

# The Teen Parents Support Programme

## Summary of Work 2021



### 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 2021 the TPSP supported 720 young parents and 1 maternal grandmother. This brings to 8,352 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 2021, **39%** of all new referrals to the TPSP had high welfare needs located at Hardiker Level 3. This compares with the same figure in **2020**. The percentage of cases with needs located at Hardiker Level 4 was **6.5%** in **2021**.

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

## Summary of Teen Births in Ireland 2011-2021

### 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	841	5.3
2021	683	4.3

Sources: CSO Vital Statistics and Yearly Summaries 2011 to 2021

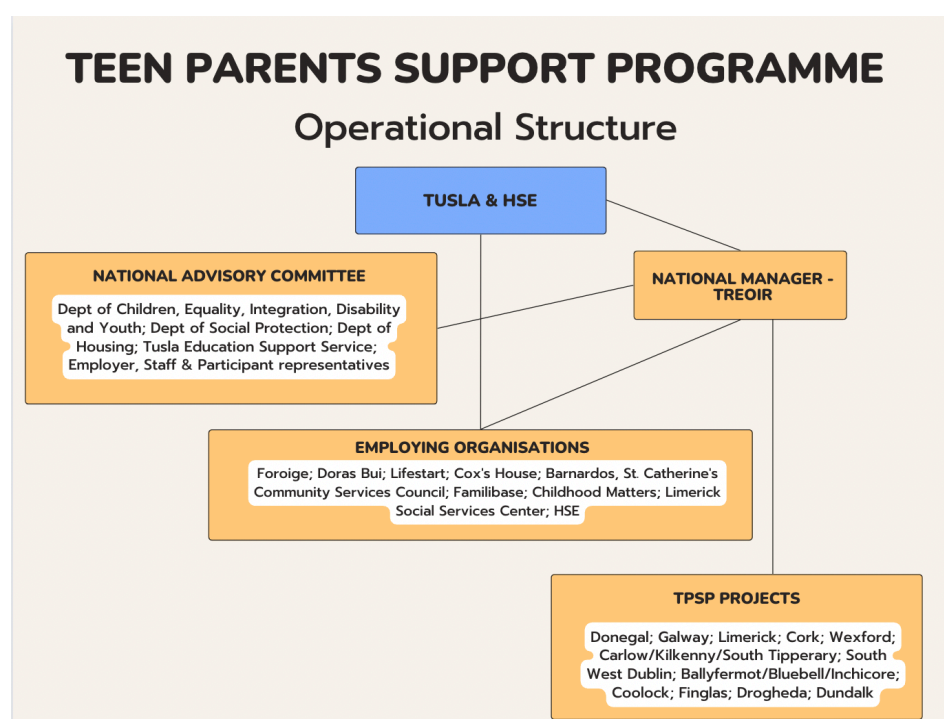
\*Number of births that were registered in 2021

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








In 2021, there were 683 births registered to mothers under 20 years of age. When the births to teen mothers were registered, 109 mothers (16%) were described by the CSO as married or in a civil partnership.

There were 38 births to mothers aged 16 years and 79 births to mothers aged 17 years and, 191 births were to mothers aged 18 years, and 375 were aged 19 years.

## Structure of the Teen Parents Support Programme



## Summary of contact in 2021 with young parents and their families

-  **729\*** - the number of young parents and other family members who, together with their children, were offered support in 2021, an increase of 12% on 2020 figures.
-  **563** – the number of young parents under the age of 20
  - **514** mothers
  - **49** fathers
-  **149** – the number of young parents aged 20 and over
  - **149** mothers
  - **14** fathers
-  **197** - the number who presented for support for the first time:
  - **178** mothers
  - **19** fathers
-  **14** - the number of parents who had engaged with the service previously and presented again for support in 2021:
  - **14** mothers
-  **52** - the number who were referred 2020 and continued to receive support during 2021:
  - **32** mothers
  - **20** fathers
-  **275\*** - the number of young parents for whom support ended in 2020:
  - **251** mothers
  - **14** fathers.

