

The Teen Parents Support Programme

Summary of Work 2017



Introduction The Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) consists of eleven separate projects funded by Tusla Child and Family Agency and the HSE and are located throughout the country in a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations (see TPSP contact details at the end of this Summary).

Each project offers interventions that promote and enhance the well-being of pregnant and parenting teens and their children. As part of an interagency approach to family support, TPSP staff begin their engagement with the young people at a critical early point of pregnancy/parenthood. They then work with them to build their capacity both as young parents and as adolescents moving towards early adulthood.

During 2017 there were 353 new referrals to the TPSP, an increase of 10% since 2016. This brings to 7,153 the number of young parents who, together with their children, partners and families, have received this service since the TPSP was established in 2000. One of the aspirations of the TPSP is that eventually all teen parents in Ireland will have access to this model of support.

The TPSP works with young people who become parents when they are aged 19 years or under and, where needed, supports them until their children are 2 years of age.

Support is offered in all areas of the young person's life – parenting, health, relationships, education, training, childcare, housing, social welfare entitlements, legal issues and anything else about which the young person is concerned.

Grandparents and other family members involved with the young parents may also be supported.

Young people may make contact directly with the TPSP. Referrals are also made by professionals and anyone interested in the welfare of the young parent and his/her child.

The main aim of the TPSP is to provide early interventions, which are needs-led and outcome focused, to enhance and support the wellbeing of all young parents and their children, empower young parents in their parenting role and ensure equality of opportunity for parent and child.

Young parents whose needs are located at Levels 3 and 4 on the Hardiker scale are also supported with specific additional interventions (such as support with parenting skills or independent living) as part of an interagency approach to family support.

In 2017, 30% of all new referrals to the TPSP had needs located at Hardiker Level 3 and 3% of all new referrals had needs located at Hardiker Level 4.

Summary of Teen Births in Ireland 2007-2017

Number of Births and Fertility Rates* for Women under 20 Years of Age

Year	Number of Births	Fertility Rate*
2007	2,464	17.5
2008	2,426	17.0
2009	2,223	16.3
2010	2,019	15.0
2011	1,720	12.5
2012	1,639	12.2
2013	1,381	10.4
2014	1,253	9.3
2015	1,187	8.7
2016	1,098	7.8
2017	1,041	6.9

Sources: CSO Vital Statistics, Yearly Summary 2017

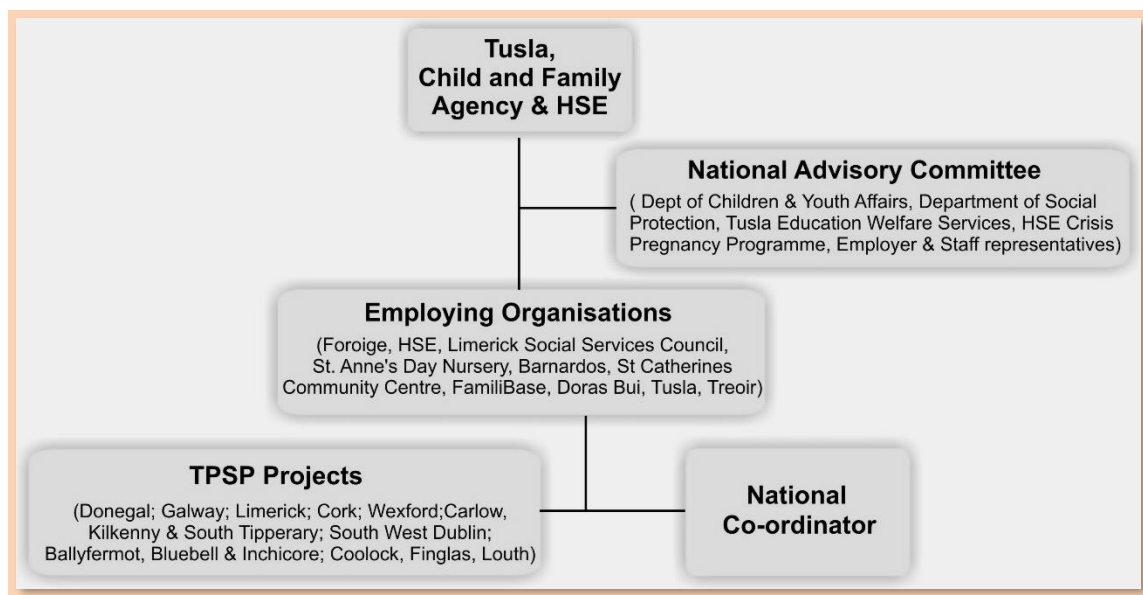
*Fertility rate is the number of live births per 1000 women aged between 15 and 20 years.

