help young mums maintain and develop their social support networks. ^{7,9}

Transport

In many areas, particularly those areas that have low cost housing, public transport is often unavailable. Where transport is available it can be expensive or very difficult to negotiate with a child, pram, shopping etc. Without adequate, affordable and accessible transport it is very difficult for young mothers to keep in close contact with their family and friends. Many young mums are “stuck at home” as a result. ^{7,11}

Young parents usually do not have access to private transport because the minimum age for a P plate licence is 17 years and many do not have the financial resources to own a motor vehicle. It can be difficult to rely on family and friends for reliable transport to education and employment. ⁹

Housing

Affordable housing can be difficult to secure because there are long waiting lists for public housing and private rental properties are expensive and often only available on 12 month lease. ²²

Some young mothers experience difficulties securing stable accommodation, most youth refuges do not accept young mothers. Catherine Villa and Glen Mervyn are two of the few accommodation services available (see contact details at the end of this section). ⁷

Child care

Most young parents haven't used child care before the birth of their first child. There is a lack of awareness about child care services such as occasional care services and many of these services are too expensive for young parents.

Lack of affordable child care is a major barrier to young parents accessing education and employment opportunities. ⁹

Income support

The level of income support for young mothers is very low and many families struggle to meet the basic costs of raising a child such as rent, food, clothes etc.

Recreation

Young mothers have the same needs as other young people, such as the need for recreation, to be able to go out, unwind and have fun. This is difficult because young mothers who can arrange child care are often viewed as “abandoning their child”. ^{6, 15}



Relationship with the child's father

Some young mothers live with the father of the child, some live apart but continue the relationship, and for some the relationship has broken down. Where a relationship still exists the addition of a child can bring stress to the relationship. When a relationship breaks down the young mother will probably still need to maintain contact with the father for access visits, and this can be a cause of stress for all involved.

Post-natal depression

Many young mothers experienced post-natal depression. It is 3 times more likely among young mothers, with around 40% affected. Post-natal depression often goes untreated in young mothers as they feel they can't discuss it due to negative stereotypes and fear of being seen as a bad parent or not coping.¹⁵

Self image

Many young mothers experience a loss of confidence and self esteem. Their role as an individual is lost and replaced by a role defined in relation to their child. There is a need for recognition of the skills, abilities and dreams of the young woman as an individual.

Needs of young fathers

Young fathers face many of the same issues as young mothers, however they are unlikely to face these issues to the same extent as young mothers unless they are the primary care giver.

For example a father who is not the primary care giver is unlikely to face the same levels of social discrimination and barriers to education and employment.

However all young fathers are in need of support. Young fathers may feel socially isolated or different from than their peers. While some young mothers may feel comfortable in talking about parenting issues with their non-parenting peers it is less likely than young fathers will be able to talk about these issues with their non-parenting male friends.²⁰

There are extremely limited opportunities for young men to access support groups specifically for young fathers. Young fathers may feel uncomfortable in attending other programs, such as play groups, if they are the only young person or only man in attendance.

PRACTICAL TIPS

Benefits of working with young parents

Resilience is strongly related to feelings of connection.¹⁰

Your service can take active steps in building and strengthening connections between young parents and:

- the wider community
- peer and family support
- support services
- education and employment opportunities.

By working with young parents your service can help them reach greater independence and stability and improve their connections to their community and to their life goals.

There are many benefits of early intervention for children. Research has revealed that the first three years of life is absolutely fundamental to lifelong wellbeing.



Children of young parents may be socially isolated. They may be the only child in the household and may not have opportunities to socialise with other children. Activities such as play groups increase their social, motor and communication skills as they mix with other children.

Activities which allow parents and children to get out of the house and have a break from each other provide time out and help improve their relationship.

As parents make new friends their self esteem and confidence increases and they feel more confident in their parenting ability.

For your existing programs

- Advertise your program in places that young parents access, such as doctors surgeries, Centrelink, hospital, shops and in local newspapers.
- Provide free onsite child care, as this is an essential component in reaching young parents. By providing a positive first experience of child care you can help young parents feel comfortable in accessing other child care options in the future.
- Provide free transport to your venue or move your activity to a place that young parents can access.
- Involve young parents in decision making about your service.
- Include fun and social activities in your program. These type of activities will help parents to develop a friendship network and increase their feelings of confidence, self esteem and the ability to cope.

