



TPSP Operating Model

September 2017

Background to the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP)

The TPSP was established in 1999 by the Department of Health and Children under the ‘Children at Risk’ strand of the National Child Care Investment Strategy (1998). The principal focus of this Strategy was to support vulnerable children within their family and community settings with the aim of reducing the possibility of children entering residential or foster care. Families headed by teen parents were identified as particularly vulnerable and the TPSP was set up to support teen parents in their parenting role, to help them achieve other life goals and to also have a child protection role (Final Evaluation of the Teen Parents Support Initiative (2002) ¹

Parenting in 2017

In 2017, there is growing emphasis on the need to support all parents including teen parents. The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014)² positions ‘Support Parents’ as its first Transformational Goal. It states that *‘parents are the foundation for good child outcomes and ...effective parenting support can ameliorate some of the more negative impacts of intergenerational poverty’*. (P 7) The National Framework goes on to emphasise that *‘some young people become parents and such ‘teen parents’ (sic) may need additional supports to access education, employment and housing and to support their own parenting’* (P 27).

Tusla’s commitment to supporting all parents in their parenting role is demonstrated by their development of the *Parenting24Seven* website³. It offers 7 evidenced based key messages for what works best for children aged 0-5 years which are reinforced by the TPSP.

Teen Parents in 2017

Over the past decade there has been a significant and welcome reduction in births to teen mothers. Nonetheless, an increasing proportion of referrals to the TPSP are presenting with more complex needs including younger parents, care leavers, those experiencing repeat crisis pregnancies, those affected by the housing crisis and young migrant parents. Most pregnant/parenting teenagers have no contact with other social services. Although many of them have high levels of need and live in very challenging home environments, they may not be identified as being at the level of ongoing risk of abuse and neglect required to meet the threshold for Tusla Child Protection Services. This applies to young parents who have never been part of Tusla Child Protection Services as well as those who are being ‘stepped down’ from those services.

Young parents under the age of 18 are still protected under national child protection policies, as are their children. Many young parents are children rearing children. The TPSP is in a position to be vigilant of the child protection and welfare needs of both parents and children, to support them when problems arise and refer them to other family support services when required.

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https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/Final_Evaluation_Report_of_the_Teen_Parents_Support_Initiative.pdf

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https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf

³ <http://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/0-5-years>

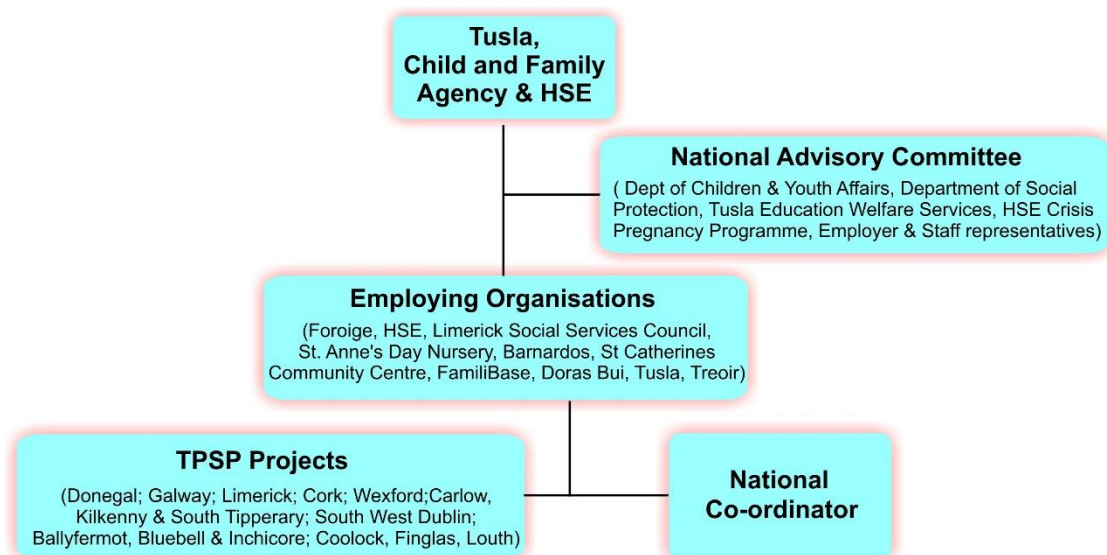
It is difficult to get young parents to engage with mainstream services, attend standard antenatal classes or typical mother and baby groups in the community. Teenagers may not be able to engage effectively with methods that are used with adults. The evaluation of the TPSP in 2002⁴ showed that they respond best to adolescent-friendly services dedicated to them. The fact that young people need separate services is also evidenced by the development of separate youth services and adolescent mental health services such as Jigsaw and CAMHS.