Over the past decade the number of births to mothers under 20 years of age in Ireland has more than halved. When compared to European counterparts, however, the birth rate to teens in Ireland remains 'high to middling' (HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme, National Strategy 2012-2016). Source: <http://www.crisispregnancy.ie>.

In 2017, when the births to teen mothers were registered, 124 mothers (12%) were described by the CSO as married or in a civil partnership and an additional 198 mothers (22%) were described as living at the same address as the father of their child.

In 2017, fourteen pregnant and parenting mothers aged 15 years and under were referred to the TPSP for support. This compares with 19 births to young mothers aged 15 and under in 2017. In 2017, thirty-eight pregnant and parenting mothers aged 16 years of age were referred to the TPSP. This compares with 54 births in 2017 to mothers aged 16 years.

Structure of the Teen Parents Support Programme



Summary of contact in 2017 with young parents and their families

- 950** The number of young parents, their children and other family members who were offered support in 2017
- 353** The number who presented for support for the first time:
- 311 mothers
 - 41 fathers
 - 1 grandfather
- 12** The number who had engaged with the service previously and presented again for support in 2017. These were all young mothers.
- 298** The number who were referred in earlier years and continued to receive support during 2017 and into 2018:
- 273 mothers
 - 13 fathers
 - 11 grandmothers
 - 1 other family member
- 283** The number of young parents and other family members for whom support ended in 2017:
- 253 mothers
 - 27 fathers
 - 2 grandparents
 - 1 other family members

In addition, in 2017, as a result of the mother/father of their child engaging with the projects the TPSP had some contact with **363** other young parents:

- 295 fathers
- 68 mothers

The Table on the next page presents a profile of the 311 young mothers and 41 fathers at the point when they first engaged with the TPSP.

For the purpose of this Summary 'social care history' refers to current or previous engagement with Tusla Family Support Services, including young people currently or previously in care.

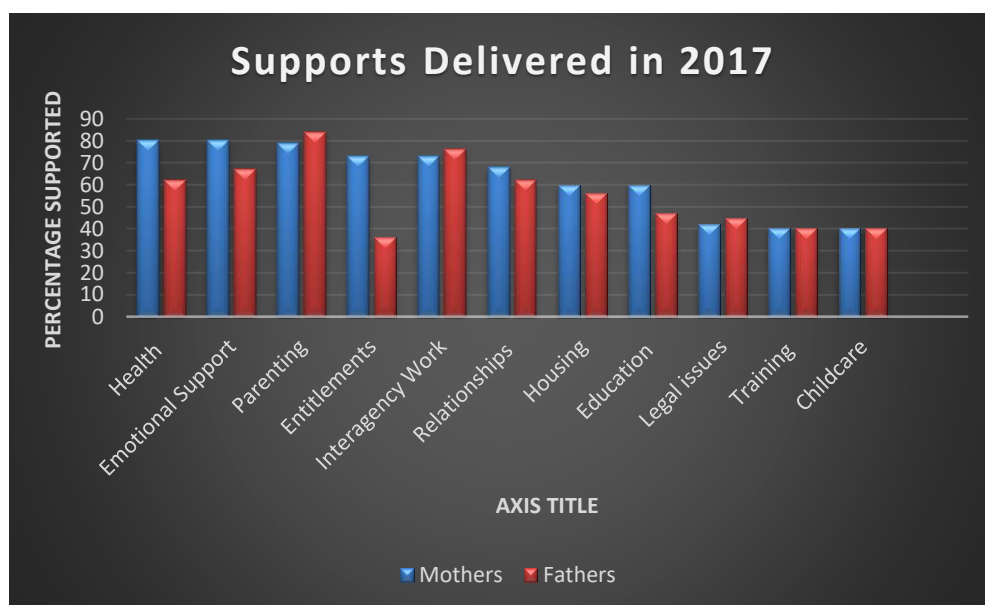
Care must be taken when interpreting Tables and Charts in this Summary due to the differences in the number of mothers and fathers involved.



