



Brave Foundation

Measurement, Evaluation & Learning Framework

SUPPORTING EXPECTING & PARENTING TEENS PROGRAM

VERSION 1 MAY 2023

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Brave Foundation acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation as the traditional custodians of the lands on which our organisation works. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Brave's work also brings us into contact with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. We commit to respecting the culture and heritage of each person we encounter, inside and outside our organisation.



Glossary

Key Term	Definition
Empathy Interviews	A form of interviewing that draws out specific stories and journeys related to the issue of interest to understand the thoughts, feelings and context associated with participants' experiences
Evaluand	The object of an evaluation, whether a product, policy, program or other innovation
Evaluation	A systematic investigation that addresses questions of merit, worth or significance
Evaluation Criteria	The qualities of the evaluand that matter with regards to the evaluation questions and conclusions
Evaluation Standards	Descriptors of what the evaluand 'looks like' at different levels of quality (e.g. poor, satisfactory, good, very good) in relation to each criterion
Evaluation Rubric	A framework that makes explicit the criteria and standards and facilitates the evaluative reasoning process upon which evaluative judgements are made
Evaluative Reasoning	The logical process (stemming from evaluative questions, criteria and standards) upon which evaluative conclusions involving judgements about merit, worth or significance are made
Indicator	An observable or measurable characteristic that indicates the presence of a phenomenon of interest
Lived Experience	In the context of Brave, refers to lived experience of parenthood at a young age

Logic Analysis	Analysis of the assumptions of a program theory against existing evidence and/or expert opinion to verify stakeholder logic
Measure	A tool that enables assessment of an indicator
Mechanisms of Change	The processes within an evaluand that drive desired outcomes (also considered mediators of the effects)
Monitoring	Ongoing tracking of progress towards goals
Outcome Evaluation	Evaluation that is focused on what is produced from an evaluand or achieved as a result of an evaluand's activities
Process Evaluation	Evaluation that is focused on an evaluand's operations, including implementation
Program Theory	Theoretical assumptions about how and why an evaluand produces outcomes
Theory-Driven Evaluation	An approach to evaluation that involves development of the program theory, using the theory to identify relevant evaluation questions and an appropriate evaluation design, and then implementing a study to test the theory (usually in part)
Success Factors	The term used in this framework to describe the moderators of success or the conditioning factors that facilitate or impede an evaluand's effectiveness
Theory of Change	Describes the theoretical assumptions about how and why an evaluand produces change, similar to a program theory, but emphasis is on the mechanisms or processes of change rather than activities; often also includes assumptions about the conditions that help or hinder an evaluand's effectiveness
Utilisation-Focused Evaluation	An approach to evaluation that emphasises use at all stages of the evaluation process and typically requires the involvement of stakeholders

Introduction

Founded, designed, and led by women with diverse lived experience, Brave Foundation (Brave) is Australia's first national not-for-profit dedicated to assisting expecting and parenting young people. Brave equips expecting and parenting young people with resources, referral, and education opportunities to facilitate happy, healthy, and skilled families. Brave's vision is to see future generations thrive by unlocking the boundless potential of young parents.

Brave's innovative Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) program was initially funded in 2018 under the Try, Test and Learn (TTL) Fund. A 2018-20 independent evaluation of a national SEPT trial by the Peter Underwood Centre found that the program provides a much needed and well-timed mentoring service for young people who face complex and intersecting challenges at the beginning of their parenting journey (Bakhtiar et al., 2020). Grounded in an agile and nationally coordinated organisation that provides responsive backbone support, the SEPT model's community-focused and collaborative approach enables the provision of locally tailored and individualised intervention and advocacy for young parents. Professional Brave mentors support expecting and parenting young people's holistic wellbeing and goal achievement success. Brave mentors also act as system navigators, coordinating resources and opportunities, and walk alongside expecting and parenting young people to facilitate their access to essential supports and services for their families' wellbeing. The place-based, system-linking and intergenerational foci of the SEPT program creates potential for long-term systemic impact. This potential has led to calls for further investment and expansion of Brave's services (Bakhtiar et al., 2020).

