

The Teen Parents Support Programme

Summary of Work 2020



INTRODUCTION

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

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 2020 the TPSP supported 634 young parents and 2 grandparents. This brings to 7,632 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 young parents in Ireland will have access to this model of support.

The TPSP works mostly with young people who become parents when they are aged 19 years or under and supports them until their children are 2 years of age. However, young parents over this age may also be supported depending on their circumstances.

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 well-being 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 with higher needs 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 2020, **39%** of all new referrals to the TPSP had high welfare needs located at Hardiker Level 3. This compares with **31% in 2019**. The percentage of new referrals with needs located at Hardiker Level 4 has remained constant at **5%** since 2018.

*Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012). Working Together for Children. Toolkit for the Development of a Children's Services Committee. 2nd Edition. Government Publications, Dublin.

Summary of Teen Births in Ireland 2011-2020

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

Year	Number of Births	Fertility Rate*
2011	1720	12.5
2012	1639	12.2
2013	1381	10.4
2014	1253	9.3
2015	1187	8.7
2016	1098	7.8
2017	1041	6.9
2018	980	6.3
2019	864	5.5
2020	830	5.2

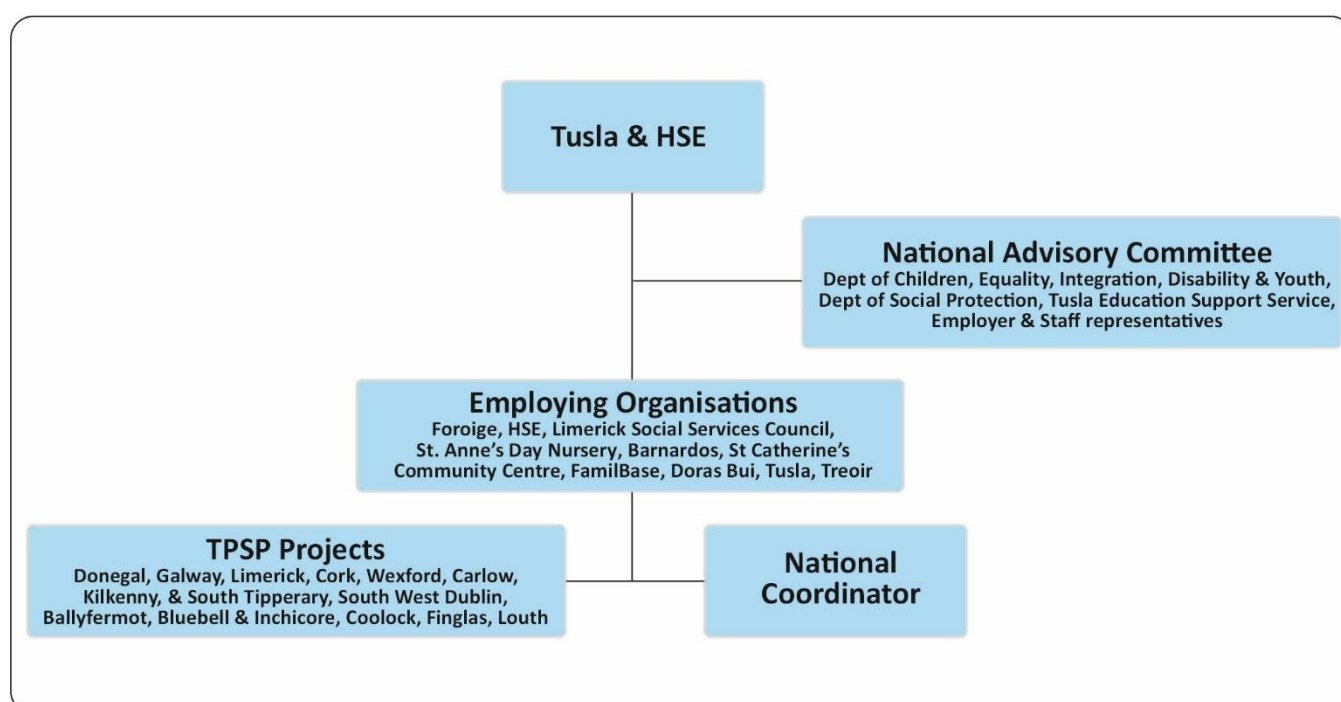
Sources: CSO Vital Statistics and Yearly Summaries 2011 to 2020

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






In 2020, when the births to teen mothers were registered, 97 mothers (12%) were described by the CSO as married or in a civil partnership and an additional 199 mothers (27% of the remainder) were described as living at the same address as the father of their child. In total 36% of teen mothers overall were described as married, in a civil partnership or living at the same address as the father of their child when the birth was registered.

In 2020, there were 21 births to mothers aged 15 years or under and 9 referrals to the TPSP of mothers in this age group. In 2020, there were 39 births to mothers aged 16 years and 14 referrals to the TPSP of mothers in this age group.

Structure of the Teen Parents Support Programme



Summary of contact in 2020 with young parents and their families

-  **676*** - the number of young parents and other family members who, together with their children, were offered support in 2020.
-  **197** - the number who presented for support for the first time:
 - 180** mothers
 - 16** fathers
 - 1** grandmother.
-  **15** - the number of parents who had engaged with the service previously and presented again for support in 2020:
 - 14** mothers
 - 1** father.
-  **295** - the number who were referred in earlier years and continued to receive support during 2020 and into 2021:
 - 271** mothers
 - 23** fathers
 - 1** grandmother.
-  **169*** - the number of young parents for whom support ended in 2020:
 - 156** mothers
 - 13** fathers.

*This number includes 40 young parents (38 mothers and 2 fathers) who were referred in 2019 and 2020 and did not avail of the service.

In 2020, due to the mother/father of their child engaging with the projects, the TPSP also had some contact with **257** other young parents:

- 211** fathers
- 46** mothers.

Chloe

Chloe was 15 years of age when she was referred to the TPSP. She had a poor relationship with her parents and siblings because she had experienced domestic violence from the father of her child and felt that her family were of no support to her. She also lived in an area with low school retention rates and, now that she was pregnant, her family expected that she would leave school early. As well as direct work with Chloe, the TPSP Project Worker engaged with her family (and Chloe's mother in particular) to rebuild family relationships and to put in place supports that would enable her to remain in school throughout her pregnancy and complete her Junior Certificate. This included liaising with the school and, through the School Completion Programme, contributing to education-related costs which alleviated financial hardship on the family. Following the birth, her mother minded Chloe's baby while it was still very young so that she could return to secondary school. This was possible due to a childcare allowance paid through the School Completion Programme. Later Chloe was able to avail of a local childcare facility run by Doras Buí and the CETs scheme of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Throughout her time in secondary school, Chloe participated in various group activities run by the TPSP relating to personal development, parenting, and education. These Groups gave her peer support and helped her make new friends. The TPSP also continued to support her emotionally and practically with education-related costs. Chloe excelled in school. She received her first choice from the CAO and will soon be starting her second year in university.

Young Mothers

During 2020, **621** young mothers were offered support by the TPSP. Of these, **38** did not avail of the service.

