

# Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens Program Trial

Interim Delivery and Impact Report

February 2020



# Acknowledgements

Brave Foundation wishes to acknowledge and thank the following individuals and organisations that have supported us on our 10-year journey to provide an ever-expanding village of support for expecting and parenting teens in Australia.

## **Brave's founding donor**

Anne Tomlinson-Walsh

## **Federal government funding partner**

Australian Department of Social Services (DSS) – Try, Test and Learn Fund – Tranche 1

## **SEPT Program trial hub sites**

*Northern Territory*  
Wulagi Primary School

### *Tasmania*

ptunarra Child & Family Centre  
Clarence Plains Child & Family Centre  
tagari lia Child & Family Centre  
Chigwell Child & Family Centre

### *New South Wales*

D.A.L.E Young Mothers Wyong  
D.A.L.E Young Mothers Newcastle

### *Queensland*

The Family Place  
Ipswich State High School

### *Victoria*

Youth Junction Visy Cares  
Norlane Child and Family Centre  
SELLEN (South East Local Learning and Employment Network)

## **SEPT Program trial support organisations**

FAST NT (Families and Schools Together)  
Sanderson Alliance  
Palmerston Community Centre  
Department of Education Tasmania – Child and Family Centres  
St Philips Christian College  
Salvation Army  
Mission Australia  
West Moreton Hospital and Health Service  
Red Cross  
Raise Foundation  
Wesley Mission  
Claremont College  
Barwon Health  
Chisholm Institute  
Roswell Neighbourhood Centre

## **SEPT Program independent evaluators**

Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne (TTL)

The Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland (TTL)

Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, University of Tasmania (SEPT)

## **Brave Foundation ambassadors**

Professor Julie Quinlivan  
Jan Russ

## **Inaugural ambassador**

Larissa Bartlett

## **Former directors**

Steven Black  
Jonathan Cavenagh  
Liana Barnett  
Sakura Franz  
Hon. David Bartlett  
Christopher Love

## **Not-for-profit, business and philanthropy**

Radiata Foundation  
Andrews Foundation  
Australian Women's Leadership Symposium  
Bridging the Gap  
Canberra College Cares  
C3 Church  
Crown Resorts Foundation  
Ethical Investments  
Genesis Pregnancy Support  
Federal Group  
GHD Engineering  
Handbuilt Creative  
Hillsong Church  
Hobart City Mission  
Hobart Midcity Senior's School  
Journey with Spirit  
Lansdale Rose Gardens  
Motivate IT  
MyState Foundation  
Pregnancy Support Frankston  
Pregnancy Counselling Support TAS  
Raising Literacy Australia  
Rev. Tim Costello  
Samaritan Projects  
Share the Dignity  
The Hutchins School

## **Local and state government**

Mrs Bridget Archer MP  
Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People, Ms Liana Buchanan  
Ms Ella Haddad MP  
Former Premier Hon. David Bartlett  
Former Premier Hon. Will Hodgman  
Mr Gavin Pearce MP  
Government House Tasmania  
Her Excellency Professor the Hon. Kate Warner  
Hon. Elise Archer MP  
Hon. Jeremy Rockliff MP  
Hon. Jo Siejka MLC  
Hon. Josh Willie MLC  
Hon. Roger Jaensch MP

Mme Speaker The Hon Sue Hickey MP  
Tasmanian Premier's Office  
Brighton City Council  
Brimbank City Council  
Clarence City Council  
Darwin City Council  
Devonport City Council  
Geelong City Council  
Glenorchy City Council  
Hobart City Council  
Ipswich City Council  
Launceston City Council  
Logan City Council  
Newcastle City Council  
Wyong City Council

## **Federal government**

Department of Social Services:  
Try, Test, Learn team – Helen Boardman,  
Lanny Delaney, Sindu Rao  
Families Taskforce – Jane Dickenson  
Financial Wellbeing Branch  
– Michele Legge  
Centrelink  
The ParentsNext Program  
Prime Minister the Hon. Scott Morrison  
National Children's Commissioner,  
Ms Megan Mitchell  
Senator Jacqui Lambie  
Senator Claire Chandler  
Senator Andrew Wilkie  
Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz  
Senator Wendy Askew  
Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck  
Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam  
Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash  
The Hon. Dan Tehan  
Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston  
The Hon. Jenny Macklin MP  
The Hon. Paul Fletcher MP

We also extend our appreciation to:

- those individuals and organisations that have referred program participants to Brave since the SEPT Program trial began
- the 700+ support services listed in Brave's national Directory of Services that provide daily support for not only SEPT Program participants, but all expecting and parenting teens across Australia, and
- Sue Vittori of Vittori Communications, Justine Cubbin of Intrepid Design, and Talitha Rice Photography, for helping to produce this report.