\*This number includes those who were referred in 2020 and 2021 and did not avail of the service, and those who were referred to other services

## Anna

Anna was 15 years of age, and 20 weeks pregnant, when she was referred to the TPSP. She was referred through Tusla's PPFS team and the Mental Health Team in the maternity service she was attending at that time. Anna had a strained relationship with her mother at the time of her referral and was living between her father and mother's home. Being just 15 years old, and 20 weeks pregnant, Anna was having a difficult time emotionally in accepting the huge change to all aspects of her young life. She no longer wanted to attend secondary school as she felt she was not supported there. Due to her age, Anna was not entitled to any social protection payments until her baby was born which put significant financial stress on her family. Once referred and assessed, Anna's TPSP worker put a plan in place to support her through her pregnancy and into parenthood by teaching basic parenting skills and antenatal education, as well as advocating for Anna regarding housing. Anna's project workers also supported her in gaining financial support by applying to the local social welfare officer for supplementary welfare allowance which Anna used to purchase essentials for herself and her unborn baby. The project worker worked with Anna to explore the importance of attachment, bonding and building a relationship with her baby via the Circle of Security and Barnardos 0 – 2 programme. The project worker will continue to encourage Anna to return to education and explore creche and other childminding options once the baby is born, and will support Anna in her own self-development and rebuilding her relationship with her mother.



### Young Mothers

During 2021, **665** young mothers were offered support by the TPSP, representing 92% of all those referred. Of these 665, **56** did not avail of the service.

Of the remaining **609** young mothers:

- Out of the 609 mothers, 97% provided their ethnic/cultural background - 78% were Irish and 9% were Irish Travellers (compared to 70% and 5% respectively in 2020)
- 19% were aged 16 or under when referred to the TPSP (same in 2020)
- 84% of mothers provided their social care history when asked at the time of their referral, 34% of those mothers were known to have a social care history\*
- Of the 98.7% mothers whose level of need was assessed, 39% were described in 2021 as either Level 3 or Level 4 on the Hardiker scale (compared to 34% in 2020)
- 22% had at least one repeat birth (compared to 18% in 2020).

*\*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 609 young mothers supported, 49% were referred by maternity services; 8.5% by Tusla Family Support Services (similar to 2020); 6% by schools or training institutions; 6% by PHNs; 5% by Youth Services while 9% of the young mothers referred themselves. Others were referred by family, peers, or medical and family community-based support practitioners.

#### ➤ Education

An analysis of those whose educational attainment was known, 28% were in education or training. Of those who provided information 36% of those not in education were early school leavers i.e. had left school without their Leaving Certificate or equivalent with 12% 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, 33% had a social care history compared to 24% overall and 80% of them presented with high welfare or care needs compared to 25% overall.

### ➤ **Accommodation**

Of those who provided information regarding their accommodation status, 44% of mothers were living in their family home, while 9% were living in the family home or home of the other parent. 25% of mothers were living in private rented accommodation, a further 6% living in their own home (incl. Local Authority Housing). 21% of mothers were living on a halting site with their families or independently, while 6% were living in local authority housing including those with housing assistance payments. 6% were living in homeless accommodation, including supported accommodation and refuge. 2% of mothers were living between friends' homes.

### ➤ **Employment**

Of those who provided information, 18% 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, 25% were described as having high welfare/care needs compared to 47% overall, and 57% had a social care history compared to 39% overall. In terms of education, all but two mothers in employment had at least their Junior Cert with 63% having completed their Leaving Certificate and an additional 18% having a PLC or 3<sup>rd</sup> Level qualification. 2% of mothers were in foster care or residential care, while one mother was in direct provision accommodation.