- Ensure your service feels comfortable to young parents and is non-judgemental.
- Ensure your venue has facilities which are friendly to young parents such as ramps for prams and baby change facilities.
- Promote positive images and positive examples of young parents who have achieved.

If you are developing a group just for young parents, for example a young mums group

- As a first step talk to and develop partnerships with local people who have contact with young mums such as:
 - Families First services
 - baby care nurses
 - doctors
 - Centrelink social workers
 - women's health service
 - youth health service or community health centre
- Promote your program in a positive way that is likely to appeal to young parents.
- Conduct home visits and phone calls, in line with your service's policies. YAPA has a model policy on home visiting at www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies .
- Ask young parents what topics they would like covered in the group. Some of the topics which may be useful are baby care topics with advice from a qualified professional, education options for young mums, nutrition, immunisation, healthy relationships, relaxation techniques, fun activities and excursions to useful services such as TAFE, the library etc.



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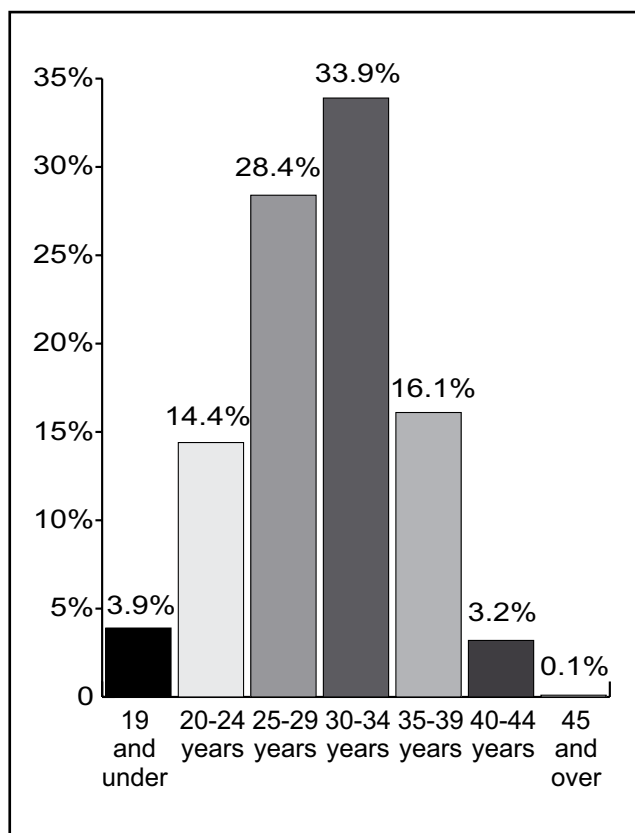
Programs can focus on the strengths that young parents have, promoting what they can do and achieve rather than what they can't.

- Link young parents to further education and employment. For example, TAFE Outreach can provide a free course in your venue.

COMMON MYTHS

Myth 1: A high proportion of women giving birth are teenagers.

Less than 4% of all births in 2003 were to young women aged 19 years or younger, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.³



Graph 1: Age of women giving birth in 2003

Myth 2: A high proportion of (sole) parent payment recipients are teenagers.

Less than 5% of all (sole) Parenting Payments are to teenagers.

It is commonly believed that the introduction of the (sole) Parent Payment has led to an increase in teenage pregnancy, however the facts stand in direct contradiction to this argument. The Sole Parent Payment was introduced in 1973 and there has been a very marked decrease in the teenage pregnancy rate in the three decades since its introduction.²⁰

It is commonly believed that sole parents stay on the payment for many, many years, however the average duration is 3.3 years. In addition, sole parents are the most active of all welfare recipients in seeking work. Sole parents face a number of barriers to gaining employment such as lack of affordable child care and lack of family friendly work agreements such as length of working hours.¹³

Young parents

How accessible is your service?

Use this checklist to identify how you can improve your service for young parents.