Profile of young parents at time of referral to TPSP in 2017

Percentages are based on known data.

Characteristic	Category	Mothers (311)		Fathers (41)	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Age	15 or under	14	5	1	0
	16	38	12	5	15
	17	53	17	3	20
	18	78	25	8	20
	19	91	29	10	25
	Over 19	37	12	28	20
Level of Need	Hardiker 2	176	61	28	70
	Hardiker 3	100	35	12	30
	Hardiker 4	11	4	1	0
	Not known when data was collected	24			
Social Care History	Yes	94	41	6	25
	No	134	59	18	75
	Not known when data was collected	83		17	
Education/Training Status	In Education/Training	90	35	16	55
	Not in Education/Training	165	65	23	45
	Not known when data was collected	56		2	
Highest Educational Attainment	Third Level	0	0	1	3
	PLC	6	3	1	3
	Leaving Certificate	74	32	13	40
	Junior Certificate only	122	53	14	42
	Non-Irish qualification	6	3	0	0
	Other qualification	3	1	1	3
	No Certification	18	8	3	9
	Not known when data was collected	82		8	
Housing	Living in mother's family home	168	60	1	2
	Living in father's family home	26	9	26	64
	Living with other family member	21	7	4	10
	In care	9	3	0	0
	Private Rented-no assistance	11	4	3	8
	Private rented-HAP/Supplement	20	7	1	2
	Living with friends	4	2	4	10
	Homeless accommodation	9	3	1	2
	Supported accommodation	4	2	0	0
	Refuge	2	1	0	0
	Direct Provision	1	1	0	0
	Halting Site	3	1	0	0
	Other	3		1	2
	Not known when data was collected	30			
Background	Irish	216	77	32	80
	Irish Traveller	31	11	1	2
	African	7	2	0	0
	Eastern European	17	6	2	5
	Other European	4	2	1	3
	Asian	3	1	2	5
	South American	3	1	2	5
	Not known when data was collected	30		1	
Location	Urban	218	70	28	68
	Rural	93	32	13	32



The Chart above refers to 650 pregnant or parenting teens (595 mothers and 55 fathers) who either:

- engaged for the first time in 2017
- had engaged previously and needed to re-establish contact with TPSP in 2017 or
- were referred in previous years and were receiving ongoing support in 2017.

The Chart shows, in percentage terms, the areas in which these young parents received support in 2017. While most support was delivered on a one-to-one basis, where opportunities arose TPSP staff organised Groups and Programmes, including evidence-based parenting programmes, for young parents (fathers as well as mothers) either on an ongoing basis or in response to specific identified needs.

The TPSP works in close partnership with all local institutions, agencies and services available to a young parent such as family support services, health services, schools, housing agencies and relevant non-governmental agencies. This partnership takes the form of collaboration and mutual referral systems. In 2017, the TPSP liaised with other agencies on behalf of 74% of all its service users. For young mothers, in order of frequency, most contact took place with the following: Tusla Family Support Services (including social workers, aftercare workers and Meitheal); Local Authorities & Housing Agencies; Maternity Services; educational institutions (2nd level and 3rd level institutions, combined), Department of Social Protection representatives (formerly CWOs); Training Organisations; Public Health Nurses; Counselling Services and Childcare Providers. There was also contact with Youth Services, services for those who are victims of domestic violence and CICs.