### ➤ **Social Protection**

Of those who provided information, most mothers (85%), including some in employment, were in receipt of a Social Protection payment. Of these, 68% were on full or part OFP, 14% were on Job Seekers Allowance, 2.5% were a dependent adult of a Social Welfare recipient and 3% were in receipt of Disability Allowance. The remainder were on 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, 45% of mothers who were postnatal did not have childcare. Most of these mothers (64%) 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. Those who have a childcare need 23% did not have their needs met, or only partially met. 70% of those with childcare had access to a crèche. Where home-based childcare/childminding was used (30), this was provided mainly by the maternal grandmother (68%) or by another family member (19%) with very few young parents using private childminders.

### ➤ **Mothers with a Social Care History**

Of the 609 young mothers supported, where information regarding previous social care history was collected, 34% had a social care history. 18% of mothers with a social care history were 16 years or under when they were referred to the TPSP, and two thirds (66%) were not in education or training.

Of those who were not in education, 50% were early school leavers – compared to 36% of all mothers supported. They were also more likely to experience a housing crisis with 8.5% living in homeless accommodation, an increase of 3.5% on 2020 figure, and compared to 5% of all mothers supported.

### ➤ **Children with a Social Care History**

In 2021, the TPSP supported the mothers of 81 children who had previous or current involvement with Tusla Family Support Services. This included 28 children then involved with Tusla Social Work Services and 11 children involved with other Tusla Family Support Services. In 2021 there were 4 additional children in care, 1 child was previously in care, and 42 additional children who had been involved with Tusla Social Work Services, or other child and family social work services in the past. The TPSP data shows that 60 or 74% 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.

### ➤ Irish Traveller Mothers

In 2021 the TPSP supported 55 young mothers who identified as Irish Travellers, and increase of 23 young mothers on 2020 figures. Like all mothers, approximately half of these referrals came from maternity services. An additional 25% were referred by Youth Services compared to 5% for all mothers. In 2021, young Traveller mothers tended to be slightly older with 7% aged 16 years or under when referred compared to 17% of all the young mothers referred. In terms of education, they were very disadvantaged and this is reflected in the fact that only no Traveller mother was referred by a school. Only 7 (13%) were still in education/training compared to 28% of all mothers. None of these Traveller mothers were in 3<sup>rd</sup> Level education. Of those out of education/training, 2 had completed their Leaving Certification, and 5 had completed their Junior Certificate. Regarding accommodation, in 2021, 18% young Traveller mothers were living in a family home, 35% were living on a halting site, and 14.5% were living with the other parent, the home of the other parent, or with a family member. Seven Traveller mothers were living in a homeless accommodation, with just one of whom had previous involvement with Tusla Social Work Services. Seven (13%) young Traveller mothers were in private rented accommodation compared to 25% of young mothers overall.

### ➤ Non-Irish Mothers

In 2021 the TPSP also supported 74 (12.5%) non-Irish mothers, 3 of whom were English and 1 of whom was from another part of Western Europe. The remaining 59 mothers consisted of:

- 18 from various African countries
- 15 who identified as Roma
- 15 who were Polish
- 9 from other countries in Europe
- 4 from Syria
- 5 from Brazil and
- 1 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 2021

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 sources.

Characteristic	Breakdown	Mothers (56) No.	All new referrals in 2020 (165)
Age	15 or under	2	9
	16	3	17
	17	9	26
	18	15	27
	19	15	39
	20	12	19
	Over 20	0	28
Level of Need	Hardiker1	9	4
	Hardiker 2	30	74
	Hardiker 3	6	60
	Hardiker 4	1	18
	Not Known	10	8