Needs analysis

Your service specifically consults young parents about their needs as young parents Yes No

Promotion

Your service advertises your program in places which young parents access Yes No

Access

Your service provides transport or outreaches to areas where young parents are. Yes No

Your venue has facilities for young parents such as ramps for prams and baby change facilities Yes No

Your service provides free on site child care for programs Yes No

Image of young parents

Your service promotes positive images and examples of young parents . . . Yes No

Information

Your service promotes information about contraception, Medicare cards, bulk billing services and free health services for young people Yes No

Your service has information available about other services for young parents. Yes No

Networks

Your service has partnerships with services who work with young parents. Yes No

Your service refers young parents to young parent programs Yes No

Your service works with local schools in supporting young mothers to remain in education Yes No

Your service links young parents to further education and employment opportunities Yes No



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Contact Services

Services in the Nepean

Young Mums Group, Nepean Interyouth

Phone: (02) 47 22 3811

Address: Cnr Henri & Station Street,
Penrith

Email: youth@pnc.com.au

Description: A young mums group for young mothers aged 15-24 years

Parenting Young, Mountains Outreach Community Services

Phone: (02) 4759 2354

Web: www.pnc.com.au/~mocs

Description: The pregnancy and parenting support group provides opportunities to meet other young people who are expecting their first child or have recently given birth. Discussions are held on topics such as newborn care, what to expect during labour, developing a birth plan, breast and bottle feeding, normal infant behaviour and development. A midwife and community nurse attend each fortnight.

The support group provides children's activities for parents and children to participate in together. Each month parents do a craft activity or invite a guest speaker to the group. It's a great opportunity to make new friendships.

Fathers Plus - Young Fathers /New Fathers, Relationships Australia – Family Skills Training Program

Phone: (02) 4731 6744

Description: This project will improve new and young fathers access to existing support services.

Families First Nepean

Phone: Families First Community
Project Officer, (02) 47 321 322

Address: 329-331 High St, Penrith

Web: [http://203.147.192.57/public/
s35_publications/default.aspx](http://203.147.192.57/public/s35_publications/default.aspx)

Description: Families First is a coordinated

strategy sponsored by the NSW Government to increase the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention services in helping families to raise healthy well adjusted children.

Early intervention and prevention is the key focus of all of the Families First programs. They are designed to improve family functioning, reduce stress, help parents build networks, access support and address potential problems before they get out of hand.

St Clair Community Project

Address: PO Box 81, St Clair

Description: This project will employ a family project worker to consult with young families in the St Clair and surrounding area to identify local support and information needs. The project will develop appropriate strategies to increase access for families, (including families from culturally and diverse linguistic background) to existing playgroups and information. The project will also increase access to support for fathers.

Mission Australia at North St Mary's Neighbourhood Centre

Phone: (02) 9673 3908

Address: Debrincat St North St Mary's

Description: A Young Parent's Network for women under 25 years old. Activities include practical topics related to baby care and recreational activities.

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Project Elizabeth, Centacare

Phone: (02) 4721 5331

Address: 12-16 Richmond Rd, Kingswood

Email: centakwd@bigpond.net.au

Description: This service:

- provides a comprehensive pregnancy related counselling service for women and girls
- offers outreach through home visits and hospital visits for women and girls
- assists women and girls to reduce the "risk" of having physical or emotional problems caused by lack of emotional support before, during and in the months following the birth of their children
- increases women's and girls' awareness of appropriate management of children 0-2 years old
- offers a "Young Mums" Group for women up to 25 years of age who are pregnant or who are parents
- establishes and maintains links for women and mothers with existing services and community networks.

Young Mum's Support Group, South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Services

Phone: 02 4721 5024

Address: PO Box 627, Penrith, NSW,

Web: www.spyns.org.au

Description: A Young Mums Support Group which provides young women who have children or are pregnant with information on various issues relevant to them, namely child health and development, parenting, healthy relationships, stress management and income support.

Other services for young mothers

Catherine Villa Accommodation Units, Centacare

Phone: (02) 9837 2095

Address: 23 Pentland St, Quakers Hill

Description: Catherine Villa provides: accommodation (supported) and living / baby skills development for homeless young mothers and children and single young mothers outreach program: home visits, living and baby skills development, groups and community resourcing.

Glen Mervyn Young Women's Health Program

Phone: (02) 9398 3519

Address: PO Box 627, Randwick

Email: nswgmervyn-ywp@redcross.org.au

Description: The 'Glen Mervyn' Young Women's Health Program offers a three-phased accommodation, support and education program for young women under 18 who are pregnant or have a child, are homeless and require intensive support.

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