For young fathers, in order of frequency, most contact took place with the following: Training Organisations, Tusla Family Support Services (including social workers and Meitheal); Secondary Schools; Local Authorities & Housing Agencies; Counselling Services and Maternity Services. There was also contact with DSP representatives (formerly CWOs), Addiction Services and Disability Services.

The above Chart includes 160 service users from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. These include 49 Irish Travellers, 12 young mothers who identified as being from the Roma community as well as 18 young parents who were originally from Africa. These young people received additional support with accessing services, understanding Irish birth and parenting practices, resolving dual cultural issues (where parents are from different ethnic backgrounds) as well as support in relation to entitlements and habitual residence requirements.

Outcomes for parents whose contact with the TPSP ended in 2017

During 2017, a total of 283 service users ceased contact with the TPSP. These consisted of 253 young mothers, 27 fathers and 3 other family members. The following Table gives a short profile of the young mothers and fathers including their ages at time of referral, levels of need at time of referral and when support ceased; accommodation at time of referral and when support ceased as well as the reasons why support ceased.

Characteristic	Category	Mothers (253)		Fathers (27)	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Age at time of referral	15 years or under	14	6	0	0
	16 years	27	11	3	11
	17 years	59	23	4	15
	18 years	58	22	3	11
	19 years	70	28	7	26
	Over 19 years	25	10	10	37
Level of Need at time of referral	Hardiker 1	0	0	0	0
	Hardiker 2	161	63	17	63
	Hardiker 3	75	30	9	33
	Hardiker 4	17	7	1	4
Level of Need when support ceased	Hardiker 1	16	6	2	7
	Hardiker 2	179	71	20	74
	Hardiker 3	51	20	5	19
	Hardiker 4	7	3		
Accommodation at time of referral	Living in family home	173	68	20	74
	Living with other family member	18	7	3	11
	Home of child's other parent	14	6	0	0
	Private rented accommodation	26	10	3	11
	In care	11	5	0	0
	Homeless	6	2	0	0
	Refuge	0	0	0	0
	Supported accommodation	0	0	1	0
	Direct Provision	2	1	0	0
	Other	3	1	1	4
Accommodation when support ceased	Living in family home	128	55	17	63
	Living with other family member	6	2	3	11
	Home of child's other parent	16	7	0	0
	Private rented accommodation	55	24	4	15
	In care	2	1	0	0
	Homeless	10	4	2	0
	Own Home-Local Authority	7	3	0	0
	Supported accommodation	5	2	0	7
	Direct Provision	2	1	0	0
	Other	1	1	1	4
	Not known when data was collected	21			
Reasons support ceased	Needs were met	86	34	13	48
	Child >2 and needs partially met	27	11	2	7
	Referred to other support	16	6	1	4
	Moved out of area	28	11	1	4
	Did not avail of service	46	18	4	15
	Parent ceased contact	47	18	6	22
	Other	3	1	0	0



Education and Training

The TPSP places particular emphasis on supporting young parents to complete their education, if that is their choice. Alongside support with parenting, this enables them to focus on their own development as young people and contributes to future equality of opportunity for parent and child. During the 2016/17 academic year, 8 of the 11 TPSPs received funding from the School Completion Programme (SCP) through Tusla's Education Welfare Services. The aim of the SCP is to increase the numbers of young people staying in primary and second level school and in doing so improve the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle, or the equivalent.

<http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services>

Supports funded through the SCP included contributions towards childcare, grinds, books, transport and uniforms. TPSP staff also organised revision groups, peer support groups, personal development courses, pre-vocational taster programmes and guidance counselling. In addition, all the young parents known to have a childcare need received information and support in relation to accessing childcare which would enable them to complete their education.

Educational outcomes for young parents who engaged with the TPSP

In 2017, TPSP support ceased for 253 young mothers and 27 young fathers. The following table compares their highest educational attainment when they were first referred to the TPSP and when contact ceased in 2017.