Of the remaining **583** young mothers:

- 79% were Irish and 5% were Irish Travellers
- 19% were aged 16 or under when referred to the TPSP (compared to 16% in 2019)
- 31% were known to have a social care history*(compared to 26% in 2019)
- 34% were described in 2020 as either Level 3 or Level 4 on the Hardiker scale (compared to 31% in 2019)
- 18% had at least one repeat birth (compared to 8% in 2019).

**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.*

Of the 583 young mothers supported, 55% were referred by maternity services; 9% by Tusla Family Support Services (compared to 5% in 2019); 7% by schools; 5% by PHNs; 5% by Youth Services while 8% of the young mothers referred themselves. The remainder were referred by family, peers, training organisations and other community-based supports.

➤ Education

Of the mothers supported, 40% were in education or training. An analysis of those whose educational attainment was known, shows that 39% of those not in education were early school leavers i.e. had left school without their Leaving Certificate or equivalent with 22% of them not having a Junior Certificate. The analysis also shows that 28% of the early school leavers are known to have dropped out of school during their pregnancy. This does not include a small number who, with support from the TPSP, had deferred their education in a planned way with the intention of returning when their baby was older. Of those who were early school leavers, 40% had a social care history compared to 31% overall and 42% of them presented with high welfare or care needs compared to 34% overall.

➤ Accommodation

Regarding their housing, 69% of all the young mothers supported were living in a family home (either with their family of origin, a sibling, the family of their child's father or in foster care) while 25% were in private rented accommodation. The remaining 6% had a variety of living arrangements including 3 in direct provision, 6 in supported accommodation and 5 in residential care. Although 16 young mothers were living in various forms of homeless accommodation, when the data was collected none were reported as sleeping rough unlike 2 young mothers in that situation in 2019.

➤ Employment

Almost one-fifth (18%) of the young mothers supported were in employment. These were in the older age range, had a lower level of need and higher educational attainments than those supported overall. For example, 24% were described as having high welfare/care needs compared to 34% overall, and 21% had a social care history compared to 31% overall. In terms of education, all but one mother had at least their Junior Cert with 54% having completed their Leaving Certificate and an additional 14% having a PLC or 3rd Level qualification.

➤ Social Protection

Most mothers (82%), including some in employment, were in receipt of a Social Protection payment. Of these, 69% were on full or part OFP, 14% were on Job Seekers Allowance, 6% were a dependent adult of a Social Welfare recipient and 4% were in receipt of Disability Allowance. The remainder were on the Covid 19-related PUP, a Training Allowance, Back to Education Allowance, Maternity Benefit, the Working Family Payment, Direct Provision Allowance, and Supplementary Welfare Allowance in that order. Those without a Social

Protection payment were either in employment, under 18 years of age and antenatal, or a non-Irish national unable to satisfy the Habitual Residence condition.

➤ **Childcare**

Regarding childcare needs, 50% of mothers who were postnatal did not have childcare. Most of these mothers (77%) were not in education, training, or employment although some of them would have benefitted from childcare as respite for themselves and as routine and stimulation for their children. The remaining 23% had an unmet childcare need or their childcare needs were only partially met. Over half of those with childcare (55%) had access to a crèche although this support was not available for most of 2020 due to Covid-19. Where home-based childcare was used, this was provided mainly by the maternal grandmother (63%) or by another family member (22%) with very few young parents using private childminders.

➤ **Mothers with a Social Care History**

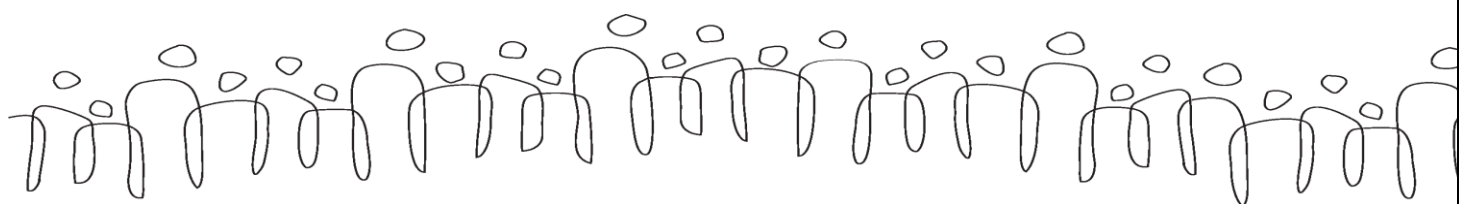
Of the 583 young mothers supported, 31% had a social care history. Almost one third (30%) were aged 16 years or under when they were referred to the TPSP. A slightly higher proportion (57%) were not in education or training – compared to 50% of all mothers supported. Of those who were not in education, 57% were early school leavers – compared to 39% of all mothers supported. They were also more likely to experience a housing crisis with 5% living in homeless accommodation compared to 3% of all mothers supported. For example, 5 of the 7 young parents living in a Family Hub had a previous social care history.

➤ **Children with a Social Care History**

In 2020, the TPSP supported the mothers of 73 children who had previous or current involvement with Tusla Family Support Services. This included 32 children then involved with Tusla Social Work Services and 4 children involved with other Tusla Family Support Services. In 2020 there were 6 additional children in care and 31 additional children who had been involved with Tusla Social Work Services in the past. The TPSP data shows that 53 (73%) of the mothers of these children also had previous or current involvement with Tusla Family Support Services. This includes 9 who had been in care in the past and 2 young mothers still in care in 2020.

➤ **Irish Traveller Mothers**

In 2020 the TPSP supported 34 young mothers who are Irish Travellers. Like all mothers, approximately half of these referrals came from maternity services. An additional 24% were referred by Youth Services compared to 5% for all mothers. In 2020, young Traveller mothers tended to be slightly older with 11% aged 16 years or under when referred compared to 19% of all the young mothers referred. In terms of education, they were very disadvantaged and this is reflected in the fact that only one young Traveller mother was referred by a school. Only 6 (18%) were still in education/training compared to 40% of all mothers. One of these Traveller mothers was in 3rd Level. Of those out of education/training, 3 had completed their Leaving Certification leaving 25 (74%) who were early school leavers compared to 43% of all the young mothers supported. Regarding accommodation, in 2020, their living arrangements were broadly similar to all young mothers with 74% living in a family home and 26% in rented accommodation. For 11 young Traveller mothers (one-third of all those supported) their family home was in a halting site. Two Traveller mothers were living in a Family Hub, both of whom had previous involvement with Tusla Social Work Services.



➤ **Non-Irish Mothers**

In 2020 the TPSP also supported 67 non-Irish mothers, 7 of whom were English and 1 of whom was from another part of Western Europe. The remaining 59 mothers consisted of:

- 17 from various African countries
- 17 who identified as Roma
- 7 who were Polish
- 12 from other countries in Eastern Europe
- 2 from Syria
- 2 from Brazil and
- 2 from different Asian countries.

These young mothers 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.