---

**“Quite honestly, (if it wasn’t for my Brave Mentor) I think I’d probably be dead in a ditch somewhere.**

***Hannah* would be living with my mum and I would either be dead in a ditch or I would have put myself in a coffin.**

**Now, I’m a lot happier. I can actually smile and go out and feel like I’m actually part of the world.”**

***Jasmine*, 19, single mum  
Brave SEPT Program participant**

“The Brave SEPT Program is one of the most worthwhile programs anyone could direct funding to. It brings hope to teenagers who otherwise would have none.

It doesn't do this by simply giving them handouts; it provides real vision for the future for many young parents who do not see any other hope than to be undereducated and on welfare or in menial jobs for the rest of their lives.

We have no other supports like this program that can provide emotional, physical and financial support for teenage parents. Without the Brave program many of our ParentsNext participants are at risk of becoming long-term and even generationally dependant on welfare.

This program gives our youngest participants the support they need to navigate parenting as teenagers and young adults ... A number of my participants have been successful in putting pathway plans in place that have given them the ability to move forwards toward work and/or study. Having this extra support network

also helps them to stay more engaged with ParentsNext as they can see real benefits of actively working towards life goals.

The SEPT Program sets out a pathway that is achievable, working on the small stuff first on the way to achieving their bigger goals – and it celebrates the wins along the way!

If only the program could reach more teen parents, the future would be brighter not just for this generation but also for the next.”

**Michelle O'Connell**, Work Coach, ParentsNext, Gforce Employment Solutions

**“Without the Brave program many of our ParentsNext participants are at risk of becoming long-term and even generationally dependant on welfare.”**



# Contents

---

Executive summary .....	4
SEPT Program interim performance highlights .....	7
Introduction .....	8
The individual and societal costs of teenage pregnancy .....	9
Brave Foundation .....	15
CEO's message .....	16
The Brave SEPT Program .....	18
The Try, Test and Learn-SEPT Program trial .....	22
Interim participation and delivery achievements .....	24
Governance and management .....	30
Brave young parents .....	34
Brave Mentors .....	40
Our delivery partners .....	42
Interim SEPT Program outcomes and impact .....	44
Independent process evaluation .....	48
Brave lessons learned .....	56
Keep this baby growing: 5-year plan .....	58

## **Our Brave young contributors**

We take great care to respect the privacy of the young parents and children we support. Some of the names and stories in this report have therefore been changed to protect individual identities. Where pseudonyms have been used, they are shown in italics.

We are deeply grateful to the 11 SEPT Program participants who agreed to be interviewed by Brave so some of their stories and comments could be shared in this report.

Special thanks also to the three brave young mums who volunteered to be photographed with their babies and mentors: Sophie, 16, with Skylah, 3 months (our 'cover girls'); Emily, 15, with Aleecia, 9 months; and Ashley, 19, with Isla, 17 months.

## **Extending our respect**

Brave Foundation respectfully acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our organisation is located and where we deliver our support programs across Australia. We pay our respects to their ancestors and Elders, past and present.

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



# Executive summary

---

## TEEN PARENTS NEED TAILORED SUPPORT

Almost 7,000 births were recorded to Australian mothers aged between 15–19 years in 2018. About one quarter of these new mums would have been from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and even more would have had a psychological or physical disorder or disability.

Teen parents and their children are among the most vulnerable people living in Australia. Many are victims of trauma, abuse and intergenerational disadvantage.

Not only do the births present inherent health risks, each young mother and child also face serious barriers to accessing appropriate health care and education and are at risk of long-term disadvantage and welfare dependency.

Teen mothers make up 1% of all single mothers in Australia but constitute 3% of the recipients of the Parenting Payment. PwC Australia (2017) calculated that, without effective interventions, young parents aged 18 and under who were receiving a Parenting Payment from the Australian Department of Social Services (DSS) during 2015–16, would cost the welfare system an average \$648,000 per person over their lifetime.

## AN INCLUSIVE, EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH

Brave Foundation is Australia's first national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to assisting expecting and parenting teens.

For the past 10 years our organisation has been developing a nation-wide 'village of support' to equip young parents with the resilience and resources they need to raise happy, healthy and skilled families.