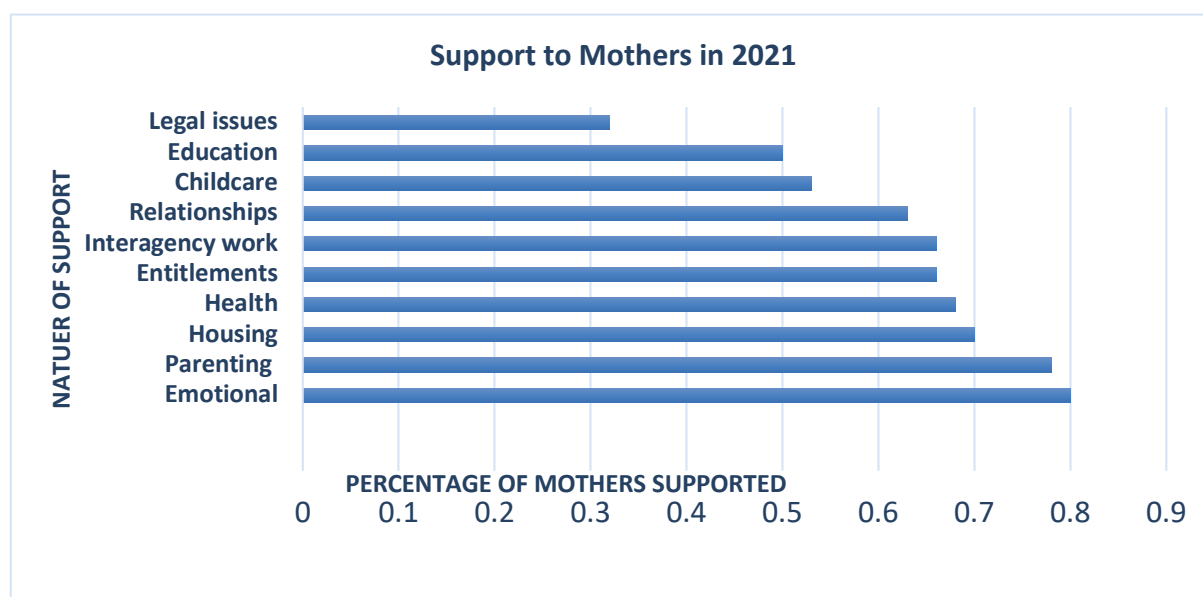
The limited data available suggests that level of need rather than age is a determining factor in whether a referral decides to engage with the TPSP. For example, 47% of all new referrals in 2021 were assessed as having high welfare/child protection needs compared to 12.5% of those who did not avail 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 2021, out of mothers supported, 123 (20%) reported having experienced domestic violence in the past, an increase of 6% on 2020 figures. Out of the 123 mothers who disclosed current and past experiences of domestic violence, 24% felt they were currently at risk, while 76% did not feel at risk currently.

This reported increase in domestic violence in 2021 is in line with reporting by organisations that support victims of domestic violence such as Women's Aid and Safe Ireland. 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 2021



The Chart above shows, in percentage terms, the areas in which all young mothers received support in 2021. While most support was delivered on a one-to-one basis, where opportunities arose TPSP staff organised groupwork and targeted programmes, including evidence-based parenting programmes, either on an ongoing basis or in response to specific identified needs.

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 2021, the TPSP liaised with other agencies on behalf of 61% of all its young mothers; or were referred to the TPSP by these agencies and community-based services. Most of the contact between TPSP staff and other agencies took place with 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.

## Kayla and Karl

In 2021, two young parents, Kayla and Karl, were referred to the Teen Parent Support Programme by a Public Health Nurse for parenting support. Their child was three years old at that time and showed signs of developmental delays. The mother (22) and father (23) are both from Syria and have some English, they also had a six month old child at the time of referral. Once referred the TPSP worker assessed the needs of the family. They are living in a three storey house and the mother was finding it difficult to use the stairs due to a heart condition. An appropriate crèche placement was needed for their three year old boy which would help in his development. Both parents needed parenting support and education in order to better understand how they could best support their son in his all areas of his development, especially in the importance of play. Once the project worker identified the needs of the family she began building a relationship in order to best support both parents in meeting their needs, and the needs of the children.

The TPSP supported Karl in identifying English language lessons, which will help his own personal development and in his parenting, employment prospects and socialising in the locality. The project worker advocated on the families behalf with the local housing authorities to advance their prospects in finding more suitable accommodation due to Kayla's health condition. The three year old boy was placed on the wait list for assessment following the possibility that he might have Autism due to significant delays in his speech and development. Three year old is now attending a pre-school with the support of an AIMS worker, when the assessment is complete and diagnoses confirmed he will then attend a SEN pre-school. Project worker explored parenting child relationships with Kayla using Barnardos 0-2 programme. Project worker also modelled playtime and story time with mam and her children during their one-to-one home visits.