Brave's unique expertise, developed in partnership with youth participants and community stakeholders, means that Brave is well-positioned to become a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for understanding the needs and advocating for, the healthy development, wellbeing, rights, and safety of expecting and parenting young people and their children. As a CoE, Brave will promote best practices, support continuous improvement through program monitoring and research, and provide thought leadership and advocacy in what works for expecting and parenting young people.

In doing so, the Brave CoE aims to:

- make a difference in the lives of expecting and parenting young people and their children.
- be recognised as an authoritative leader regarding expecting and parenting young people.
- contribute to the evidence base about what is needed and what works well in supporting expecting and parenting young people.
- influence government policy and budget decisions regarding expecting and parenting young people.

This report outlines Brave's first MEL Framework, focused on its flagship SEPT program. The purpose of Brave's MEL Framework is to operationalise the kind of evidence needed, and the overarching plan and steps to generate, disseminate and learn from evidence in response to priority evaluation questions to meet organisational goals. The MEL Framework will provide valuable direction for the development of Brave's evidence infrastructure, in support of its aim to be recognised as a CoE.

Brave acknowledges that this work would not be possible without the support of its current funders, including the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Office for Women, the Paul Ramsay Foundation, the Department of Communities Tasmania, Equity Trustees and MyState Foundation. Brave looks forward to growing a robust evidence base on effective supports for expecting and parenting young people in partnership with current and future funders.

Values Alignment of the MEL Framework

All Brave operations are guided by five core values: Inspire, Empower, Connect, Include and Innovate. The objectives and activities of Brave’s MEL Framework are no different. Table 2 describes Brave’s core values and outlines how the implementation of Brave’s MEL Framework is values-aligned.

Table 2. The MEL Framework’s alignment with Brave’s Core Values

Core Values	Description	MEL Framework Alignment
Inspire	by supporting and encouraging our community to dream	Evaluative inquiry into program processes and outcomes will signal opportunities to amplify impact and feed into continuous learning initiatives where evidence-based insights provide a platform to inspire new program development ideas.
Empower	by championing and resourcing individual potential	Inquiry efforts will give voice to marginalised young people by creating accessible opportunities for them to share their experiences and to be recognised for their expertise. Brave’s dissemination and learning plan will ensure participants are able to access information about Brave’s evidence and understand how their expertise was taken on board. Evidence will also be used to affirm existing practices and the strengths of the Brave community and to highlight areas where additional resourcing is needed to more effectively support Brave champions.
Connect	by establishing and strengthening collaborative relationships	Research and knowledge-sharing opportunities related to Brave’s growing evidence base will strengthen existing connections and create avenues for new collaborative relationships with practice, funding and research partners.
Include	by embracing diversity and combatting prejudice	Investigation into the experiences of the diverse individuals who make up Brave’s community and how well they are supported to belong and participate in society, as well as consideration of eligible young people who are not represented in SEPT, will point to areas where inclusion barriers exist and how they might be addressed. Evidence on the barriers faced by and the needs of expecting and parenting young people will also support systemic advocacy efforts to redress inequities.
Innovate	by finding and making a way	Collectively, these evidence-driven threads will support continued innovation that benefits expecting and parenting young people.

Scope of the MEL Framework



The scope of the current MEL Framework is restricted to the SEPT program and the experiences and outcomes of SEPT participants

A clear and contained focus on Brave's established SEPT program will facilitate the implementation of MEL processes and tools that can be feasibly introduced and tested before further expansion of the framework.