Brave's approach has social inclusion and collaboration at its heart. We foster community bonding and capacity building by partnering with a wide range of well-established support organisations and services.

Brave's innovative SEPT Program follows an early intervention pathway underpinned by the evidence-based First 1000 Days model. The program's delivery model and Pathway Plan process were co-designed with young parents, DSS and other stakeholders.

## TRYING AND TESTING THE SEPT PROGRAM

Brave Foundation was awarded a \$4 million grant from the Australian Government's Try, Test and Learn Fund to conduct a two-year trial of our SEPT Program.

The primary purpose of the trial is to test whether our early intervention model works to reduce long-term reliance on welfare among expecting and parenting teens.

The SEPT Program engages young parents during the critical early stages in their parenting journey. Each young person is paired with a trusted professional mentor who guides them along an interactive and flexible pathway that connects them to parenting support, life support and educational opportunities in their local communities.

Supported by their Brave Mentor, each participant voluntarily progresses at their own pace to achieve personal goals relating to education, training, employment, health and wellbeing, parenting and covering their basic needs.

The SEPT Program trial is being delivered from 12 hub sites in major cities and regional centres in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. Enrolments opened in July 2018 and the trial is due to end in June 2020.

## INTERIM PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

At the end of November 2019, 16 months into the trial, 361 participants had been recruited and 270 of those were actively receiving mentoring. Fifteen participants had achieved their pathway plan goals and graduated.

This exceeded the trial's original participation target of 350 young parents over two years, with seven months remaining and recruitment continuing. This demonstrates the strong demand for this type of intensive support for teen parents, as well as Brave's success in reaching and engaging the target group.

The youngest participant at that time was 12 years old. As you would expect, almost 96% of the active participants (256) were young mothers or mothers-to-be. Fourteen young fathers/partners were enrolled. Almost half (123) were in the DSS priority cohort of teen parents aged 19 or under. Almost half had a psychological or physical disability, and one fifth came from Indigenous backgrounds.

### KEY DELIVERY ACHIEVEMENTS

To date, Brave's highlight achievements in delivering the trial include:

**Scaling up rapidly** – we increased our workforce 6-fold, established 12 hub sites and opened enrolments within four months of the trial's commencement.

**Establishing a collaborative village of support** – we worked proactively to establish and sustain constructive partnerships with more than two dozen delivery partners and support organisations. We tripled the size of our online Directory of Services to more than 750 listings.

**Awarding more than \$80,000 in Brave Scholarships** – we distributed more than \$80,000 in Brave Scholarships, ranging from \$100 to \$1,500, to help individual participants overcome barriers to achieving their goals (for e.g., to pay for driving lessons or a course).

### EVIDENCE OF EARLY OUTCOMES

Internal monitoring and an independent process evaluation indicate that the SEPT Program trial is on track to deliver potentially life-changing outcomes for the majority of participants.

Around 70% of the program participants who were actively engaged up to the end of November 2019 had either already met all their goals and graduated or were on track to do so. Eighty-four (31% of active participants) had already returned to school, further study or training, and 22 had found work.

### INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

An independent process evaluation of the trial's delivery, conducted in 2019, returned positive interim findings and constructive insights for improvement. A summary of the findings is provided on pages 48–55.

A major finding was that there is genuine and successful collaboration between the SEPT and ParentsNext programs. Participation in the SEPT Program has the potential to divert parenting teens from being compelled to participate in ParentsNext.

### KEEP THIS BABY GROWING!

The rationale for continuing to invest in and expand the Brave SEPT Program is evident. It is being rigorously tried, tested and evaluated and we now know that this intervention model works.

For a comparatively minimal early investment, this program has the capacity to break cycles of intergenerational teen parenting and disadvantage and contribute to saving the Australian Government billions of dollars in welfare payments over the longer term.

Australia's teen parents deserve a better start in life, and so do their children. The SEPT Program offers the best means of giving them that opportunity.

### 2020–25 FORWARD RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. Phased expansion of existing SEPT Program footprint

– a 5-year phased expansion to consolidate existing hub sites, expand into South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, increase Indigenous participation and double operations in high-risk communities.

**2. Transitional funding** – Brave seeks transitional funding of \$4.58 million per annum for a minimum of two years, to be confirmed by the end of March 2020. This would include 11 months' operational funding from 1 May 2020 to ensure continuity in program delivery after 30 June as well as the ability to complete a full 1,000-day delivery cycle, as proposed in Brave's original Try, Test and Learn submission.