## Young fathers

**In 2021, 60 fathers were offered support separate from the mothers of their children. Of these 2 did not avail of the service. Of the remaining 58 fathers:**

- 72% were Irish, 14% were Irish Travellers, one father was Brazilian, one was Nigerian and the nationality of two others was not known.
- 17% were 16 years or under when referred to the TPSP
- 31% were known to have a social care history and
- 24% had needs at Hardiker Levels 3 or 4.

Care must be taken when interpreting comparisons in this section 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 one third 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, 31% were known to have a social care history compared to 28% of all mothers supported.

### ➤ Education

In 2021, 20% were still in education or training. However, 36% of those not in education or training were early school leavers compared to 39% of mothers. Of those who were early school leavers, 25% had a social care history and all of these again were described as still having high welfare needs.



### ➤ Employment

Of the young fathers supported, 41% were described as having either full-time or part-time employment. 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 79% had completed the Leaving Certificate or a Post Leaving Certificate Course (PLC).

### ➤ Social Protection

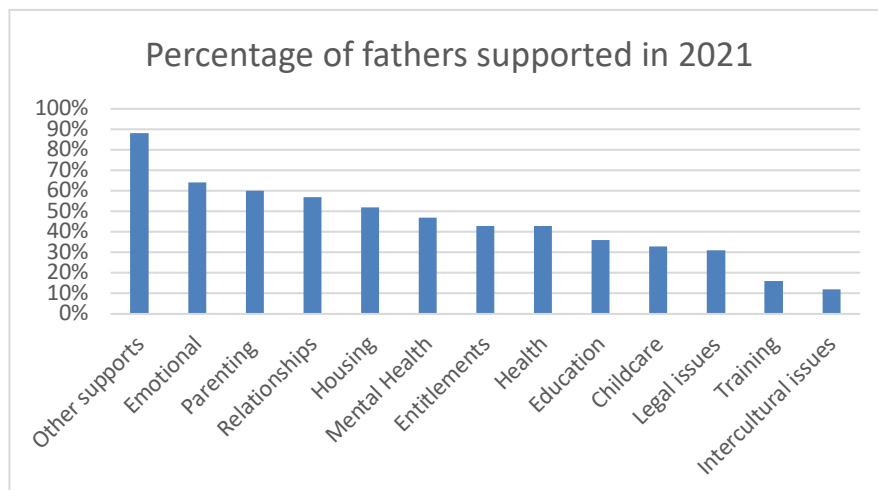
Over one-third (39%) of fathers were in receipt of a Social Protection payment with the majority (46%) receiving Job Seekers Allowance. The remainder were receiving the training allowance, full or part One-Parent Family payment, working family payment, a supplementary welfare allowance or a Disability Allowance.

### ➤ Contact with their children

In 2021, the TPSP supported **368** mothers who were postnatal. In **47** cases the father's level of contact with his child was not known when the data was collected. Of the remaining **321** fathers:

- **120** were described as having frequent contact with their children
- **90** were married/cohabiting with the mother of their children
- **50** had infrequent contact
- **39** had no contact
- **14** of the children were living in the paternal home without the mother
- **8** had a legal access arrangement.

## Supports to all young fathers in 2021



The Chart above shows, in percentage terms, the areas in which young fathers received support in 2021. As with mothers, most support was delivered on a one-to-one basis however, fathers also participated in groups facilitated by TPSP staff.

Regarding interagency work, in 2021 the TPSP liaised with other agencies on behalf of 88% 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).