Approach to Developing the MEL Framework

Figure 1 outlines the broad steps Brave has taken to develop the current MEL Framework. The approach follows general guidelines for developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks (see Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

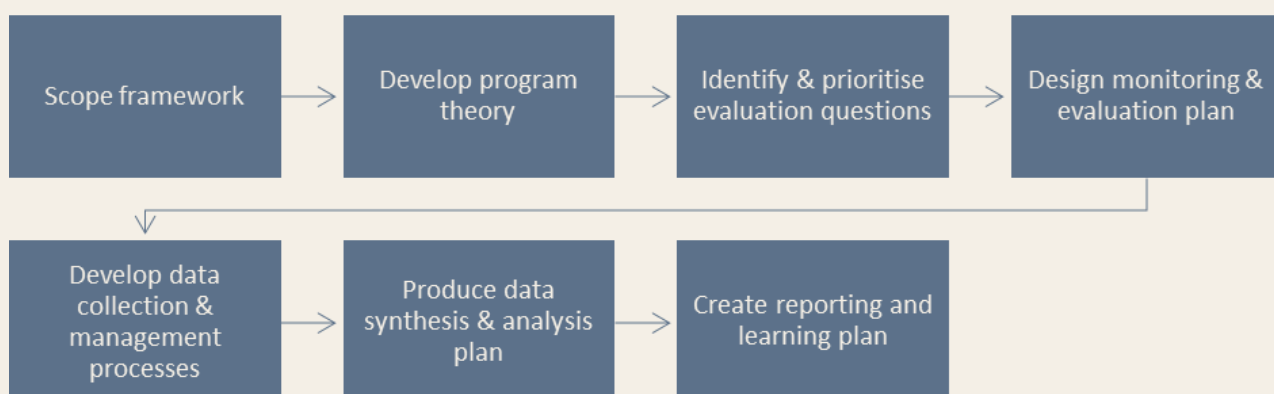


Fig. 1. MEL Framework Development Steps (adapted from Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

Guiding Principles

The MEL Framework is guided by Brave’s foundational principles of putting the voice of young people with lived experience of early parenthood at the heart of all it does. This is reinforced in the Brave Model of Participation. In addition, the MEL Framework is informed by the NEST, Australia’s national strengths-based wellbeing framework (Goodhue et al., 2021), internationally accepted ethical guidelines for the conduct of research involving human participants (see National Health and Medical Research Council et al., 2018), and the integration of principles from different evaluation theories (see Figure 2).



Fig. 1. MEL Framework Development Steps (adapted from Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

Process of Development

In line with the general approach for developing MEL frameworks, the SEPT Theory of Change (ToC) provides the foundation for subsequent components of the Brave's MEL Framework. Brave developed the ToC in collaboration with stakeholders who are the closest to the program – SEPT participants, Brave Mentors and other staff members involved in program delivery. Grounding the theory in the perspectives of those who have direct involvement with SEPT not only honours the principle of centring lived experience but also helps to ensure selected measures and evaluation activities focus on program processes, outcomes and conditions that are the most relevant and realistic. It also facilitates shared ownership and understanding of the theory (Donaldson, 2007) and enhances the likelihood that the process and outputs will be useful (Patton, 2012). The SEPT ToC was based on contributions from 26 SEPT participants, 14 mentors and four additional staff members who participated in three face-to-face workshops, one virtual workshop and one focus group. A review of relevant internal documents also informed the ToC.

A stakeholder mapping and analysis exercise with Brave's Senior Leadership Team and further consultation with the Brave Board occurred in parallel to the SEPT ToC construction process. This was to pinpoint evaluation stakeholders that were high priority at the present time, and to identify their information needs with regards to the SEPT program. The findings of the analysis were held in view of the ToC and also informed decisions about the monitoring and evaluation questions that should be prioritised during the initial phases of Brave's evaluation journey and related measurement and evaluation plans.

SEPT Program Theory

Figure 3 provides a visual overview of the SEPT Program Theory that illustrates the basic components of the program and the general logic flow, including the success factors thought to be most influential in enabling or impeding program effectiveness. It is important to note that the SEPT Program Theory is a living theory, representing the most salient features of the program at the current time. It should be reviewed and revised periodically to ensure it evolves alongside program development and captures new evidence-based insights as they are generated. The more detailed SEPT ToC is also available upon request.