Young mothers who did not avail of the service in 2020

There is no complete information available on mothers who did not avail of the service other than the information below on their age and level of need as assessed by the referral source.

Characteristic	Breakdown	Mothers (38) No.	All new referrals in 2020 (197)
Age	15 or under	2	9
	16	2	14
	17	8	37
	18	12	43
	19	8	47
	20	3	19
	Over 20	2	27
	Not Known	1	1
Level of Need	Hardiker1	1	0
	Hardiker 2	27	106
	Hardiker 3	6	76
	Hardiker 4	2	10
	Not Known	2	4

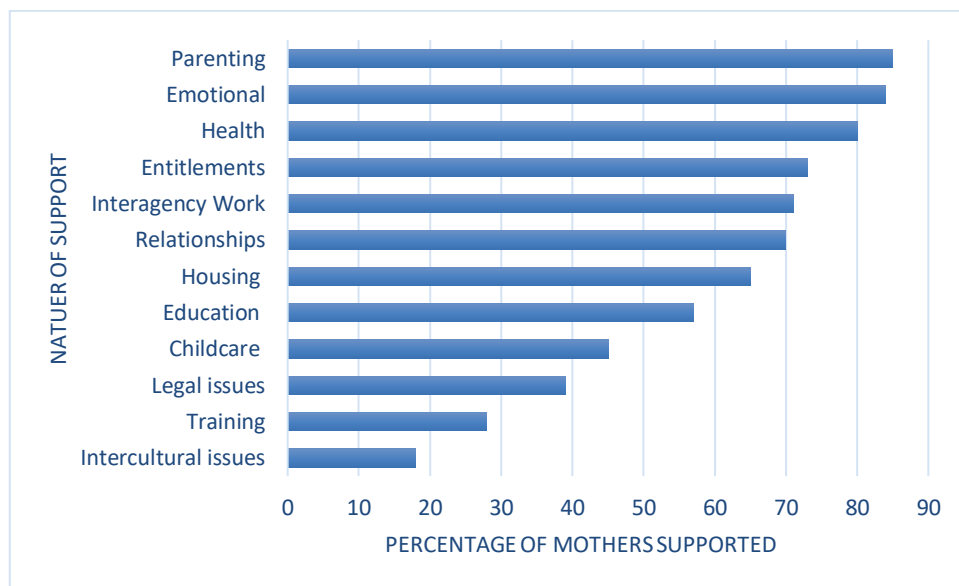
The limited data available suggests that level of need rather than age is a determining factor in whether a referral decides to engage with the TPSP. For example, 44% of all new referrals in 2020 were assessed as having high welfare/child protection needs compared to 21% of those who did not avail of the service.

Young mothers and domestic violence

The TPSP has become increasingly concerned about the levels of domestic violence experienced by the young parents they support and started to collect data nationally in 2019. In 2020, out of 583 mothers supported, 83 (14%) reported having experienced domestic violence in the past but not being at any current risk. This compares with 13% in 2019. A further 36 (6%) disclosed having a current experience of domestic violence and of being currently at risk. This compares to 3% in 2019.

This reported increase in domestic violence in 2020 is in line with reporting by organisations that support victims of domestic violence such as Women's Aid and safeireland. The TPSP supports young mothers who are experiencing domestic violence to create a safety plan for themselves and their children which may involve supporting them to get Court Orders or to avail of the special Rent Supplement arrangements for victims of domestic violence introduced by the Department of Social Protection during Covid-19.

Supports to all young mothers in 2020



The Chart above shows, in percentage terms, the areas in which all young mothers received support in 2020. 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, either on an ongoing basis or in response to specific identified needs. In total 129 young mothers attended one of these Groups or Programmes while 34 availed of TPSP-based antenatal classes tailored to meet the needs of young expectant mothers. Almost all these groups/classes took place remotely due to Covid-19.

O.M.G.
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 OTHER YOUNG MOMS AND
 SHARE EXPERIENCES!**

**EVERY WEDNESDAY
 3PM-4PM**

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 LINK WILL BE SENT TO YOU!

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teenparents
 support programme
 Cork

The TPSP works in close partnership with all local organisations, 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 2020, the TPSP liaised with other agencies on behalf of 71% of all its 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 combined; Educational Institutions (Second and Third Level institutions, combined); Maternity Services; Public Health Nurses; Counselling and Mental Health Services, combined; Department of Social Protection representatives; Training Organisations; Childcare Providers; Domestic Violence organisations and Youth Services. There was also contact with local community-based organisations that offer family support and non-governmental organizations such as SVP and organisations running food banks.

Miriam

In 2019, the TPSP received a referral of a teenager who was pregnant as the result of rape in her country of origin. Miriam was extremely traumatised and found it difficult to communicate her thoughts, her fears, and her needs. She was unsure of how she would bond with the baby and whether she wanted to keep the baby following the birth. Granny was gathering some baby items and Miriam said she felt she had to keep the baby because that is what her mother wanted her to do.

Initially, the TPSP Project Worker spent time with Miriam to build up a trusting and supportive relationship. A Meitheal was then considered but it was felt that this would be too daunting for the young woman. Instead, The TPSP Project Worker convened a meeting with professionals from the following services: Home School Liaison Officer from the young person's school, Antenatal Education Co-ordinator, SATU (Sexual Assault Treatment Unit) Clinic, HSE Hospital Social Worker, Tusla Adoption Services, the manager of the maternity ward and a midwife from the hospital where she would deliver her baby. This meeting ensured there was a coordinated support structure in place for Miriam.

The following plan was put in place:

- the maternity ward would admit Miriam for 2 nights in the weeks leading up to her due date so that she could get a feel for the place, would get to know the midwives and would feel less anxious going into hospital to have her baby
- Some services around the table would source baby equipment and other items needed
- The Antenatal Education Coordinator and the TPSP Project Worker would spend time with Miriam in the hospital preparing her for the birth and showing her around the labour ward
- Tusla Adoption Services would support and guide Miriam if she chose to have her baby adopted and, pre-birth, they were available to help other professionals working with her, if needs be.

During her 2-night stay in hospital (4 weeks prior to the birth) some of the midwives and a doctor spent time with Miriam to ensure she felt comfortable and safe in the environment. This was in the hope that returning to hospital for the birth would be a positive experience rather than another traumatic event for her. When the TPSP Project Worker visited her during this time in hospital, Miriam appeared more relaxed and was smiling. The TPSP Project Worker and the Antenatal Education Coordinator were able to complete pieces of work with her around the birth and post birth, which ensured she was more informed. Miriam was always assured by the Project Worker that the decision about whether she would keep the baby was hers alone and that she would be supported no matter what decision she made.

Miriam gave birth to a healthy baby at the start of the Covid-19 restrictions. The midwife rang the Project Worker to tell her of the birth and said, *"Miriam reached out straight away and put the baby to the breast automatically, she is doing great"*.

Miriam made the decision to keep her baby. Her bond with her child appears to be strong and the TPSP Project Worker continues to support her practically and emotionally. This includes inputs on bonding, attachment, and play, and on how to access other supports in the community such as a Food Bank. She also supported Miriam with her Social Welfare entitlements and with finding childcare so that she could return to school to complete her Leaving Cert. She was also supported with finding a solicitor and applying for refugee status.