**3. An improved cashflow structure** – implementing a new cashflow model that meets the needs of both the expansion program and day-to-day operations.

**4. Jointly exploring alternative funding models** – working with SEPT Program stakeholders to explore alternative funding models and submitting a *SEPT Social Impact Recommendations Report* to Government before the transitional funding period ends.

**5. Establishing a sustainable funding model** – that the Government agrees to confirm the timing and integration of a sustainable funding model, subject to decisions arising from the social impact recommendations.

**6. Long-term commitment** – subject to the above, Brave Foundation will continue delivering the SEPT Program, as the Government's preferred provider, through sustainable funding structures from July 2022 onwards.



“The majority of participants in this trial will not end up in the database of Australia’s long-term welfare recipients.

The potential benefits to the Australian community, and savings to the public purse, are immense. The positive ripple effects will be felt for generations to come.

This program must continue. It must be consolidated and eventually expanded to reach and support many more expecting and parenting teens in this country. I trust that Brave’s collaborative, professional and agile approach to delivering this trial, and the early evidence presented in this interim report, will galvanise continuing support for the SEPT Program from the federal government and other funders.”

**Gary Lottering**, Chair, Brave Foundation Board of Directors

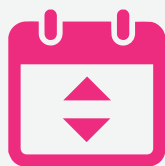




# SEPT Program trial interim highlights

**361** young parents recruited in first 16 months<sup>a</sup>

**350** was original 2-year target agreed with DSS



**19.7** average participant age

**12** age of youngest participant

**26** age of oldest participant

**43%** of active participants have a physical or psychological disability<sup>b</sup>



**20%** of active participants come from ATSI backgrounds<sup>b</sup>

**9%** of active participants come from CALD backgrounds<sup>b</sup>

**270** participants were actively engaged in mentoring/pathway plans<sup>b</sup>



**256/14**  
mums dads



**123 (45%)** of whom are in DSS top priority cohort



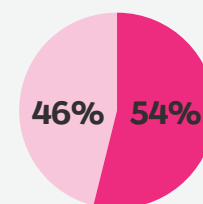
**12** hub sites and partnerships, and **15** support organisations established across 4 states and the NT

**70%** of active participants (189) are on track to achieve their overall pathway goals and graduate from the program in 2020<sup>c</sup>



**13** professional mentors recruited

**54%** of the 270 active participants have already met at least one goal in their pathway plan<sup>b</sup>



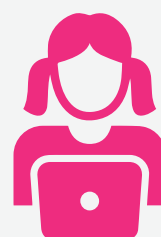
**46%** are working towards meeting their first goal<sup>b</sup>



**\$80,000+** allocated in scholarships and brokerage



**750+** organisations in expanded Directory of Services



**66%** of active participants (178) aspire to undertake education, training or employment by the end of the SEPT Program<sup>b</sup>

a All figures provided are based on recruitment and participation numbers reported to DSS as at 26 November 2019.

b Results drawn from Peter Underwood Centre interim evaluation findings report (January 2020).

c Based on an internal Brave Foundation assessment of progress being made on 270 active participants' individual pathway plans in the first 16 months of the trial.

# Introduction

Every year, thousands of Australian teenagers are giving birth and raising their own children.

Many of these brave young people are parenting on their own, with little or no family support. Many are victims of trauma, abuse and intergenerational disadvantage. These young parents deserve a better start in life. And so do their children.

Unfortunately, our society and our schools are still not well equipped to adequately support these young mums (and dads). This is where Brave Foundation and our SEPT Program are having an impact.

We are fortunate to have been given the opportunity to trial the innovative, early intervention SEPT Program in partnership with the Australian Government. During the past 20 months, Brave Mentors have been walking alongside more than 300 expecting and parenting teens during their pregnancies and early parenting journeys, giving them intensive, personalised support that has not been available to them until now.

With their mentors' guidance, young people are re-engaging with school, completing their studies, entering training or university, and preparing for fulfilling and productive careers. They are being empowered to pursue a different life path than one of long-term disadvantage and welfare dependency.

Our mentors are not only building the capacity of young parents and their children; they are also actively strengthening the connections and capacity of local support services in a dozen hub communities across Australia.

**'With their mentors' guidance, young people are re-engaging with school, completing their studies, entering training or university, and preparing for fulfilling and productive careers.'**

This intensive support also aims to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage, by giving each newborn child a healthier and more stable start in life. Research evidence confirms that what each individual experiences in the first 1000 days of life – from conception until the end of a child's second year – has lifelong health and wellbeing consequences. The SEPT Program is underpinned by this evidence while also being co-designed with young parents to respond to their lived experience.