Highest Educational Attainment	When referred to the TPSP		When support ceased in 2017	
	Mothers (253)	Fathers (27)	Mothers (253)	Fathers (27)
Completed 3 rd Level Education	0	0	5	0
Completed PLC Course	10	1	30	2
Completed Leaving Certificate	65	3	86	8
Completed Junior Cert only	84	9	49	8
No 2nd Level Qualification	16	4	16	2
Non-Irish Qualification	7	0	7	0
Completed Other Training	25	10	23	7
Not known***	46	0	37	0

***refers to those who were on a waiting list when data was collected, had not engaged with the service, had engaged and then ceased contact or those whose non-Irish qualifications were unclear.

Jessica

Her Public Health Nurse told Jessica about the TPSP shortly after her baby was born but, at that time, she was too nervous to get involved because she found it difficult to talk to people she didn't know. However, when her baby was around 7 months-old she agreed to be referred to the TPSP.

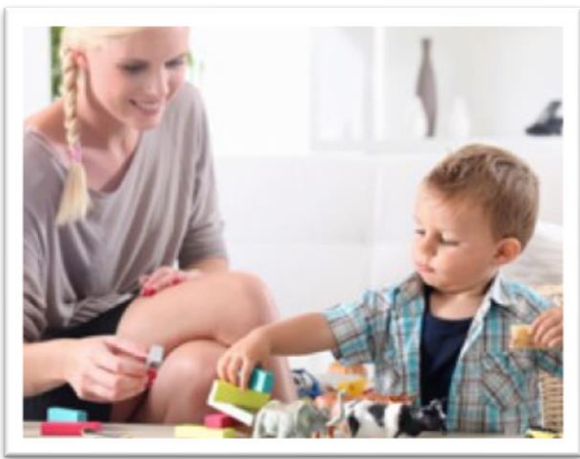
The TPSP project worker arranged to meet with Jessica straight away. During the first home visit she established a rapport with Jessica which resulted in her agreeing to avail of the support being offered to her. During the second home visit, the project worker carried out a pre-test evaluation on which Jessica scored extremely high at 33 which indicated severe problems and extreme physiological distress.

Over time the project worker built up a good relationship with Jessica which helped her to understand Jessica's needs and concerns as Jessica started to confide in her. It came to light that Jessica had gone through a very traumatic experience in childhood which was still affecting her life. She did not feel comfortable leaving the house either with and without her son and suffered with her mental health - in particular, with high levels of anxiety, poor self-esteem and low confidence. Jessica found life as a parent very difficult and, like a lot of other young parents, she felt like she was being constantly judged by the local community for being a young parent and felt that her parenting was under the spotlight when in public. Jessica was a deep overthinker and this had taken over her life which was the main reason why she refused to go out of the house.

The project worker put various interventions in place for Jessica such as covering topics from Foróige's *Be Healthy Be Happy* and *REAL U* Programmes as well as the *TPSP Toolkit*. They also looked at education and career options. The project worker helped Jessica to set both short-term and long-term realistic goals. She also helped Jessica with her anxiety by going with her and her son to local play areas. They explored the effects of negative and positive thinking and the huge negative effect Jessica's overthinking was having on her life.

The project worker also helped Jessica prepare a CV when she expressed an interest in getting a job as she acknowledged that she needed to get out of the house on her own and she understood how this would have a positive effect on her mental health.

Jessica's quality of life had now hugely improved and she enjoys taking her son to activities outside of the home. While she still suffers from anxiety it has greatly reduced: the TPSP project worker carried out a post-test evaluation in January 2017 on which Jessica scored 13 compared to the original score of 33. Jessica has taken up employment and has successfully completed a part time sixteen-week course which the project worker found for her. She has become clear about what career path she wants to follow. Jessica is more confident as both a mum and a young person. She no longer feels like she is a bad mum and does not feel that society is watching her as a mum. Jessica has said on numerous occasions that she wished that she had become involved with the TPSP a lot sooner as she sees a big positive change in her life since getting involved. Jessica has also expressed interest in becoming a mentor for other young parents who come to the TPSP>