As part of TPSP group work, Miriam and her baby got the opportunity to meet other mums and babies in small outdoor groups (following Covid-19 guidelines) which provided her with positive peer support in a safe environment. She also engaged in a *Wellness Challenge* with Foróige during the first lockdown in 2020 which encouraged her to go for walks with her baby, make a healthy meal, spend time playing with her baby and take time out for herself where possible. She is due to sit her Leaving Cert in 2021 and hopes to progress to Third Level.

Young fathers

In 2020, **53** fathers were offered support separate from the mothers of their children. Of these **2** did not avail of the service. Of the remaining **51** fathers:

- 80% were Irish, 12% were Irish Travellers and the remainder had 3 different nationalities
- 16% were 16 years or under when referred to the TPSP
- 39% were known to have a social care history and
- 41% had needs at Hardiker Levels 3 or 4.

Care must be taken when interpreting comparisons in this Chapter due to the differences in the number of mothers and fathers involved. Nonetheless, the profile above suggests a higher level of need among these young fathers compared to the young mothers supported. Regarding referrals sources, just over half of the fathers self-referred to the TPSP having heard about the Programme through the mother of their child, a friend or a family member. The remainder were referred by Maternity Services, Tusla, Schools and Youth Services in that order. With regards to the mothers of their children, 39% were known to have a social care history compared to 31% of all mothers supported.

➤ Education

Almost half of the young fathers supported (48%) were still in education or training. However, 50% of those not in education or training were early school leavers compared to 39% of mothers. Of those who were early school leavers, 44% had a social care history and half of these again were described as still having high welfare needs.

➤ Employment

Of the young fathers supported, 38% were described as having either full-time or part-time employment although this was affected by Covid-19 for most of 2020. Like the mothers who were working, these fathers were also in the older age range supported, had a lower level of need and higher educational attainments than those supported overall. All of those in employment had at least their Junior Certificate and 67% had completed the Leaving Certificate.

➤ Social Protection

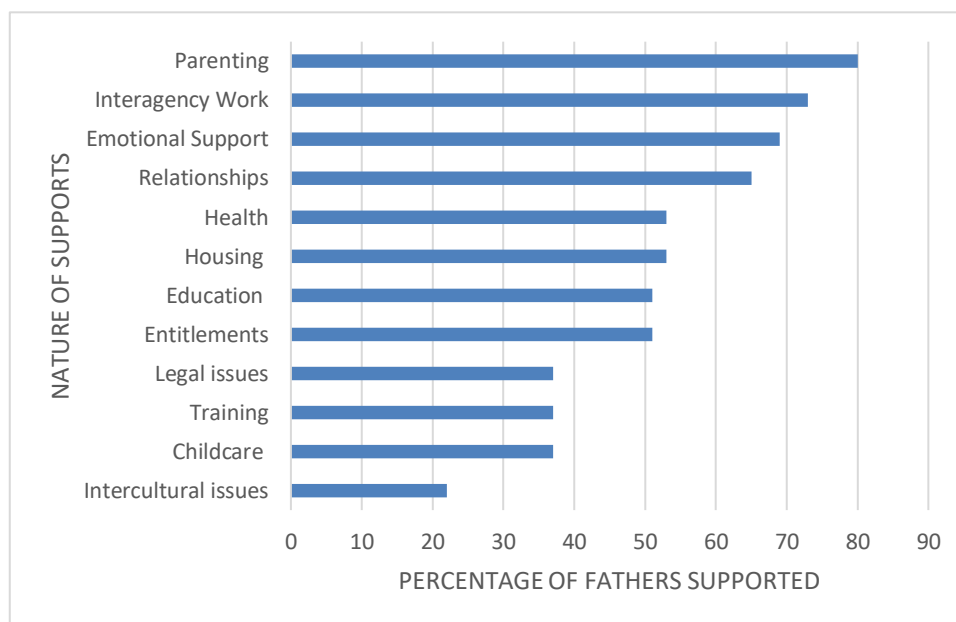
Over one-third (37%) of fathers were in receipt of a Social Protection payment with the majority (52%) receiving Job Seekers Allowance. The remainder were receiving the Covid-19-related PUP payment, full or part OFP, or a Disability Allowance.

➤ Contact with their children

In 2020, the TPSP supported **397** mothers who were postnatal. In **42** cases the father's level of contact with his child was not known when the data was collected. Of the remaining **355** fathers:

- **147** were described as having frequent contact with their children
- **74** were married/cohabiting with the mother of their children
- **61** had infrequent contact
- **52** had no contact
- **11** had a legal access arrangement
- **8** of the children were living in the paternal home without the mother
- **2** fathers were deceased.

Supports to all young fathers in 2020



The Chart above shows, in percentage terms, the areas in which young fathers received support in 2020. As with mothers, most support was delivered on a one-to-one basis and remotely because of Covid-19. However, 4 fathers participated in groups facilitated by TPSP staff.

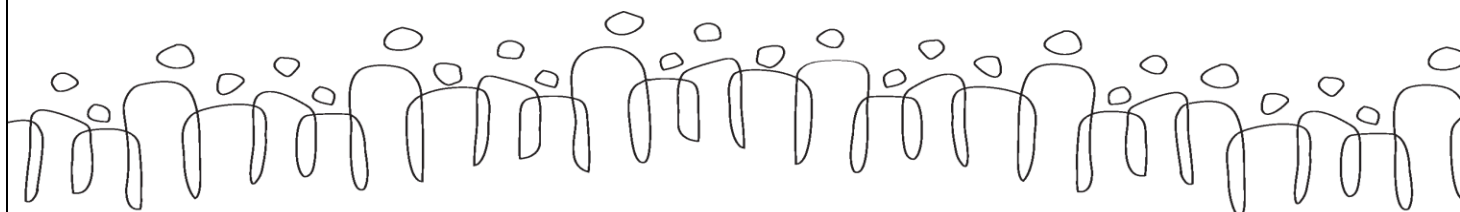
Regarding interagency work, in 2020 the TPSP liaised with other agencies on behalf of 73% of the young fathers supported. In order of frequency, most contact took place with the following: Tusla Family Support Services (including social workers and Meitheal); Mental Health & Counselling Services combined; Training Organisations; Local Authorities & Housing Agencies combined, and Educational Institutions (Second and Third Level combined). There was also contact with a Food Bank, the Probation Service and DEASP.

Young fathers who did not avail of the service in 2020

Two young fathers did not engage with the TPSP in 2020. They were aged 18 years and 20 years; both were referred by Tusla Family Support Services and one of them, who had previous involvement with Tusla Social Work, was assessed as still having high welfare needs. Neither young father was in education, both were living in their family home and both were Irish.

Young fathers and domestic violence

In 2019, of 54 young fathers supported, no one reported that he had experience of domestic violence in the past. However, 4 reported that they were then in a situation involving domestic violence and felt at risk. Comparing this with 2020, out of 51 fathers supported 8 reported an experience of domestic violence in the past but did not feel at risk currently. A further 2 disclosed that they were currently living in a violent situation and felt at risk.



