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**MID-WESTERN**  
HEALTH BOARD

27 November 2002

**To: Chairman & Each Member of the Board.**

Report No: 89/02 .  
Item No6 on Agenda

**Report for Meeting of the Board to be held on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2002.**

## **Final Evaluation Report and Research of the Teen Parents Support Initiative**

Dear Member,

The Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan, T.D., launched the final evaluation report of the Teen Parents Support Initiative on 15 October 2002. He also launched two separate reports commissioned by the Teen Parent's Support Initiative.

- "I hadn't a Penny": a review of State Income supports available to Young Parents.
- "The Invisible Students": Young Parents in Education.

The evaluation and two research reports were undertaken by the Centre for Social and Educational Research in The Institute of Technology, Dublin, between July 1999 and June 2002.

The Teen Parent Initiative, launched in July 1999 sought to provide a range of additional support services to Teen parents during pregnancy, until their child/children reached two years of age. Five specific programme objectives were identified by the initiative.

1. To identify the needs of the targeted young parents, the services available to them and any gaps in these services.
2. To collect, collate and disseminate any information on the Parenting Process and experiences encountered by young parents.
3. To provide services to enhance and support the well being of young parents and children, to ensure equality of opportunity.
4. To encourage existing services to work more collaboratively to enhance the capacity of the community, network and agencies to respond to the needs of this client group.

5. To monitor and evaluate the pilot scheme and to disseminate the findings of the evaluation, and stimulate any necessary change at policy level.

The initiative comprised of three projects:

1. A Community Model located in Limerick Social Service Council, working in partnership with the Mid- Western Health Board.
2. Hospital Model located in the University College Hospital, Galway and managed by the Western Health Board.
3. A Voluntary Project, managed by Barnardos and serving the South West region of Dublin 8, Drimnagh, Crumlin and Tallaght.

The Three Pilot projects provided the following supports

- One to one support to young mothers, young fathers and grandparents
- Group work support which encouraged peer support
- Parenting Support
- Home Visiting Programme
- Education- involving close liaison with schools
- Support with Childcare
- Attendance at ante-natal classes and support in relation to sexual health
- Information and advocacy activities

A fourth element of the Initiative was the design and dissemination of a resource pack and directory of services for key workers and young parents undertaken by Treoir (Federation for Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children).

### **Profile of Participants**

- A total of 415 young parents were referred to the initiative, of these 108 were involved in the Limerick Project.
- The average age was 17.5 years. The majority of young mothers were single, although 34% were in on-going relationships with the father of their child.
- 60% lived in the family home with 21 % living in private, rented or local authority accommodation. The remainder lived in sheltered accommodation, residential care, foster care or in temporary accommodation. The Limerick Project had the highest percentage in residential care/foster care (8%) and the highest percentage living in local authority housing (11%).
- 40% of participants had completed their Leaving Certificate, 25% had completed the Junior Certificate and 12% had completed primary school only. 22% were engaged in second level and 8% in third level at the end of the evaluation period.
- Only 16% of participants were in employment at the end of this evaluation period and the majority of these were in part-time employment.

### **Key Findings:**

- 76% of those interviewed believed that the participation in the Initiative had made their lives “ better or much better.”
- All those interviewed believed that there was a need for support projects such as those provided by the Initiative.
- The majority would recommend the Initiative to any other young person, who is either pregnant or a parent.
- The following supports were identified as being helpful to parents; Supports with parenting; provision of information on a range of issues, including income supports,

health services, educational training, having “someone to talk to”, access to group supports as well as individual and one to one supports.

- 96% of participants stated that the Initiative helped them with their parenting by: Providing information on Parenting and Child Development; Reassuring them in their parenting role. Linking young parents to other parents in their local area. Providing assistance with childcare and education.
- A similar percentage stated that the Initiative helped them as young adults through the personal support and encouragement they received from staff of the Initiative, through being networked with other support services and the support they received to remain in education.
- There were no social admissions to hospital among children of participating young parents, nor were any of these children taken into care during the pilot period.

The key strengths of the Initiatives identified by participants and professional include:

- It was non- stigmatising, strength focused, flexible and creative in its responses to young parents needs.
- The personal qualities and characteristics of project staff were seen to be a key element: staff were friendly, easy to talk to and good listeners, down to earth, non-judgemental and helpful, with a wide range of knowledge on relevant topics.
- Its commitment to supporting young parents regardless of the types of needs expressed either by direct service provision or by linking with other appropriate services.
- The development of multi- agency working arrangements to ensure an integrated and effective response to young parents support needs.

## **Recommendation**

The overall assessment of the Initiative is that pilot projects had achieved all their key objectives and it supported the recommendation of the National Children’s Strategy proposal that the Initiative be expanded to all health boards

Other recommendations include

- Setting up of a monitoring committee to oversee the proposed mainstreaming of the Initiative
- The appointment of a national co-ordinator
- The School Protocol guidelines to support students or parents, currently developed by the Limerick Project should be released nationally.
- Development of a national funding scheme developed through the education and training sectors to assist young parents avail of opportunities
- Further development of Peer- led home visiting programmes.
- Provision of Sexual Health training and Family Planning in overall remit of the initiative.
- Development of inter-agency communication network or fora for all agencies engaging with young parents.
- An awareness training courses for service providers in relation to the complexities of social issues experience by pregnant teenagers and teen parents.