The Problem

Young people with aspirations for their & their child's lives are not well supported in their transition to parenthood due to stigma & discrimination; this occurs at a critical juncture for nurturing the healthy development of their children & when the young parents are navigating developmental complexities themselves

Target Group

Expecting & parenting young people 24 years or under who began parenting under 20 or who have other vulnerabilities, & the children of these parents

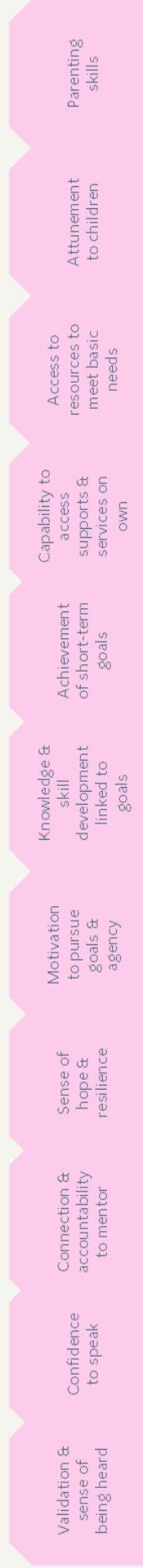
Participant Profile

Young single mothers & under-resourced mothers & fathers who face stigma & systemic discrimination & commonly experience challenging & interconnected personal & contextual circumstances that compromise their personal aspirations, & their own & their children's wellbeing

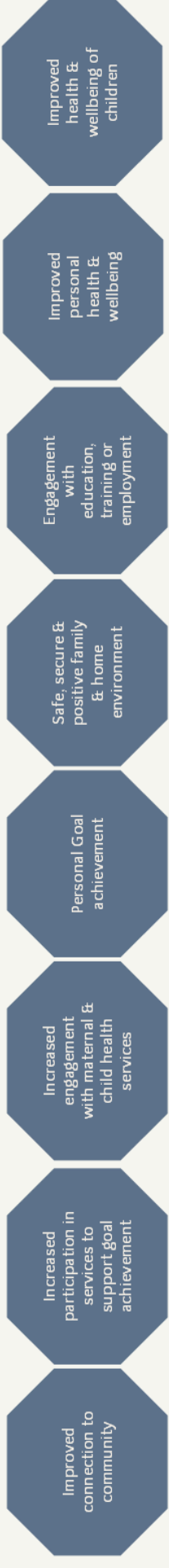
Core (cream) & Supporting (blue) Program Activities



Short-Term Outcomes



Intermediate-Term Outcomes



Success Factors

A mentor who is skilled & supported by a well-resourced back-bone organisation to provide sufficient, flexible, individualised & culturalised mentoring support, is knowledgeable of & well-connected to participants' communities & active in outreach efforts

Long-Term Outcomes

Past participants are resilient, skilled parents with healthy relationships, providing a stable & nurturing environment for their child/ren & are achieving their personal educational & employment aspirations

Success Factors

A young person who is not at the point of crisis & is ready to engage with the opportunity; the SEPT program, & other services, supports & opportunities within their local communities are available & accessible to them

Areas of Inquiry & Priority Questions

The SEPT ToC, in combination with the stakeholder analysis, informed the identification of five priority areas of inquiry for the initial implementation phases of the MEL Framework as shown in Figure 4.



Fig. 4. Areas of inquiry and related monitoring and evaluation questions identified for the initial phases of the MEL Framework's implementation.

Design, Methods & Measures

In consideration of the varied needs of different evaluation stakeholders, the monitoring and evaluation plans outlined in this MEL Framework incorporate both process and outcomes-focused evaluation approaches and a mixed-methods design that draws on the advantages and addresses the shortcomings of both qualitative and quantitative research. The monitoring strands of inquiry will draw on participant case file data and will be predominantly quantitative in nature to describe high level trends and patterns based on aggregated data. However, given the centrality of the lived experience voice to Brave and the guiding principles of this MEL Framework, qualitative data, particularly those that capture the stories and voices of SEPT participants, will be privileged within the evaluative strands and orient the findings. Table 3 provides an overview of the design, methods, and indicators by Area of Inquiry.