This report presents the interim participation results and achievements recorded during the first 16 months of the two-year trial, together with evidence of the program's early outcomes and impact. We present this evidence through the direct voices of our program participants, delivery partners, support organisations and mentors, as well as in the findings of an independent process evaluation.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, we trust that the impact of this program will be demonstrated in dramatically improved life trajectories for these vulnerable young parents and their incredibly vulnerable children over the long term.

We trust that the positive ripple effects will reach out beyond each family unit to reverberate throughout the Australian community in ways we can only begin to imagine.

## Glossary

**DSS** Department of Social Services

**ParentsNext** A compulsory, federally funded support service for parents who have children under six-years-old, and who are receiving a Parenting Payment. ParentsNext aims to support each parent's transition into education, training or employment

**PUC** Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, University of Tasmania

**SEPT** Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens

**TTL** Try, Test and Learn

# The individual and societal costs of teenage pregnancy

## TEEN PREGNANCIES IN AUSTRALIA

The availability of contraception and better education and career prospects for women have contributed to a considerable reduction in the number of teenage girls giving birth in Australia over the past four decades.<sup>2</sup>

However, despite this trend, Australian Bureau of Statistics records indicate that 6,885 births were recorded to mothers aged between 15–19 years in 2018.<sup>3</sup>

While some teen pregnancies are planned or welcomed, many are not. Teen births present inherent health and wellbeing risks for each young mother and her child, and associated financial and social cost burdens for the wider community, some of which are described in Table 1.



**6,885** teen births recorded in 2018<sup>3</sup>



**26%** of teen mothers in 2015 were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds<sup>4</sup>



Teen birth rates in 2015 (per 1,000)<sup>4</sup>

National:	Indigenous Australians:	Rural/remote:
<b>11.9</b>	<b>59.3</b>	<b>57</b>

1 Bakhtiar, A., Te Riele, K. & Sutton, G. (2020). *Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) Trial Independent Evaluation. Interim Report* [confidential]. Hobart: Peter Underwood Centre

2 Deloitte Access Economics, *A practical guide to understanding social costs: Developing the evidence base for informed social impact investment* (February 2016), Appendix A, pp38-39. Available online: <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/practical-guide-understanding-social-costs.html>

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 33010DO001 Births, Australia 2018 (11 December 2019)

4 Australian Human Rights Commission, *The rights and needs of young parents and their children. A summary of key findings from the Children's Rights Report 2017*. Available online: [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/AHRC\\_CRR\\_2017\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/AHRC_CRR_2017_Summary.pdf)



**Table 1: Risks associated with expecting and parenting teens<sup>2,4</sup>**



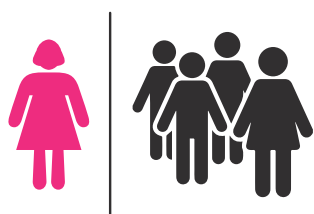
- Teenage mothers are at greater risk of complications during pregnancy and delivery.
- They are also more likely to experience post-natal depression than other mothers.
- A high proportion of teen mothers suffer from mental illness and psychological and/or physical disabilities, particularly depression and anxiety.
- The immediate safety and long-term health and wellbeing of their babies may also be placed at risk due to these factors.



- Young mothers face major barriers to completing their education and therefore have lower levels of educational attainment than other mothers and childless women. Barriers include lack of private transportation and access to affordable and convenient early childhood education and childcare services.
- This results in lower levels of labour market participation, lower paying jobs and, in many cases, welfare dependency.
- The children of teen parents are also at risk of having inadequate early childhood learning and development experiences.



- Teen mothers tend to be the most socio-economically disadvantaged of all mothers, mainly due to poor educational qualifications, pre-existing socio-economic circumstances, and the impact of raising children from a young age.
- Young mothers have a higher likelihood of welfare dependence throughout their lifetime and are overrepresented (at 3%) among recipients of Australia's Parenting Payment.
- The partners of teenage mothers are more likely to be unemployed and poorly educated than partners of older mothers.
- These factors also affect the ability to access adequate health care and basic necessities for both mother and child.
- Homelessness, or having poor living conditions, is also common for expecting and parenting teens.



- Teenage parents may experience disapproval, prejudice and social stigma from within their community and feel alienated from their peers and family as a result.
- Many drop out of school and lose contact with their previous friends and social groups, contributing to social isolation.
- A teenage pregnancy can place a great deal of strain on familial and partner relationships. This can leave young mothers with no support from their family or a male partner before and after the baby is born.