## ***“I hadn’t a penny”***

### **A Review of state income support available to young parents**

This paper examined the extent to which existing provision within the Irish Welfare System meets the financial support needs of teenage parents, in particular, the extent to which it meets

the needs of different sub-groups within the overall population of teenage parents. Young parents with whom the initiative engaged, saw the provision of timely financial supports, particularly when they were attempting to participate in education and training, as key to assisting them in the long-term to move from welfare dependency to self sufficiently.

The principal financial support needs as identified by young parents relate the following areas:

- Education,
- Childcare,
- Assistance with unanticipated and emergency costs and
- Accommodation.

The key issue arising is the difference in the provision for parents based on the marital status and their participation in education or training.

The lower level of provision for parents who are co-habiting or unmarried, aged less than 20 and in full time education (without any breaks) was highlighted. The only financial support that these parents are entitled to is Child Benefit. In contrast, a single (that is not married or co-habiting) parent aged 18 years who had left school early or been in receipt of one parent family payment for 2 years and had returned to full time or third level education may be entitled to one parent family benefit, child benefit and back to education allowance, while retaining other secondary benefits, previously payable.

Other major gaps identified include

- 1) The limited availability of financial support for childcare expenses for those participating in full time education or employment
- 2) Difficulties in accessing rent supplement for those aged less than 18 years and in education
- 3) Lack of information on the operation of social welfare system combined with unease expressed by many parents in dealing with social welfare officials.

The Initiative assisted parents by:

- Providing them with information on benefits and entitlements to which they may be eligible and assisting them with filling out forms, writing letters of support to accompany parent's applications when meeting with officials etc.
- Developing opportunities to meet with key players such as community welfare officers and social welfare officials to highlight the issues identified by young parents.
- The provision of financial subsidies to those in full time education to assist with cost of childcare expenses and grinds, course fees, course equipment and materials.

The report recommends:

- Greater support with childcare expenses for young parents particularly for those using "informal" childcare.
  - Greater support for teen parents for education and training expenses to assist them to remain in education.
  - Better outreach to teen parents to build their awareness about the existence of and their eligibility for supportive assistance
  - Adoption of specific strategies by key agencies frequently interacting with teen parents (particularly The Department of Social and Family Affairs and The Department of Health & Children) including the appointment of a "Teen Specialist" at each local office or contact point to liaise with teen parents and relevant agencies.
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# ***“The Invisible Students”***

## **Young Parents in Education**

This paper identifies and discusses key aspects of the policy landscape in relation to young parent's participation in education and inform the work of Teenage Parents Support Initiative Pilot Projects. A central policy issue identified through the work of the projects is the importance of supporting young parents to reconcile pregnancy and parenthood and their own continuing participation in education and training.

Research suggests that lower levels of education attainment are strongly associated with the higher probability of teen parenthood, as well as poor long-term life outcomes. The Teenage Parents Support Initiative Pilot Projects made it a key element of their work to support young parents who wish to participate in education and training. The initiative identified a number of obstacles limiting young parents opportunities to participate in education and training, these include:

- a) Family and Social Obstacles including a lack of parental or family support, social constructions of good mothering, cultural attitudes, feelings of stigmatisation and social exclusion
- b) Structural and Institutional Obstacles including exclusion from mainstream schooling, negative school experiences, childcare affordability and availability, financial needs (including secondary benefits), barriers to accessing alternative education and training opportunities (such as age criteria) and lack of external counselling and support programmes.

The paper suggests that more flexible arrangements for the pursuit of educational qualifications need to be introduced to ensure that teenage parenthood does not lead to further diminishment of life chances.

Specifically the report recommends:

- The naming of young parents as the specific target group under the social inclusion and education measures and the appraisal of policies for their impact on young parents.
- The creation of a body of data on young parents in order to combat their present “invisibility” within official statistics. In particular a greater focus in official statistics on young fathers and non-nationals is required.
- The development of “joined up” policy on education and training for young parents and the potential central role of partnership working relationships and locally based integrated networks to develop strategic approaches to the education support needs of young parents.
- Development of guidelines or policies for each individual school on teenage pregnancy and parenthood which should cover and support on disclosure of pregnancy, support during pregnancy and delivery, support for young fathers and support and training needs of teachers.
- Further research and schooling experiences of parenting teenagers.

The paper calls for a shift towards “differentiated” policies, which acknowledge and respond to the full range of circumstances among young parents and their diversity of support needs. This would lead to a more holistic response to the full range of circumstances and needs of young parents. The Initiative by supporting all aspects of young parent's life sought to overcome the numerous “obstacles” that can reduce even the most committed young person's ability to participate in education and training. The paper recognises that the Initiative is well placed to play an important role in the development of local and regional networks to meet educational and training needs of young parents.

**Future of Initiative**

Minister Lenihan stated that Hebe, (the Health Board Executive) will take on the overall further development /expansion of the Initiative. The existing pilot projects will be supported as a mainstream service and continuing funding will be provided."

Yours sincerely,

~~JAMES O GRADY~~  
~~REGIONAL MANAGER~~  
~~CHILD CARE & DISABILITIES~~