Table 3. Design, methods and indicator details according to Area of Inquiry

Area of Inquiry	Design	Methods	Indicators
Monitoring of Program Outputs	Output focused, descriptive quantitative design	<p>Extraction, organisation and quantification of participant case file data from client management system.</p> <p>Descriptive analysis of frequencies, proportions, means, standard deviations and minimum/maximum scores for total population of SEPT participants and by delivery region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of referrals • Number of accepted referrals • Number of program completions • Number of children in participants' care • Demographic characteristics of participants & their children • Number of Outcome Stars completed • Number of scholarship applications • Proportion of successful scholarship applications • Total amount of funding awarded • Amount of funding awarded per participant • Number of onward service referrals • Number of goals set by participants • % of goals set by participants that were achieved
Monitoring of Program Experiences	Process-focused, descriptive and general linear quantitative design	<p>Extraction, organisation and quantification of participant case file data from client management system.</p> <p>Descriptive analysis of frequencies, proportions, means, standard deviations and minimum/maximum scores for total population of SEPT participants and by delivery region (for some indicators and measures).</p> <p>Correlational analysis of associations between proposed program processes, success factors and outcomes.</p> <p>Mean difference testing of effects for different program conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorical frequencies of inward service referral type • Mentoring dosage received by participants • Categorical proportions of different modes of mentoring delivery (e.g. hub, home-based or virtual) • Outcomes Star improvement scores • Session Rating Scale scores • % of participant goals set across goal typology • % of awarded scholarships by scholarship typology • % of awarded brokerage grants by brokerage typology • % of onward service referrals by outcome typology
Evaluation of the Program Theory	Theory-driven and rubric-based evaluation incorporating a logic analysis and a multi-method qualitative approach	<p>Logic analysis based on literature review and synthesis guided by program theory to assess alignment of theoretical components with existing evidence, including evidence-based and best practice recommendations.</p> <p>Review of SEPT documents and content analysis based on program theory components to assess alignment with internal stakeholder perspectives.</p> <p>Random selection of SEPT participants (proportional to each mentoring region) and mentors for semi-structured empathy interviews. Interview data analysed using thematic analysis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of alignment between the program theory components and existing evidence relating to the needs of expecting and parenting young people, effective supports and intervention strategies, and process-to-outcome links • Degree of alignment between program theory components and participant and mentor reports of program experiences and outcomes • Degree of alignment between program theory components, participant and mentor reports of program experiences and outcomes, and program documents

Evaluation of Supportive Connections

Process-focused, mixed-method design incorporating quantitative descriptive and correlational analysis, and semi-structured empathy interviews

Intake Assessments incorporating baseline outcome measures of participant empowerment. Follow up assessments of baseline outcome measures at end of program. Mentor administration of the Outcomes Star tool to track improvement in the participants' and their children's health and well-being from early to end of program. Session rating scale assessments of the therapeutic alliance between mentors and participants administered by Team Leaders at early, mid and end of program. Descriptive analysis of mentor-participant relationship quality and correlational analysis of associations between relationship quality scores and participant end of program outcomes. Semi-structured empathy interviews with all interested Brave mentors and random selection of SEPT participants.

- Session rating scale scores at each timepoint
- Significance and size of predictive associations between session rating scale scores and increases in Outcomes Star improvement scores
- Significance and size of predictive associations between session rating scale scores and increases in participant agency scores at end of program
- Mentors' qualitative reports about the quality of their community connections and the impact they have observed on participants
- SEPT participants' qualitative reports about the quality of their relationships with their mentors and the quality of their mentors' community connections and the impact these have had on them
- Number of onward service referrals
- Nature of onward service referrals
- Outcomes of onward service referrals documented in participant case files
- Mentors' qualitative reports about how well equipped they feel within their roles
- Mentors' qualitative reports about the quality and effectiveness of the training and professional development they have received
- Mentors' qualitative reports about the quality and effectiveness of supervisory support they have received
- Mentors' qualitative reports about the quality and/or gaps in organisational supports that affect how well equipped they are in their roles