- Children born to a teenage mother are more vulnerable to neglect relative to those born to older mothers. This is due to a variety of potential factors including relative poverty, social isolation and the mother being in an unhealthy relationship, such as one involving domestic violence.
- Children of a teenage parent are also more likely to become teen parents themselves.

## AMONG THE MOST VULNERABLE YOUNG AUSTRALIANS

Teenage parents and their children are some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people living in Australia.

In 2017, the National Children's Commissioner engaged with almost 170 young parents to identify the gaps in knowledge about their experiences and life trajectories and analyse good practice early intervention and support services. The Commissioner worked closely with Brave Foundation while conducting her research and invited our CEO, Bernadette Black to launch the final report.

Reporting on the Commissioner's findings, the Australian Human Rights Commission states that:

**'Young parents and their children are particularly vulnerable to breaches of their rights to health, education and care, and are at risk of long term disadvantage and welfare dependency.'**

**Higher rates of teenage pregnancy are associated with family histories of teenage pregnancy, unstable housing arrangements, socio-economic disadvantage and sexual abuse in childhood. The challenging personal circumstances of many young parents are further compounded by the social, financial, medical, education and employment difficulties of raising a child ...**

**Children of young parents are also at greater risk of experiencing poorer life outcomes ... [They] are often at risk of being removed into the care and protection system.<sup>4</sup>**

Young people who are already experiencing other difficult life circumstances are more likely to become teen parents. This includes those who have been in care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, young people living in rural and remote areas, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, in 2015 almost 26% of births Australia-wide in the 15–19 age group involved young mothers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Services therefore need to understand and respond to the 'multidimensional' nature of young parents' lives in order to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group.<sup>4</sup>

**'Despite the many barriers that young parents face, overwhelmingly the young people we spoke to during this project were motivated to be great parents, to provide the best care for their children, to get an education and do well in life.'**

**Australian Human Rights Commission<sup>4</sup>**

### An international human rights issue

International human rights treaties, including the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), stipulate that protecting the best interests of all children, including young parents and their children, is a priority.

The United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasised the need to support young parents and their children in light of their particular vulnerability. Under the CRC and other human rights treaties, young parents and their children are entitled to:

- accessible education
- enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health
- an adequate standard of living
- assistance in the performance of child-rearing responsibilities.<sup>4</sup>

**Teen mothers make up 1% of all single mothers in Australia but constitute 3% of the recipients of Australia's Parenting Payment.<sup>4</sup>**

**"We share many fabulous success stories here at Brave, but it's the traumatic stories we hear from our young parents that are the hardest to forget.**

**There are so many trauma stories in the lives of the young people we support and it's not just past trauma and abuse – for many teen parents, terrible, toxic situations are affecting their lives on a daily basis."**

**– Allison Levinson, Chief Mentor and Stakeholder Manager, Brave Foundation**

## THE LONG-TERM ECONOMIC COSTS

An actuarial valuation report produced by PwC Australia for DSS in 2017 found that young parents aged 18 and under are particularly vulnerable to welfare dependency.

As indicated in Table 2, 3,760 young parents in this age range were receiving a Parenting Payment from DSS during 2015-16. According to the PwC valuation, without effective interventions this group will have an average lifetime cost to the welfare system of \$648,000 per person. This amounts to a potential welfare cost burden of around \$2.4 billion on the

Australian taxpayer over the lifetime of the young parents counted in this valuation.

The valuation indicates that we can expect that 79% of these young people will still be receiving income support payments in 10 years and 57% will still be receiving income support in 20 years.

Also, the average lifetime welfare cost for young parents in the 2016 assessment was significantly higher than the lifetime costs calculated for two other high-interest groups: Young carers (\$482,000) and Students transitioning to working age (\$262,000).<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2: Summary of key statistics for young parents**

Key statistic	2016 valuation
Number of people	3,760
Average lifetime cost	\$648,000
Expected outcomes in 10 years' time	79% still receiving income support 16% receiving other payments 5% not receiving welfare
Expected outcomes in 20 years' time	57% still receiving income support 24% receiving other payments 19% not receiving welfare
Expected outcomes over remainder of future lifetime	31 years receiving income support payments (excl. Age Pension) 7 years receiving non-income support payments only 16 years not receiving welfare 17 years receiving Age Pension
Proportion with employment earnings over last year	6%