John

John, who is an 18-year-old father, contacted the TPSP at the suggestion of the mother of his child. They had a 10-month-old daughter, they were no longer together as a couple and his access arrangements were by way of a Court Order.

Due to Covid-19, all contact with the young dad took place outdoors.

John said that that he was finding access with his daughter very stressful. He said that access took place once a week in a local indoor play centre (when possible) and once a week in the family home of the baby's mother. In the latter case, he said that the baby knew that her mother was in the next room so he found it extremely difficult to get her to settle with him as she would constantly cry and look to go to her mother.

The TPSP Project Worker first worked with John to help him understand the importance of bonding and attachment and how key this was in his setting up a good relationship with his child and the long-term benefits for her. Then using *Marte Meo* and the NSPCC's *Look, Say, Sing Programme*, the TPSP Project Worker helped John develop skills to tune into his baby, communicate with her and feel comfortable and at ease around her as the baby was possibly responding to his own nervousness and lack of confidence. The Project Worker also went through elements of *Parents Plus' Parenting When Separated* to support John with issues around parenting effectively when the relationship with a child's mother breaks down. How to communicate with the mother in a constructive way was a big part of this piece of work.

The next step was to explore what appeared to be unsuitable access arrangements. The Project Worker felt that a loud environment such as an indoor play centre may leave the baby feeling afraid and insecure. Equally, access in the mother's family home may confuse the baby and make John uncomfortable. As a result, it was very difficult for them both to relax and bond together.

The Project Worker supported John to talk to the mother about applying to vary the Court Order so that he could have access with his daughter in his own family home. She helped him to communicate this need in a positive way so that the young mother did not feel angry or threatened.

With a successful variation of the Court Order, John now has access to his daughter in his family home. He says that the baby is much happier and content, that he and his family really enjoy having access with her and that he is no longer feeling helpless and stressed as she no longer constantly cries when he spends time with her.



Outcomes for parents whose contact with the TPSP ended in 2020

During 2020, a total of 169 service users ceased contact with the TPSP. These consisted of 156 young mothers and 13 fathers. Of these, 40 (38 mothers and 2 fathers) did not avail of the service. The following Table gives a short profile of the young parents who engaged. It shows their ages at time of referral, compares their level of need at time of referral and when support ceased, compares their accommodation type at time of referral and when support ceased and gives the reasons why support ended.

Characteristic	Category	Mothers (119)	Fathers (10)
Age at time of referral	15 years or under	8	0
	16 years	11	1
	17 years	13	0
	18 years	33	1
	19 years	32	2
	20 years	9	2
	Over 20 years	13	4
Level of Need at time of referral	Hardiker 1	0	0
	Hardiker 2	73	7
	Hardiker 3	35	3
	Hardiker 4	11	0
Level of Need when support ceased	Hardiker 1	10	2
	Hardiker 2	72	5
	Hardiker 3	31	3
	Hardiker 4	6	0
Accommodation at time of referral	Living in family home	71	4
	Living with other family member	7	1
	Living in home of child's father	9	n/a
	Private rented accommodation	13	4
	Own home - local authority	1	0
	In care	3	0
	Homeless	7	0
	Refuge	1	0
	Other	1	1
	Not known when data was collected	6	0
Accommodation when support ceased	Living in family home	64	0
	Living with other family member	4	1
	Living in home of child's father	6	n/a
	Private rented accommodation	30	8
	In care	1	0
	Homeless	2	1
	Own home-local authority and other	5	0
	Supported accommodation	1	0
	Other	1	0
	Not known when data was collected	5	0
Reasons support ceased	Needs were met	51	4
	Child >2 and needs were partially met	14	2
	Moved out of area	11	0
	Referred to other support	6	1
	Parent ceased contact	36	3
	Other	1	0



Education and Training

The TPSP supports 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 both parent and child. This work is supported by the School Completion Programme (SCP) of Tusla's Education Welfare Service (TESS)¹. The aim of the SCP is to increase the numbers of young people staying in primary and second level school and in doing so increase the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle or equivalent. In 2020, for the first time, all 11 TPSPs received some funding from the SCP.

The advent of Covid-19 and the closure of schools in March 2020 highlighted the 'technology divide' and the incorrect assumption that all households have a computer and internet access. Initially, some young parents were trying to follow lessons online and do their homework using a smart phone. Fortunately, the TPSP had the funding to equip them with laptops so that they could participate in remote learning and study from home. Other supports funded through the SCP included contributions towards childcare, grinds, books, course fees, other in-education costs and uniforms. TPSP staff also organised peer support groups, personal development courses and guidance counselling.

Educational outcomes for young parents who engaged with the TPSP

In 2020, TPSP support ceased for 119 young mothers and 10 young fathers who had engaged with the service. The following table compares their highest educational attainment when they were first referred to the TPSP and when contact ceased in 2020.

Highest Educational Attainment	When referred to the TPSP		When support ceased in 2020	
	Mothers (119)	Fathers (10)	Mothers (119)	Fathers (10)
Completed 3rd Level Education	0	0	2	0
Completed PLC Course	2	0	10	0
Completed Leaving Certificate	46	6	51	6
Completed Junior Cert only	41	2	27	2
No 2nd Level Qualification	7	0	7	0
Non-Irish Qualification	3	0	3	0
Other	1	0	3	0
Not known when data was collected	19	2	16	2

¹ <https://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/scp/>

Laura

"At 16 years old I found myself pregnant. It was an extremely hard time. I was in school, feeling like my whole world had changed. How could I tell my parents? My friends? What would everybody think? I was terrified.

I remember receiving a newspaper clipping from a family member for the Teen Parents Support Programme in Cork. I was very unsure whether I should phone the service as this was completely new to me. I had never attended any services or needed support until then. As the weeks went by and I was starting to show rumours were going around the school. I felt everyone was staring at me and therefore I did not return to school after the October mid-term and I was due mid-December.

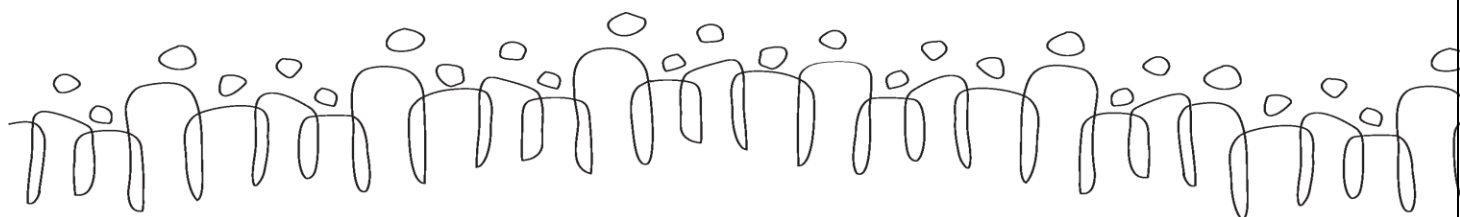
After much thought, I contacted the TPSP. I spoke to a lovely Project Worker who took my details and I referred myself to the service, still feeling very isolated. I met with her, she reassured me that there were many other girls in my position, which I did not expect. At 16, having a baby, as a child myself, was a huge shock.

