



## Pre-Budget Forum 2022

Name of your Organisation	Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP)
Representative attending	Margaret Morris

Please provide brief overview of your organisation:

The Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) consists of eleven separate projects funded by TUSLA and the HSE and located throughout the country in a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations. The TPSP engages with young people who become parents when they are under 20 years of age and supports them to build their capacity as parents as well as completing their own development as adolescents moving towards early adulthood. See [www.tpssp.ie](http://www.tpssp.ie) Support is offered in all areas of the young person's life – social welfare entitlements, parenting, health, relationships, education, training, childcare, accommodation, legal issues, and anything else about which the young person is concerned.

In 2020, the TPSP supported 719 young parents, their children, and families. This represents over a quarter of all the teen parents in the country and the issues raised in this Submission is based on the experience of these young people.

Please tick the target area for your submission (can be more than one):

Pensions  Working Age Income Supports  Working Age Employment Supports   
Illness, Disability and Carers  Children  Other  Young Parents

Please tick which of the below refer to your proposals:

Rate Change  Means testing  Allowable Working Hours  Employment Rights   
Grants  Scheme Rules  Education/Training  Research  New Initiative   
Cross-Departmental Communication  Other  \_\_\_\_\_

Please list the DSP Scheme/s included in your proposals:

- Back to Education Allowance
  - Cost of Training Allowance
  - Grant for those transitioning out of homelessness
- Schemes/issues requiring Cross-Departmental Communication
- SUSI Grant
  - Housing First for Youth



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### **Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)**

The TPSP is asking that the qualifying age for BTEA should be lowered. In 2020 the TPSP supported 33 young mothers (5% of all those supported) who did not have a Junior Certificate and a further 140 young mothers (19% of all those supported) who had only the Junior Certificate. With support, some of these young parents could return to education before they reach 18 years of age and the Cost of Education Allowance, which accompanies BTEA, would act as an added incentive for them. The cost of this would be minimal to the Department but hugely significant to the life chances of any young parent (and their children) who could be encouraged to return to education.

#### **Recommendation:**

- That DEASP examine lowering the qualifying age for BTEA.

### **Cost of Training Allowance**

The TPSP continues to see a reduction in the number of young mothers attending training courses because of the additional costs they incur makes training unaffordable. Many young mothers are early school leavers and not ready to return directly to formal mainstream education or to enter the labour market. If they were ready for the formal education sector, they would be eligible for the Cost of Education Allowance which is an automatic part of the BTEA. If they were close to being ready for employment, they would be eligible for a Training Support Grant of up to €1000 per annum.

Training courses re-introduce early school leavers to learning, give them new work skills, give them access to career guidance, help them to develop a work routine and increase the likelihood of their progressing to further vocational based training, PLCs and Third Level. In short, they provide at a much earlier stage of parenthood the kind of ‘activation’ which DEASP is proposing for lone parents on Job Seekers Transition.

#### **Recommendation:**

- That the DEASP introduce a realistic Cost of Training Allowance to make training affordable and attractive to young parents.

### **Grant for those transitioning out of homelessness**

With the ongoing housing crisis, TPSP workers are involved in supporting young parents to make the transition from homelessness to rented accommodation. When young parents find a place to rent through Homeless HAP, they need a small start-up grant for basic items such as bedlinen, towelling, delph, cutlery, laundry basket etc. They have not provided any of these items for themselves in homeless accommodation and cannot afford them from their weekly social welfare payment. Those moving into local authority housing automatically receive a large start-up grant. Both local authority housing and HAP are forms of social housing. While a landlord will provide some furniture, the TPSP is asking the Department to acknowledge that those moving into rented accommodation for the first time also have additional expenses.

The TPSP is asking the Department to introduce a Grant for those leaving homeless accommodation. This should be easy to access without the advocacy currently required of TPSP staff when service users are relying on the Exceptional Needs Payments system.

#### **Recommendation:**



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- That DEASP introduce a Grant for those moving out of homelessness and into rented accommodation.

### **Schemes issues requiring Cross-Departmental Communication**

#### **The SUSI Grant**

The TPSP welcomes the Review of the SUSI Grant by DFHEIS and has made a submission to it.

We are asking that the SUSI grant be reintroduced for lone parents in receipt of BTEA; that SUSI be extended to part-time students and that DEASP advocate for more part-time Third Level courses to balance the needs of its customers wishing to return to education.

Currently, lone parents who are required to transfer from OFP to BTEA to attend Higher Education are not eligible for the maintenance component of the SUSI grant, making it practically impossible for them to make this transition. For all students, the maintenance component of the grant scheme covers only part of their living costs. This is even more so for lone parents with the costs of rearing their family, contributing to childcare, and meeting all the additional incidental costs of being a student. With BTEA as their sole income, these additional study-related costs are prohibitive. The TPSP believes that this creates an inequitable situation for those lone parents with the motivation to attend Third Level education.

In addition, for most lone parents, it is not possible to combine looking after their family and attendance at full-time degree courses. They need more family-friendly, flexible, modular based degree courses where they can gather credits over time. They also need a maintenance grant in addition to OFP or BTEA. This more flexible model of Third Level education would also suit other customers of DEASP such as those in receipt of disability payments.

#### **Recommendations:**

- That DEASP advocate for the restoration of the maintenance component of the SUSI grant for recipients of BTEA and for the extension of the SUSI grant to those on part-time courses
- That DEASP also advocate with the HEA for more part-time degree courses to accommodate mature students with other responsibilities and challenges.

#### **Housing First for Youth**

In 2020, 128 young parents supported by the TPSP had a housing need. This includes 23 young parents living in short-term emergency accommodation.

For young parents to be homeless is catastrophic with wide ranging and long-term consequences. Homelessness affects all aspects of their lives and the lives of their children – their health, education, the ability to parent, their children's development, and their ability to sustain tenancies in the future. Apart from the personal cost, there is a social and financial cost which the State (and the DEASP, in particular) will carry into the future.

Research conducted into young people experiencing homelessness has shown that sustainable exits from homelessness are disproportionately low due to lack of support.

Despite this, there has been little policy response to the plight of homeless young people, including young parents. *Rebuilding Ireland* contains no reference to youth homelessness, apart from highlighting the importance of looking after the housing needs of those leaving care. Many of the homeless young mothers, whom the TPSP supports, come from family



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situations with pre-existing social disadvantage. They lack life experience and have poor coping skills which makes it difficult for some of them to transition successfully to independent living. The TPSP believes that *Housing First for Youth* is an effective model for supporting the transition to independent living for young people. A *Housing First* approach ensures that the young person can first access a secure and stable home, and then be provided with a tailored and flexible support plan to meet their individual needs e.g. healthcare, education & training, financial advice and counselling.

### **Recommendations:**

- That DEASP advocate for the extension of the *Youth Housing First* model of support and
- Advocate that any new Housing Policies/Strategies contain a Youth Homelessness Strategy.

Margaret Morris  
National Co-ordinator, TPSP  
29<sup>th</sup> June 2021