I can honestly say my experience with the TPSP has changed my life. I have been attending for nearly 2 years now and don't know what I would have done without the programme. I am currently 21 years old and fell pregnant at the age of 19. I only started with the teen parents support programme when my child was 7 months old and I wish that I had started sooner. I would meet with a staff member one

to one at a place that I felt comfortable with and sometimes we met at home and sometimes we met in a local coffee shop whatever I felt more comfortable with. I was a very anxious first-time mum and found it very hard to even go out the door on my own. I felt I wasn't able to go on to 3rd level education and have a normal life again with a small child but found this wasn't the case. Having the amazing support from the TPSP I soon learned that I had so many opportunities available to me. This gave me the confidence to go to college and to have a great balance of education and family. I was given a lot of help and advice such as meeting with a careers advisor which really benefitted me as I still wasn't 100% sure what I wanted to do. For me too having the TPSP programme was also time for me to get out of the house and to be able to meet for a coffee and a friendly chat with someone outside of my family and friends. I was always able to say what was on my mind and know that I was not going to be judged. I feel that I have come through a lot since discovering I was going to be a mum and the programme has helped me regain my confidence and given me a little push in the right direction. I am more determined now that I can achieve my goals in life even though I have a young child so I can make him proud and give us the future we deserve. I can never thank the TPSP staff enough and it has honestly changed my life and given me the support when I needed it most.

December 2017

National Co-ordination of the TPSP

The national co-ordinator of the TPSP is based in Treoir. The main purpose of this post is to provide a central focal point for the promotion of the work of the TPSP and the enhancement of the lives of all young parents including those living outside areas covered by a TPSP.

During 2017, This was achieved mainly through:

- ☐ maintaining regular contact with TPSP projects and holding regular meetings of all project staff, project management and the TPSP National Advisory Committee
- ☐ keeping TPSP staff informed of changes in government policy and legislation in areas which affect young parents such as education and training, childcare, social welfare, birth registration, guardianship and housing
- ☐ maintaining contact with key staff in relevant government departments and State agencies and advocating on behalf of the TPSP and young parents nationally
- ☐ collecting, collating and analysing detailed data from the TPSP database in relation to referrals received and supports offered by the TPSP. This is used for the annual TPSP Summary of Work; for reports to Tusla; to explore outcomes and to inform TPSP policies and advocacy
- ☐ providing training to TPSP staff and other professionals working with young parents
- ☐ maintaining the TPSP website.

TPSP Meetings

To ensure cohesion and the flow of communication among all strands of the TPSP structure, in 2017 two separate meetings were organized for all TPSP staff, TPSP Employing Organisations and the TPSP National Advisory Committee. The Coordinator followed up issues raised at these meetings such as housing, childcare and aspects of the supplementary welfare system.

Policy and advocacy

One of the other main ways in which the TPSP supports all young parents in Ireland is through advocating on their behalf. During 2017, this was achieved mainly through the TPSP Pre-Budget Submission 2018 and meetings to progress written submissions made in 2016 in relation to crucial issues affecting young parents. These included meeting with:

- Minister Varadkar and Senior Official in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection regarding the administration of the Exceptional Needs Payments, the Back to Education Allowance and Child Benefit for Mothers under 16 years of age
- Senior Officials in the Early Years Unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs regarding the proposed Affordable Childcare Scheme and
- Senior Officials in Tusla Education Welfare Services regarding the School Completion Programme.

In terms of outcomes, the TPSP received written assurance from Minister Varadkar that, where legislation allows for discretion (such as in relation to the Back to Education Allowance), this discretion would be used in favour of teen parents, that DSP officials would be directed accordingly and that the TPSP could inform the Department if they found that this discretion was not applied as directed.

In relation to the Affordable Childcare Scheme, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs undertook to try to find a mechanism which would allow an exception to be made for student parents in Second Level education in relation to certain conditions of the Scheme.

Following its Pre-budget Submission 2018, the TPSP succeeded changing how Child Benefit is applied to mothers under 16 years of age. Previously a mother under 16 years of age was precluded from getting Child Benefit for her baby. Instead, it was paid to her mother i.e. the maternal grandmother. In the view of the TPSP

this ran counter to supporting a young mother to fully take on her new role and responsibilities as a parent. It was also inconsistent with the fact that in all other respects the Department of Social Protection treats a young mother and her baby as a separate family unit, and she may apply for One-parent Family Payment regardless of her age. In October 2017 the National Co-ordinator received correspondence from Regina Doherty T.D., the current Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection stating that from October 2017 'Child Benefit would now be paid to all new applications from mothers under 16 years of age'. The Minister added 'This change will ensure consistency across all our schemes in terms of how we treat young mothers'.