Evaluation of SEPT Outcomes

Outcomes-focused, mixed-methods design combining repeated pre, within and post-program process and outcomes measures and narrative case study analysis

Repeated measures of participant empowerment at intake, end of program, 3-months and 6-months post-program. Repeated administration of the Outcomes Star tool at beginning, mid and end of program and documentation of qualitative narratives that contextualise Outcomes Star ratings in client case files. Assessments of occupational status (education, training, employment or other) via standardised interview questions at 3-months and 6-months post-program. Semi-structured empathy interviews with a random selection of SEPT participants. Thematic analysis of interview data. Construction and analysis of narrative case studies based on participant case files and interview data. Quantitative analysis of longitudinal outcome measures data to assess changes over time.

- Size and significance of changes in participant agency from baseline to end of program, 3-months and 6-months post-program
- Size and significance of changes in Outcomes Star improvement scores relating to parenting skills and children's wellbeing from early to mid and end of program
- % of SEPT alumni engaged in education, training or employment opportunities 3-months and 6-months post-program
- Participants qualitative reports of program impacts relating to psychological empowerment, parenting efficacy and skills, engagement in education, training or employment and their children's wellbeing
- Case file evidence of participant changes relating to participant agency, parenting efficacy and skills, engagement in education, training or employment and their children's wellbeing

Reporting & Learning Plan



The learning function of the MEL Framework is addressed via internal knowledge-sharing, capacity building and continuous improvement efforts that aim to foster a vibrant evaluation culture within Brave, where evaluative-thinking and evidence-informed decision-making occurs across all levels of the organisation. Regular dissemination of evidence-based insights via different reporting mechanisms provides the platform for ongoing organisational learning, making Brave's reporting plan integral to the learning function. Via the youth advisory group that is the fulcrum of Brave's Model of Participation, those with lived experience will support the development of evidence updates and reports that are engaging and accessible to expecting and parenting young people. The Brave Continuous Improvement group is the primary forum for generating and considering program development and innovation ideas. Evidence insights will feed into Continuous Improvement group discussions, support feedback-learning-action cycles and evidence-informed decision-making.

External knowledge-sharing via mutual dissemination and collaborative discussion of evidence-based insights with interested parties will also contribute to Brave's development and recognition as a CoE. With support from the Brave Communications Advisor, findings and insights will be shared via Brave social media. Table 4 summarises the various avenues through which evidence will be regularly disseminated.

Reporting & Learning Plan

Reporting Format	Description
Bimonthly Evidence Updates	Circulated to all Brave staff members, updates will include visualisation of monitoring dashboard insights, a MEL Advisor spotlight on preliminary findings and process and practice implications or evidence-based continuous improvement ideas.
Bimonthly Evidence Learning Infographics for Young People	Translations of the bimonthly evidence updates will be co-designed with youth advisory group members and the Brave Communications Advisor for dissemination to SEPT participants and via youth-focused social media channels.
Mid-year MEL Reports	Will summarise monitoring and evaluation activities and synthesise monitoring and evaluation data based on the prior six months. Detailed internal versions will be shared within the organisation and a condensed outward-facing version will be shared with external stakeholders and made publicly available on Brave's website.
End of Year MEL Reports	Will summarise monitoring and evaluation activities and synthesise monitoring and evaluation data based on the prior 12 months. Detailed internal versions will be shared within the organisation and a condensed outward-facing version will be shared with external stakeholders and made publicly available on Brave's website.
Youth-focused MEL Reports	As with the bi-monthly updates, the lengthier MEL reports will be co-designed with the youth advisory group and Communications Advisor to appeal to expecting and parenting young people within and outside of the organisation.
Social Media Updates	Interesting evidence snapshots will be shared via Brave's various social media channels with support from the Communications Advisor for wider reach and impact.
Presentations at Networking and Conference Events	A 6-monthly outlook will identify upcoming opportunities to present findings on topics of interest to relevant networking groups or conference events, approximately on a biannual basis.
Research Reports and Academic Publications	Identification and uptake of opportunities to contribute original ideas or findings to academic and other research communities, approximately on an annual or biennial basis.

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