### Young fathers who did not avail of the service in 2021

Two young fathers did not engage with the TPSP in 2021. They were aged 16 years and 18 years; one was referred by a mid-wife, the other was referred by his peer. Both had moderate level of needs, with no recorded previous history with social work. One father had completed his leaving certificate, the educational attainment of the other father was not known. The father who had completed second level education was working part-time, the employment status of the other father was not known. One father was Irish, the background of the other father was not known.

### Young fathers and domestic violence

In 2021, out of 51 fathers supported 8 reported an experience of domestic violence in the past but did not feel at risk currently. In 2021, 4 fathers reported a history of domestic violence, but none felt they were currently 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 2021

During 2021, a total of 274 service users ceased contact with the TPSP. These consisted of 250 young mothers, 24 fathers. Of these, 58 (56 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 (194)	Fathers (22)
Age at time of referral	15 years or under	18	2
	16 years	26	5
	17 years	32	3
	18 years	37	3
	19 years	43	4
	20 years	12	2
	Over 20 years	26	3
Level of Need at time of referral	Hardiker 1	9	2
	Hardiker 2	113	12
	Hardiker 3	64	7
	Hardiker 4	8	1
Level of Need when support ceased	Hardiker 1	34	2
	Hardiker 2	103	12
	Hardiker 3	53	7
	Hardiker 4	4	4
Accommodation at time of referral	Living in family home	109	12
	Living with other family member	14	1
	Living in home of child's father	12	n/a
	Private rented accommodation	23	2
	Own home - local authority	6	0
	In care	3	2
	Homeless	7	2
	Refuge	4	0
	Other	13	2
	Not known when data was collected	3	1

Accommodation when support ceased	Living in family home	109	12
	Living with other family member	14	2
	Living in home of child's father	12	n/a
	Private rented accommodation	23	2
	In care	4	2
	Homeless	11	1
	Own home-local authority and other	6	0
	Supported accommodation	4	0
	Other	8	2
	Not known when data was collected	3	1
Reasons support ceased	Needs were met	77	12
	Child >2 and needs were partially met	10	2
	Moved out of area	18	2
	Referred to other support	7	0
	Parent ceased contact	76	6
	Other	6	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)<sup>1</sup>. 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 2021, for the first time, all 12 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, which has continued to be the case in 2021. 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 2021, TPSP support ceased for 194 young mothers and 22 young fathers who had engaged with the service. The following table compares their educational/training status when they when contact ceased in 2021. Out of 194 mothers, 123 received educational supports through the TPSP, either financial support, information

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

and advice, or direct advocacy by their support workers who liaised with schools, institutions, and training centres.

Highest Educational Attainment	When support ceased in 2021	
	Mothers (194)	Fathers (22)
Completed 3rd Level Education	5	0
Completed PLC Course	19	0
Completed Leaving Certificate	74	4
Completed Junior Cert only	37	6
No 2nd Level Qualification	3	0
Other	6	1
Not known when data was collected	50	0

## Patricia

At 14, Patricia was referred to the TPSP by Maternity Services. She gave birth to her baby while being supported by the TPSP. Her support worker helped Patricia with antenatal education, emotional support and in her education. Patricia left second level during her pregnancy having completed her Junior Certificate exams. Patricia then deferred re-entering fifth year until she settled into parenthood.

Patricia was living with her younger brother and her mother who has a health condition which she finds challenging, Patricia was struggling to cope with being a mother while also caring for her mother and brother.

Patricia's partner lived in an adjacent county and had little time to spend with her and their new born baby. The TPSP support worker helped Patricia in her parenting skills, bonding and with her finances.

Living in a mobile home in a very rural area, once Patricia decided to return to education, the TPSP helped with childcare, educational costs and transport to and from school. Patricia moved from her mother's accommodation to her father's home which was more suitable to her and her child's needs.

Patricia is now in fifth year and is still linked in with her TPSP support worker.

## Young Parents and Housing

Each year the TPSP has conducts 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 ETHOS<sup>2</sup> typology used by FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. FEANSA 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.