The TPSP also engages with young fathers, the majority of whom have no contact with any other social service or any other agency or institution that acknowledges and promotes their identity as parents. TPSP staff endeavour to get both mother and father to understand the importance for a child of having both parents in his/her life. Where it is safe, TPSP staff encourage shared parenting - to whatever extent is possible.

Structure of the Teen Parents Support Programme

The TPSP consists of 11 separate projects throughout the country funded by Tusla and the HSE. They are managed by a variety of non-governmental and community based organisations. The TPSP has a

National Coordinator who is based in Treoir and a National Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from relevant government departments, Tusla and TPSP staff.



Referrals

Pregnant and parenting teens are referred to the TPSP mainly by professionals who have contact with them and by family members, peers and self-referral. Most young parents come to the TPSP when the mother is antenatal i.e. not yet a family and therefore not in contact with any other form of family support. Through this early engagement with the TPSP, the mother is encouraged to attend antenatal services and to look after her own needs and those of her unborn baby. There is a strong association between teenage pregnancy and low birthweight⁵. However, there is also evidence that this can be improved by early enrolment and consistent attendance at antenatal services⁶

⁴ op.cit

⁵ Institute of Public Health in Ireland (2006). *Unequal at birth. Inequalities in the occurrence of low birth weight babies in Ireland*

⁶ ibid

Most teen parents are positioned at Level 2 on Tusla's 'integrated continuum of preventative support' i.e. needing Targeted Family Support such as Home Visiting Programmes and Parenting Support⁷ Young parents with needs at Levels 3 (high to complex needs) and Level 4 (complex or acute needs)⁸ are also supported by the TPSP with specific additional interventions (such as support with parenting skills, independent living and participation in Parent & Child groups) as part of an interagency approach. In 2015, 38% of parents who presented to the TPSP for the first time were located at Levels 3 and 4, some of whom are involved with Tusla Child Protection Services and Aftercare Services.

Supports

After initial assessment, each young parent is assigned a project worker who supports her/him in whatever areas of need have been identified. This may be in the areas of healthcare for mother and baby; parenting; personal development; independent living; childcare; social welfare entitlements; housing; guidance with significant inter-personal relationships; legal information (in relation to being an unmarried parent) and anything else about which the young person is concerned. The TPSP also plays a key role in breaking the cycle of disadvantage experienced by many young and lone parents by encouraging and supporting them to remain in or return to education, if that is their choice.

TPSP staff have frequent and flexible contact with the young parents. They meet them in their homes, the TPSP office or other venues where the young person is safe and comfortable. This level of engagement enables TPSP staff to identify emerging problems (such as postnatal depression in the mother, developmental delays in the baby or abuse in relationships) and to respond appropriately. The young parents are also encouraged to avail of postnatal care, contraception and developmental checks for the baby.

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

Interventions are delivered on a one-to-one and family basis (as described above), through group work and interagency working.

Group Work

Group Work is an efficient way of delivering information, offering peer support and encouraging the young people to develop new social networks as parents. In some situations, the children are minded by trained childcare workers while parents are attending their Group. As a result, the children of the young parents also benefit from an opportunity for socialisation (depending on age), from stimulation and a space where their developmental progress can be observed by other professionals. In line with the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation on Decision Making, these Parents & Child Groups also provide a user-friendly space where the views of young parents are taken seriously and acted upon where appropriate⁹.