I met with my assigned Project Worker many times and relied on the support more so once my baby was born. This was most definitely a time where I needed the support the most. I had no previous experience around young children/babies. I had family support, however, it remained very hard as they were also affected by my situation in different ways. My mom received support from this service, she was given reassurance on many occasions throughout the hard times.

Both myself and my daughter's dad attended cooking classes organized by the Project. We found this great. It was a very good way for us to bond together and learn, as well as meeting other young parents. We did not feel as lonely or isolated knowing others were going through the same thing. I made a great friend from attending the classes which helped me a lot as we would meet regularly with our babies and could relate to the challenges we were faced with.

I received so much support around my education. I was supported with Home Tuition when I remained at home. I returned to school intermittently when my daughter was born. I worked closely with my Project Worker around education options. I completed a PLC course which then led me to Cork Institute of Technology to complete my Bachelor Degree in Social Care. While going through college, the support I received both emotionally for myself and financially with childcare for my daughter was second to none. Without the help from the TPSP, I would not be where I am today.

After many years of working in both child and adult services around Cork, I found myself searching for options to work with young parents like myself – being able to relate to their situations and guide them through with support. I now work for the TPSP in Cork, alongside Trish my Project Worker who supported me right through the hardest of times almost 12 years ago which I am extremely grateful for. I will continue to help and support young parents as I am aware, first-hand, of how beneficial this service is for vulnerable people just like I was".



Young Parents and Housing

Each year the TPSP has conducted a Census of all its service users with a serious housing need. This is to ensure that the needs of young people who are also young parents are included in discussions about youth homelessness. The Census used the ETHOS² typology used by FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. FEANTSA uses 4 categories to describe housing needs: Roofless, Homeless, Insecure, and Inadequate. In June 2020, the TPSP Housing Needs Census found that 128 (20%) of the young parents accessing its supports had a serious housing need at that point in time. This compares with 18% of those supported in 2019 and 16% of those supported in 2018.

The June 2020 figures are comprised of:

Roofless: No young parent was sleeping rough in June 2020 compared to 2 young mothers in this situation in June 2019.

Homeless: 23 young parents (22 mothers and 1 father) were in homeless accommodation or temporary supported accommodation following homelessness. This compares with 21 young parents in June 2019.

Insecure Accommodation: 63 young parents (62 mothers and 1 father) were in insecure accommodation. This compares with 43 mothers in insecure accommodation in June 2019. Examples of insecure accommodation include couch surfing with family or friends, living with insecure tenancies or living under the threat of eviction.

Inadequate Accommodation: 42 young parents (38 mothers and 4 fathers) were living in inadequate accommodation such as rented properties that are substandard or homes with serious overcrowding. This compares with 62 young parents (60 mothers and 2 fathers) in this situation in 2019.

This chronic housing crisis is having a serious effect on the young parents and children supported by the TPSP. TPSP staff report developmental delays in children living in homeless accommodation or substandard/overcrowded housing.

Abby

In 2018, Abby was referred to the TPSP after giving birth to her baby. Initially, she was very reluctant to engage with a Project Worker on a one-to-one basis. However, the TPSP in her area offered a variety of Parent & Child Groups which at the time suited Abby better. She appeared to enjoy these groups greatly and completed courses in Baby Massage, Weaning, Self-Care, Life Skills and Parenting.

In 2019, when her baby was one year old, Abby was offered a place in the crèche run by Familibase in Ballyfermot. This gave her the space to explore her options around employment or returning to education – something she had always wanted to do. She found employment locally in a shop and a restaurant which gave her more confidence and self-belief. At this time, she also started to engage on an individual basis with her Project Worker and completed the *Incredible Years* one-to-one parenting course.

2020 was an eventful year for Abby. In April, she started to attend Systemic Family Therapy to address her mental health issues and childhood trauma. In May, her housing circumstances changed and she and her child became homeless. The TPSP Project Worker supported her entering Homeless Services and later, through the HAP scheme, sourced appropriate accommodation for her. In July Abby enrolled in her local College of Further Education and in September started to study a Level 5 Course in Early Years Care and Education. Abby continues to be supported by the TPSP. She is still in college, she attends her therapy regularly, she is a consistent participant in the TPSP's Young Mums Fitness & Wellness Programme, played a lead role in International Women's Day 2020 events locally and attends regular one-to-one support sessions with her TPSP Project Worker.

² <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion> (accessed 8th September 2020)

Aaron and Holly

In 2017, Aaron and Holly were both aged 15 years when Holly became pregnant. Aaron dropped out of school during the pregnancy and Holly dropped out 2 years later in Sixth Year.

In 2019, Aaron's relationship with his mother broke down and he became homeless. He tried hostels but was very nervous of staying in them and slept between his grandad's camper van in Dublin City centre, Holly's home and the sofas of friends.

In 2019 Holly became pregnant again. Her family home was very overcrowded. She shared it with both her parents, two brothers, her sister and her sister's four-year old child. Holly and her daughter shared a set of bunk beds.

In June 2020 she and Aaron went into Homeless Services with their daughter – a month before her new baby was due. They were placed in a B&B in Gardiner Street where they shared a bathroom with 4 other families. They found this experience very difficult. They were not allowed to have a key to their room so they could not lock it at night. They had to vacate their room during the day and could not return to it (so their daughter could have a nap, for example) until the evening because it was locked by staff. On one occasion when Holly needed to go to the Rotunda Hospital in an emergency Aaron brought their daughter to her grandparents in Finglas. When they both returned to the B&B they were not allowed in without their child and Holly (who was now 8 months pregnant) had to wait on the steps outside the B&B until Aaron returned from Finglas late at night with their daughter.

The TPSP advocated with a local Homeless Service to have this young, vulnerable family moved to a Family Hub nearby. They moved to the Hub on a Monday without any help and with 8 bags of belongings. On Tuesday it was discovered that some paperwork was missing from Dublin City Council's (DCC) file so Aaron and Holly (who was heavily pregnant) were moved back to their original B&B with all their belonging and the food they had bought for the Hub. On Wednesday their TPSP Project Worker intervened, sorted the missing paperwork and Aaron and Holly returned to the Hub – again on foot with all their belongings. Some of the shopping they had bought for the Hub had to be thrown out and replaced because there was no fridge in their room in the B&B. This is just one example of numerous difficulties which Holly and Aaron (who are still only 18 years of age) experienced in trying to find temporary housing.

In July 2020 Holly had her new baby. The family is still living in the Family Hub and trying to get rented accommodation through the Homeless HAP. They now have a support worker from DCC and their TPSP Project Worker also continues to support and advocate for them.