In 2021 data collected from the TPSP database shows the following:

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

**Roofless:** No young parent was sleeping rough in 2021

**Homeless:** 41 young parents (22 mothers and 1 father) were in homeless accommodation or temporary supported accommodation following homelessness. This compares with 23 young parents in June 2020.

**Insecure Accommodation:** 63 young parents (62 mothers and 1 father) were in insecure accommodation. This compares with 63 parents in insecure accommodation in June 2020. Examples of insecure accommodation include couch surfing with family or friends, living with insecure tenancies or living under the threat of eviction.

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.

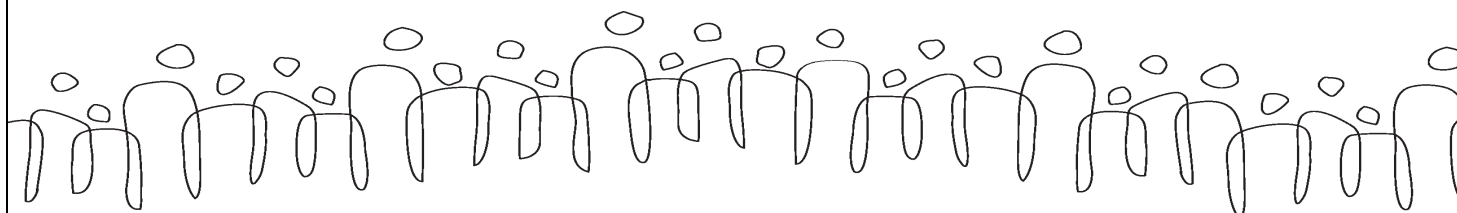
## Naomi and Jack

In 2017, Naomi and Jack were advised by an Education Service to contact Barnardos Family Support Service as they were expecting their first baby. At the time of the referral mother (18) was living in overcrowded accommodation and father (22) was homeless. The couple's family were supportive but unable to meet the needs of the couple as there is a history of unpredictability and difficult family dynamics within both sides. The couple were feeling very isolated. By the start of 2018 the couple moved to one-bedroom accommodation due to difficult family relationships. The accommodation was cold and damp, and not suitable for a baby. This caused huge concern for the couple. The family were experiencing financial difficulties as they were surviving on Naomi's social welfare payment and Jack's wages from his chef job of just 20 hours per week.

Following the birth of their daughter and with no alternative accommodation being sourced, the family spent their days in the maternal grandmother's house and nights sleeping on a family members couch. The relationship between the couple was extremely volatile and Naomi expressed that she was struggling with mental health and post-natal depressions.

Practical family support was given to the family through the TPSP project worker before the birth of their first daughter. This included clothes, food and vouchers. Naomi was supported to purchase her hospital bag. The project worker also supported the family to complete relevant paperwork for Social Welfare Grants and financial help with a deposit for a rental property. Paperwork can often be a huge barrier for young parents. Their Project Worker also liaised with the County Council in relation to securing a suitable property for the family. The family moved into their home in a rural location in April 2018, this was not ideal as transport to and from town was an issue. At this time, support was also provided through group based TPSP, the couple and baby attended each week and benefitted from the support of a Project Worker and peer support within the group.

The family closed to the TPSP in early 2019 as the baby was thriving and meeting all developmental milestones. Naomi was linked in with a mother and toddler group and was starting to express an interest in returning to education in the future. Jack was also doing well currently and working to support his family. The family were happy for the TPSP to close off on the referral with the understanding they could contact the project again if they felt they needed support.





## Stacy and Philip

In 2022, a young family were referred into service by Medical Social Worker. Mother (22) had mentioned that she had been involved in with TPSP on her first pregnancy and would like to access the support again on this pregnancy.