In 2017, the TPSP National Coordinator also represents the needs of teen parents and unmarried parents on The Parenting Network facilitated by the Centre for Effective Services.

Promoting the work of the TPSP and networking with other agencies also ensures that TPSP staff and participants are consulted in major pieces of research to do with their client group such *Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment* which was completed in 2017.

Reporting to Tusla

In addition to responding to queries on an ongoing basis, in 2017 the National Coordinator provided the Corporate Planning and Corporate Performance Section (CPCP) of Tusla with quarterly updates on the numbers of young parents supported by the TPSP projects.

Training for TPSP staff and dissemination of TPSP expertise

During 2017, the TPSP organized two workshops targeting all those working with young parents. The first of these, the Focus on Fathers Workshop, built on materials developed previously by the Louth TPSP and funded at that time by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency. This workshop was co-facilitated by Veronica Black, Treoir's Information and Training Officer and Finian Murray, Men's Health Development Worker, HSE Dublin North East. To date, 45 non-TPSP workers have completed this training.

In 2017, the TPSP also organized a Workshop based on The TPSP Toolkit. The TPSP Toolkit, which was funded by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, brings together in one resource manual, the knowledge, skills and experience of TPSP staff focusing on what are the distinct needs of teen parents. This was the 11th Toolkit Workshop organised by TPSP bringing to 159 the number of professionals working in non-TPSP areas who have availed of it. These include youth workers, social workers, family support workers, aftercare workers, staff in family resource centres, crisis pregnancy counsellors, those working with marginalised groups such as young Traveller mothers and those working in drug addiction services.

Both these Workshops have proved to be a very efficient way of disseminating learning and good practice from the TPSP to staff in areas where there are no specific support services for teen parents. They are also a way in which young parents living in these areas can benefit to some extent from the resources and expertise of the TPSP.

TPSP Website

The TPSP website (www.tpssp.ie) was updated regularly with items of interest to young parents and those involved with them. In 2017, there were 58,748 pages viewed.

The Co-ordinator also acts as a source of information, advice and guidance for professionals working with young parents in areas where there is not a TPSP and directs them to other appropriate services. She also responds to queries from pregnant and parenting teen and their parents/guardians from areas where there is not a TPSP.

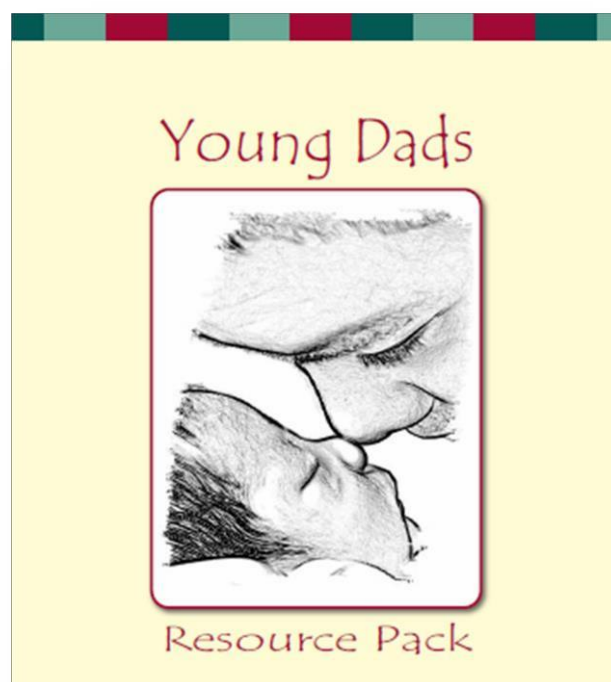


Sharing of TPSP expertise

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