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Brave's early intervention vital for the future of young parents and children

A national program offered by Tasmania's Brave Foundation is providing essential support for teenage parents, an independent report by the Peter Underwood Centre has found.

Lead researcher and Peter Underwood Centre deputy director Professor Kitty te Riele said the Brave Foundation's Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) program was a much-needed innovation.

"Our study has revealed robust evidence that the SEPT program is vital as an early intervention because of the large number of teenage mothers in Australia and their complex needs," Professor te Riele said.

Almost 40,000 children were born to teenage mothers in Australia between 2014-18, and the teenage birth rate in Tasmania is among the highest in the country.

"SEPT provides support for vulnerable young people at the right time, often as early as during pregnancy.

"This is also crucial for their children, because there is abundant and growing evidence of the importance of a child's first 1000 days from pregnancy, for their health, development and wellbeing."

Expecting and parenting young people often face complex challenges to success, including systemic barriers of discrimination and exclusion, intergenerational disadvantage, a lack of family support, domestic violence and unhealthy relationships, mental illness, financial hardship, and inadequate housing and transport.

The SEPT program has been funded through a Try, Test and Learn (TTL) grant from the federal Department of Social Services to support young parents across eight locations around Australia, including greater Hobart.

SEPT provides participants with a tailored pathway plan, supported by Brave Foundation mentors, which aims to identify their aspirations and reconnect them to education and employment opportunities within their communities.

Professor te Riele said by collaborating with service providers within the young parents' communities, SEPT develops valuable links between these various organisations and participants.

"The program assists expecting and parenting young people to navigate a complex landscape of ever-changing services and providers, enhancing accessibility, avoiding duplication and reducing costs," she said.

The researchers also found that the strengths of the SEPT model were not restricted to working with pregnant and parenting young people, and were transferrable to supporting other vulnerable groups.

The Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) Trial – Independent Evaluation Final Report, and the Peter Underwood Centre's recently released *Teen Parents Fact Sheet* can be found here: www.utas.edu.au/underwood-centre/publications-and-resources

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