Stacy was due her second baby in October 2022. She reported feeling overwhelmed and unsure how she will manage with two children to her medical social worker. The family have moved house and are now living in two-bedroom accommodation with no local support around them. The apartment is more appropriate to the needs of the family but the space is cluttered and Philip is working from home. The relationship between parents has broken down and there is a lot of hurt. Philip is recovering from a gambling addiction which has impacted significantly on the family's financial situation. The couple are continuing to manage the impact of this. Philip is working from home and Stacy is in control of the finances, but their relationship is poor as a result and they have not spoken to each other about how this has affected their relationship. Stacy lacks confidence in herself and her ability to parent her daughter. She is unable to recognise what she is doing well and is concerned about her attachment with her daughter. She is concerned about her mental health and how she will manage this when the baby comes. Philip is currently seeking support in terms of his mental health.

Stacy felt that Baranrdos TPSP was a huge support to her in the past. It is a space where she was not judged but instead supported to navigate the next steps on her journey. This is the reason Stacy wanted the support of the service again with this pregnancy. The parents have been open to discussing the impact of a new baby on family life and the way in which they will manage this. Their Project Worker has supported Stacy to recognise her strengths as a parent and encouraged her to take one step at a time. Providing love, warmth and basic needs such as food and sleep for her two daughters is the priority at this time. The family were provided with vouchers to help out in the lead up to the arrival of their daughter and a hospital bag of essentials were bought for both Mother and Baby.

A lack of family support, mental health difficulties and financial struggles will continue to be a part of this family, therefore there is a need for continued support to offer reassurance and practical advice around parenting, mental health and budgeting. The couple will need to be linked into more appropriate and specific mental health supports. The family's needs will change over time as their children reach different developmental milestones. Over the coming year the eldest daughter will be transitioning into Primary School, which may cause some financial pressure and struggle around change for the little girl. Their Project Worker will remain in contact and provide supports or refer the family to other supports as required until they exit the TPSP.

## National Coordination of the TPSP

The National Coordinator of the TPSP is based in Treoir<sup>3</sup>. 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 2021, the Coordinator continued to support the 12 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 2021 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 2021 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.

### ○ 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 2021, 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) regarding the operational guidelines relating to the SUSI grant scheme.

During 2021 the National Coordinator represented the needs of young parents on:

- The Irish Coalition to end Youth Homelessness and
- The Parenting Network.
- Local Advisory Committee in Donegal

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<sup>3</sup> [www.treoir.ie](http://www.treoir.ie)

In 2021, the Coordinator represented young parents at online and in-person 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 2021, 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 2021, 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 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.

#### ○ School Completion Programme (SCP)

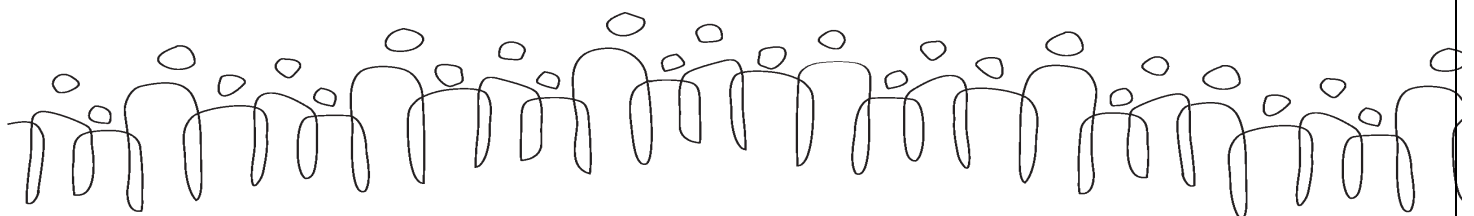
The SCP is funded through Tusla's Education Support Service (TESS). The aim of the SCP is to increase the number of young people staying in school and in doing so increase the numbers of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle or the equivalent. In 2020, the National Coordinator took over the administration and distribution of Tusla's SCP allocation to the TPSP. The National Coordinator, with the help of Finance Officer, Sharon Kavanagh, managed the administration of the SCP programme for 2021/2022 for the second year following the commencement of Treoir involvement in 2020.

#### ○ 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.

#### ○ TPSP Website

During 2021, the TPSP website ([www.tpsp.ie](http://www.tpsp.ie)) was updated regularly with items of interest to young parents and those involved with them.



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