"I would like to appreciate the huge help and great support that we have been given by TPSP throughout our difficult times. Through my daughter's pregnancy until she gave birth to her baby. I would like to say in a million times your help was appreciated from the physical and mental support, the hospital bag, the baby food, the nappies, the clothing. The application of the medical card, the application of baby to get support with childcare so that she could go back to school and continue her leaving cert. We were not going to pull through without your help. In million times thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Grandmother (mother of young migrant parent)

Home visiting and other one-to-one support, which is usually face-to-face, is a core part of the work of the TPSP. With the first lockdown in March 2020 all projects had to reassess how they would continue to provide essential support especially to those who were most vulnerable.



TPSP staff and young parents were already comfortable with maintaining contact through phone, text messages, WhatsApp and Facebook. They now added Zoom and other virtual platforms for more in-depth individual support and for groupwork.

During the pandemic, Family Support and Youth Work were classified as essential frontline services for children in care or where there were concerns about child protection, domestic violence, or other forms of abuse. As a result, some TPSP staff continued to meet young parents in person, in line with Government guidelines, either at home (following risk assessment), in the office or in another centre. As the country opened up, TPSP staff increasingly met the young parents outdoors - such as in front gardens and local parks - and found creative ways of encouraging them to engage such as going for a walk or having a picnic.

Early in the pandemic food poverty emerged as a cause of concern with the additional cost of having all family members at home all day without the meals usually provided by schools and crèches. Some TPSPs, as part of their parent organisations, compensated for this by delivering food hampers and pre-cooked meals to the most vulnerable families.

While the level of groupwork decreased, some projects moved their groups online with considerable success. One advantage of online groups is that they could be accessed by parents who in the past had not been able to attend centre-based activities because of obstacles such as travel or childcare or because they were in education or employment. For example, one project was able to include some young parents from outside their usual catchment area.

Most young parents continued with their education (second and third level) online despite their not having childcare. As mentioned earlier, the TPSP was able to provide a laptop for those who needed one. Some projects also organised Activity Packs and other learning materials to help parents engage with their children and to stimulate and occupy the children while parents were trying to study.

While all young people found the extended and unpredictable nature of the pandemic very challenging, this was particularly so for those who were also parents. TPSP staff reported increased anxiety levels and mental health issues among those they supported. Many missed the routine that a crèche provided or the social outlet which school/college or employment gave. Young parents living independently struggled during lockdown and felt very isolated with not being able to meet family and friends. They needed support (such as the Wellness Fest organised by Foróige) to build new routines for themselves and their children. For others, the restrictions heightened pre-existing problems in the home such as overcrowding, domestic violence and addiction and they needed advice and guidance on how to keep themselves and their children safe.

Week 1 – Wellness Challenge

Wellness Challenge is part of Foróige's Fit Festival in conjunction with CYPSC Donegal

Foróige's Teen Parent Support Programme Donegal

Daily wellness checklist

Did you...	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Go for a walk with your child 3 times this week, you choose which days suit you best (keeping to the 2km radius from your home while also keeping social distance from everyone you meet along the way)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cook a healthy meal of your choice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take part in one or more free 'Rinka' sessions with your child (a link for these can be found on our Facebook page)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take part in one or more free 'Tinytunes' session (music and movement for babies, a link for these can also be found on our Facebook page)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Start a 'Wellness Journal' and write down one thing that you are thankful for everyday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a treat at the end of the week bake something with your child - you can keep in simple with making rice krispie buns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In order to complete this challenge you will need:

1. Send photos of your efforts in completing each part to Jacqueline/Michelle or send us a pm on Facebook. Points will be allocated based on the efforts made
2. As proof of your walk we will be posting a photo each morning of one thing that you will need to look out for on your walk and will also need to send a photo of this to Jacqueline/Michelle
3. This challenge is open to teen parents (up to 21 years old who are involved with Donegal TPSP, however, if you are a teen parent in Donegal who is not currently involved in the TPSP please get in touch.

Reward for person with the most points at the end of the week will be given a 50 euro Penny's voucher.



Healthy Ireland Fund supported by the Department of Health and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.



Naomi

Naomi was 21 years of age with an 18-month-old son and living in a Direct Provision Centre when she was referred to the TPSP. Despite Covid-19 restrictions and being unable to meet face to face, her Project Worker succeeded in developing a very supportive and productive relationship with her.

Naomi did not have any connection with other services and therefore strongly relied on the TPSP for support with a check-in on a weekly/fortnightly basis. She linked in with her Project Worker when she needed advice, had a question or just for a chat as a way of connecting with someone outside the Centre. It was evident that having someone to connect with was a strong priority for her and she used the TPSP for this.

Naomi presented as a very capable and confident young mother. She did, however, need courage and guidance to plan for her own future in Ireland. Her Project Worker worked closely with her on her goals and where she would like to see herself in the future. This was done via phone calls, texts and online video calls.

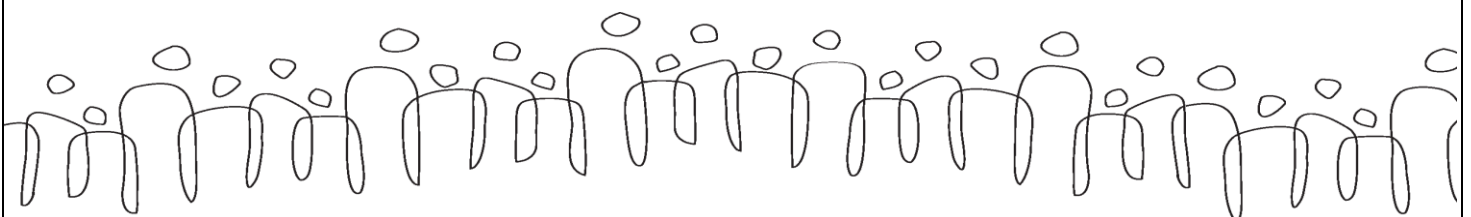
When there was an outbreak of Covid-19 in the Centre, Naomi tested positive and had to self-isolate in a room with her child for two weeks. This was extremely tough and isolating despite regular online contact from her Project Worker. She was also given information on who else she could contact over the phone if she needed extra assistance.

Shortly afterwards, Naomi secured a house through the HAP scheme. This involved her Project Worker making numerous phone calls to landlords and searching on the internet on her behalf as she did not know where to look and her English language skills were sometimes a barrier. Naomi was concerned about leaving the Centre. This was a secure and known environment for her and she was used to the busyness of having people around her all the time. But she knew that living independently was the right choice for her son.

Naomi is now settled in her home and her son is very happy having his own space in their two-bed-roomed apartment. It is evident on video calls that he is thriving having his mother to himself and they can build a much stronger relationship having the time and space to do so.

With information and support with form-filling from her Project Worker, Naomi is now in receipt of the One-parent Family Payment (OFP), she has secured a childcare place in a local Family Resource Centre (FRC), is applying for childcare support through the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and is waiting to be enrolled on a FETAC course. With her son's childcare secure she now has been given the opportunity to focus on her own development and future employment.

Naomi continues to link in with the TPSP weekly and attends the Online Mom's Group (OMG) which the Project set up during lockdown as a way for young mothers to connect and share experiences. She is a very active participant and supportive of other mothers whose babies are younger than her son.