Source: Adapted from PwC Australia, 30 June 2016 Valuation Report, Department of Social Services: Final Report 2017, p160

**“Our family has been a proud supporter of Brave Foundation since ‘day one’, when we funded the first print run of Bernie’s book for teen mums.**

**We’ve continued to increase our support as Brave has grown and it’s been amazing to see our contribution being put to such good use. It has been particularly satisfying to see the SEPT Program developed and scaled so successfully to support hundreds of teen parents across Australia.**

**If anyone can make a difference in the lives of these vulnerable young people, the team at Brave can. And, at the same time, they’ll also be the glue that binds local services and young parents together.”**

**– Stuart Davey-Sypkes, Radiata Foundation**

<sup>5</sup> PwC Australia, 30 June 2016 Valuation Report, Department of Social Services: Final Report 2017, p160. Available online: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11\\_2017/j16\\_valuation\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2017/j16_valuation_report_final.pdf)



“This is a disconnected, vulnerable high-risk group of young people.

If we’re honestly looking at breaking a cycle, then we need to be intervening at the earliest possible stage we can to support them on their journey into parenthood.

The gap that exists in many mainstream services is that ‘walk-beside mentoring role’. We simply don’t usually have people doing those regular visitations and connections like these Brave mentors are doing.

We’re not talking about adulthood here; these are teenagers and young adults – many may not know how to reach out and ask for or find the support they need. It’s so critical that they get this deep level of support because it’s not just their own health and welfare that needs to be considered; it’s also about their babies and giving them the best possible start in life as well.”

– **Jenny Chaves**, Mission Australia, Ipswich, QLD







I BRAVE

I BRAVE

I BRAVE

# Brave Foundation

## BUILDING A VILLAGE OF SUPPORT

Brave Foundation is Australia's first national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to assisting expecting and parenting teens.

For the past 10 years, our organisation has been developing a nation-wide village of support to equip these young people with the resilience and resources they need to raise happy, healthy and skilled families.

By respecting the dreams and different circumstances of each individual, Brave offers a caring and responsive support community that empowers young parents to forge better futures for themselves and their children. Our approach promotes a cultural shift away from stigmatising teen parents, to one of open acceptance and non-judgemental support.

Brave Foundation's model has social inclusion at its heart. We foster community connections and capacity building by partnering with a wide range of well-established support organisations and services throughout Australia.

## VISION, MISSION, VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

**Our Vision** is to have a village of support and acceptance around all Australian expecting and parenting teens.

**Our Mission** is to build the village to:

- embrace and shape the future
- join the dots to meet the needs, and
- celebrate the child.

**Our Values** at Brave are:

**SUPPORTIVE:** Nurturing and encouraging a brave village

**INSPIRATIONAL:** Sharing stories to inspire courage, hope and continued education

**RELEVANT:** Keeping our finger on the pulse

**CONNECTED:** Strengthening links for improved service provision

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE:** Now and for future generations

**Our Principles** govern how we conduct ourselves and interact with others:

- Behave honestly and with integrity and act with care and diligence.
- Act in unity to work together with each other, our host organisations and expecting and parenting teens.
- Respect the rights of all and treat people the way we would like them to treat us.
- Strive for excellence as we work towards achieving our goals and improving outcomes.

## THE BRAVE DIRECTORY OF SERVICES

Brave understands that it takes a village to nurture, support and empower expecting and parenting teens. To help bring this village to life, we established the most comprehensive national directory of services available to support teen parents in this country.

The Brave Directory of Services provides contact details for more than 750 organisations in all states and territories and continues to expand on a daily basis. DSS licenses the Directory from Brave. It can be accessed from our website: <http://bravefoundation.org.au/support/list-of-services/>.

## OUR HISTORY

Brave Foundation celebrated our 10<sup>th</sup> birthday in mid-2019, when we were just over half way through delivering the national SEPT Program trial.

Our organisation was established by Hobart mother of three, Bernadette Black in 2009 to give teen parents the support and confidence they need continue their schooling and pursue their dreams.

Despite struggling as a teen mum at the age of 16, Bernadette went on to forge a successful life and career. Her 2006 book, *Brave Little Bear*, tells the story of her own journey from teenage pregnancy through to becoming the 2009 Barnardos Australian Mother of the Year, 2016 Telstra Tasmanian Business Woman of the Year, and 2019 Tasmanian Australian of the Year.



# CEO's message

---



It is beyond rewarding to be leading the organisation I looked for but couldn't find as a 16-year-old mother over 20 years ago.