⁷ http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Commissioning_Guidance.pdf

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/docs/national-strategy-on-children-and-young-people-s-participation-in-decision-making/3456.htm>

Interagency Working

Within their catchment areas, each TPSP project is familiar with the other family support services available locally and form part of the area based networks for family support under Tusla's Prevention Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Structure. Project staff are trained in the delivery of the Meitheal national practice model and may act as Lead Practitioner where young parents have complex additional needs that do not reach the Threshold for Child Protection Services. TPSP project workers are ideally placed to use the Meitheal process because of their pre-existing relationship with the young family. By maintaining fidelity to the principles of Meitheal they can empower young parents to identify their own strengths and supports and to participate in decisions about their own lives. This enables them to develop more independent decision-making skills for when they no longer have the support of TPSP. Currently any Meitheal lead by TPSP forms part of the evaluation of the Meitheal and the Child and Family Support Networks by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI, Galway¹⁰

Children and Young People's Services Committees

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. The overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency working¹¹. The voice and needs of young parents are represented on local CYPSC through the employing organisations of the TPSP who form part of structured sub-groups aligned to the National Outcome and Transformational Goal areas in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

¹⁰ http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Meithael__Networks_Report_-_2016_-_Final.pdf

¹¹ [http://www.cypsc.ie/_fileupload/Documents/News%20and%20Events/CYPSC-final-draft-blueprint%20CR-210415%20\(to%20issue\).pdf](http://www.cypsc.ie/_fileupload/Documents/News%20and%20Events/CYPSC-final-draft-blueprint%20CR-210415%20(to%20issue).pdf)

Summary of Referrals, Supports and Interagency Working

| Referrals from | Support with | Support through | Interagency Work with |
|--|--|--|--|
| Maternity Services Medical Social Workers Tusla Family Support Services Tusla Social Workers Aftercare Services Schools & Training Agencies Area Based Childhood Initiatives Housing Agencies Services for Domestic Violence Youth Groups Public Health Nurses Mental Health Services Family Peers Self | Health Parenting School Completion Training Childcare Social Welfare Entitlements Independent living Developing support networks Significant interpersonal relationships Intercultural issues | One-to-one information, guidance and advocacy Home Visiting Group Work Meitheal Delivery of evidence-based parenting programmes Referral to other sources of support Other Interagency Work | Tusla Social Workers Tusla Family Support Workers Aftercare Workers Area based Childhood Initiatives Area based family support networks under PPFS Schools Training Centres Third Level Institutions Childcare Providers PHNs Community Mothers/Parents Domestic Violence Organisations Housing Agencies Local Authorities Government Departments Disability Services Counselling Services MABS St. Vincent de Paul Migrant Organisations |

How TPSP contributes to the 5 National Outcomes for Children and Young People in Ireland¹²

| Active & healthy, physical & mental wellbeing | Achieving full potential in all areas of learning & development | Safe & protected from harm | Economic security and opportunity | Connected, respected & contributing to their world |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| <p>Improved antenatal & postnatal care Baby full-term with healthy birthweight Establishment of quality parent-child relationship Support with breastfeeding Support with bonding & attachment Improved infant mental health Awareness of postnatal depression and how to seek medical help Supported to attend for immunisation and developmental checks Learn good mental and physical self-care.</p> | <p>Are supported to be effective and happy in their transition to parenthood Reinforcement of key messages in <i>Parenting24Seven</i>¹³ Have access to evidence-based parenting programmes Baby is learning and developing from birth Supported to complete their own development as young people as well as young parents through ongoing learning and social activities Potential to break intergenerational poverty and social exclusion through support to remain in or return to education/training.</p> | <p>Recognise positive and respectful relationships Practice good sexual health including safe sex Can recognise domestic violence and other abuse and know how to seek help Are supported to find alternative and suitable housing if necessary Learn to provide baby with has a secure stable environment through good routines, nutrition and stimulation TPSP staff can identify when a parent, a baby or both are at risk and refer to Tusla.</p> | <p>Supported to complete their education/training in whatever way suits them Are protected from poverty through knowledge of their entitlements and benefits Are informed of pathways to economic participation Are supported to make the transition from welfare to education/training or employment Understand the impact of their parenting on the long-term outcomes for their children and are supported to engage with evidence based parenting programmes and other supports.</p> | <p>Through interagency contact young parents learn of local supports and are empowered to use them Group work supports the building of new social relationships and interaction with community-based activities, services and facilities Young mothers understand the importance of identity such as ensuring the father's name is on the birth certificate TPSP staff encourage shared parenting where possible so that children are connected to both sides of their family.</p> |

¹²

https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf

¹³ op.cit.