National Coordination of the TPSP

The National Coordinator of the TPSP is based in Treoir³. 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 2020, the Coordinator continued to support the 11 TPSP projects as well as other professionals working with young parents.

This was achieved mainly through:

- maintaining regular contact with TPSP projects and holding 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, and social welfare
- maintaining contact with key staff in relevant government departments and State agencies and advocating on behalf of the TPSP and young parents nationally
- collaborating with other agencies and initiatives who have interests in common with young parents in areas such as housing, childcare, and parenting supports
- providing training to TPSP staff and other professionals working with young parents
- collecting, collating and analysing detailed data from the TPSP projects in relation to referrals received and support given. This is used for this Summary of Work; to explore outcomes and to inform TPSP policies and advocacy
- administering Tusla's School Completion Programme (SCP)
- responding to queries from young parents and those involved with them
- maintaining the TPSP website.

○ TPSP Meetings

To ensure cohesion and the flow of communication among all strands of the TPSP structure, in 2020 the National Coordinator organised separate meetings for the TPSP Employing Organisations, the TPSP National Advisory Committee and for all TPSP project staff. The Coordinator followed up issues raised at these meetings such as the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), the SUSI grant, the SCP, and aspects of the Supplementary Welfare system. In line with the Youth Participation Strategy, in 2020 a young mother attended meetings of the TPSP National Advisory Committee. This young parent is a current service user of the TPSP who has recently progressed from Secondary School to Further Education.

Due to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 these meetings were held remotely.

○ 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 2020, the Coordinator made a Pre-Budget Submission to the Department of Employment and Social Protection (DEASP) and a submission to the Statement of Strategy 2021- 2023 of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

During 2020 the National Coordinator represented the needs of young parents on:

- The Irish Coalition to end Youth Homelessness and
- The Parenting Network.

³ www.treoir.ie

In 2020 most face-to-face meetings were suspended due to Covid-19 restrictions. However, the Coordinator represented young parents at online events organised, among others, by:

- The Children's Rights Alliance
- Tusla
- Focus Ireland
- The Irish Coalition to end Youth Homelessness (ICEYH)
- The Parenting Network and
- The Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN).

○ **Training for TPSP staff**

In 2020, all staff received training from Pobal in relation to the sponsored components of the NCS. This Scheme commenced fully in November 2019 includes a sponsored component which gives free childcare to mothers in second level education. Supporting young mothers to access this free childcare has proved very frustrating and time consuming for both TPSP staff and the Coordinator. However, through contacts made with staff in Department of Children, Equality, Integration, Disability and Youth (DCEIDY) and Pobal and with training delivered by Pobal this situation will hopefully improve.

○ **Training for professionals working with young parents**

During 2020, the TPSP organized a *Focus on Fathers* workshop targeting professionals working with young parents nationally. This Workshop builds on materials developed originally by the Louth TPSP and funded at that time by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency. It 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, this Workshop has been completed by 85 non-TPSP professionals working with young fathers. These include youth workers, social workers, family support workers, aftercare workers, staff in family resource centres, staff in housing agencies and those working in addiction services.

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 targeted 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. *The TPSP Toolkit* Workshop did not take place in 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions.

○ **School Completion Programme (SCP)**

The SCP is funded through Tusla's Education Support Service (TESS). The aim of the SCP is to increase the number of young people staying in school and in doing so increase the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle or the equivalent. In 2020, the National Coordinator took over the administration and distribution of Tusla's SCP allocation to the TPSP. In May 2020, for the first time, the 2020/21 SCP Retention Plan and Budget Application was presented to Tusla as one unified Plan. This process went well with support from Sharon Kavanagh, Treoir's Administrative and Finance Officer and Tusla rated the Plan as 'Very Strong'. One benefit of this new arrangement is that the SCP fund is now divided among all 11 TPSPs whereas previously 3 of the projects did not have access to this funding.

○ **Responding to queries**

The TPSP National Coordinator acts as a source of information, advice, guidance and referral to other support for pregnant and parenting teens, their families and professionals in areas where there is not a TPSP. During 2020 she also delivered an Information Session on teen pregnancy to Leaving Certificate Applied classes in South Dublin and Kildare.

○ **TPSP Website**

During 2020, the TPSP website (www.tpsp.ie) was updated regularly with items of interest to young parents and those involved with them. In 2020, the website had 7,852 page views. It had 2,699 visitors of who 350 were return visitors.

Emma and David

Emma and David demonstrate the complexity of need of some young families. Supporting them involves trauma-informed work, practical support, crisis intervention and advocacy on behalf of both parents.

They were referred to the TPSP by their Public Health Nurse (PHN) because of concerns about their parenting skills and the parent-child relationships. They have two children, a three-year-old who was presenting with behavior that was difficult for the young parents to manage and an 8-month-old baby. Early on in their involvement with the TPSP, Emma became pregnant with their third baby.

Work with this family was slow and complex due to Emma's own history of trauma: her family have all been entrenched within the care system and Social Work has always been part of her life. David also grew up in the care system. Emma has poor relationships with her own mother and siblings and her network of family support is limited. Forming a trusting relationship and supporting her to trust other professionals was a priority. In the past she refused to engage with the PHN. The TPSP Project Worker started to attend the initial stages of PHN visits with her to build up her trust in this service. Emma now engages very well with the PHN. David has also increased his parenting role. For example, he walks his child to crèche, engages and communicates with crèche staff, takes the child to the park, and has started cooking healthy meals.

Trauma-informed work

This work supported Emma with her own development while all the time nurturing her parenting skills. There was also a focus on self-regulation for both parents. As part of this approach, the TPSP Project Worker, who is trained in baby massage, taught these skills to Emma. This was calming for both Emma and her baby, helped develop a strong bond between them and gave Emma the confidence to recognize her baby's needs.

Practical support

Emma was nurtured by the Project Worker during her third pregnancy. Among other practical help, she received a hospital bag with new night clothes for herself and the baby, slippers, underwear and toiletries. When her baby was born, her Project Worker was the first person Emma called.

Crisis Management

Crisis management has been part of the support to this family. They tended to run out of heating oil, have no electricity and not enough money for food and baby essentials. While the Project Worker was able to help with these immediate problems, there was also a focus on budgeting, planning and nutrition.

Advocacy

Due to their inadequate housing situation, the Project Worker advocated on their behalf with the local County Council.

Due to her life circumstances, Emma has difficulties with literacy. The TPSP plans to link her in with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) which will hopefully increase her confidence and empower her to advocate on her own behalf.

The Project Worker is also in the process of linking David in with a Local Development Company to explore some pre-employment courses.

The Project Worker also found a pre-school place for the three-year-old under the NCS. Emma notes that since her son has started Play School, she has found it easier to get herself into a routine.

When Covid-19 restrictions are lifted and it is safe to do so, Emma will be encouraged to join a local Toddler Group with the aim of giving her a sense of place in her community.

This work with Emma, David and their children will continue for at least another year.

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