Our board, national partners, army of supporters, incredible

staff and team of champions are changing the culture of how this nation supports expecting and parenting teens. These incredible people make up the 'Brave village' and are making history by delivering Australia's first national program targeted solely at improving the life outcomes of teenage parents and their children.

In 2015-17, Brave led the creation of Australia's first national strategy for helping teen parents to re-engage with education. We drew on expertise from across many sectors and, most importantly, the experiences of teen parents themselves. This led to our organisation being procured by DSS to develop the SEPT Program, and the subsequent invitation to apply for a direct, non-competitive Try, Test and Learn grant of \$4 million to trial the program across Australia.

We know that teen parents have high hopes and aspirations for the future, but they need help creating a roadmap to get there. They want to complete their schooling, undertake further training or study and secure good jobs. They want to be positive role models for their children and give them the best possible chances in life.

We also know that, until this trial, it has been difficult for these young people to navigate their way back onto the path to completing their education and finding gainful employment. The SEPT Program and our amazing team of skilled mentors are the glue that connect each young parent to the village of support that already exists in their own communities.

Based on the internal data we've been collecting and the Peter Underwood Centre's recent interim evaluation, this trial is destined to deliver strong economic and social benefits over the long-term. Almost three quarters of the young participants are on track to achieving their individual education, training and employment goals. It was extremely pleasing to read comments in the evaluation report that some of our program participants would make great Brave mentors themselves one day. I have no doubt that they will. What a transformative investment for future generations!

Brave's story started 10 years ago with me telling my own story. Now, it's time to turn to the next chapter and tell the story of the hundreds of expecting and parenting teens who Brave is empowering through this innovative early intervention program. Together, we are guiding these brave young parents onto positive pathways we trust will lead them into the healthy, fulfilling and independent lives they all deserve.

**Bernadette Black**

CEO and Founding Director, Brave Foundation



Bernadette with her family at Brave Foundation's 10th birthday celebration in August 2019.



# The Brave SEPT Program

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Brave SEPT Program is a pre-ParentsNext<sup>6</sup> early intervention approach that coordinates timely access to physical and mental healthcare and other supports for expecting and parenting teens and their children.

The program provides support that spans pre, during and post-birth care, as well as supporting young people in their 20s who were teen parents and are now parenting young children. The primary aim is to empower young parents to pursue happy, healthy and productive lives.

The program's broad objectives are to:

- improve the health and well-being of young parents and their children
- connect young parents with appropriate support services
- help each young participant to develop and achieve a realistic goals-based plan that sets them on the path to a better future
- increase expecting and parenting teens' engagement with and participation in education and training and, in the longer term
- improve their readiness for work, in order to help them transition away from relying on long-term welfare.

**Figure 1. A Brave SEPT Program participant's journey**





## THE BRAVE PATHWAY PLAN

The SEPT Program guides participants along an interactive and flexible two-year Pathway Plan designed to connect them into parenting support, life support and educational opportunities in their local communities.

The aim is to ultimately enable them to pursue fulfilling careers, without the need for long-term welfare support. The Pathway Plan template and process were co-designed with young parents, DSS and other stakeholders.

Brave Foundation provides each young person with the support of a Brave Mentor to help them progress along their own, tailored pathway. This special mentoring relationship is augmented with the expertise and support of Brave's hub

site partners and support organisations at the community level, and our nationally focused Chief Mentor and Stakeholder Manager.

The Pathway Plan is individualised, culturalised and localised. It enables expecting and parenting teens to identify their aspirations, goals and ambitions for further study, training and employment within their own communities. Program participants also identify the issues and barriers they need to overcome to achieve their dreams, and progressively work to address these with their mentor's support.

Figure 1 provides an overview of each participant's journey as they progress through the 10 key milestone stages of the Pathway Plan.

6

Identify opportunities to access flexible funding package (scholarships and/or brokerage).



7

Identify and refer to relevant services that support attainment of goals.



10

Graduation from SEPT Program.



8

Regular review of progress against goals and updates captured in Pathway Plan.



9

Celebrate successes and wins as goals are achieved.





## A RESPONSE TO LIVED EXPERIENCE

Brave Foundation's core philosophy is to ensure that everything we do is directly informed and shaped by the young people we are here to help. The Brave Pathway Plan is an excellent example of this approach. It was developed by looking through the prism of the lived experiences of teen parents.

Expecting and parenting teens co-designed the Pathway Plan and governance for the SEPT Program trial, and continue to contribute to improving, implementing and overseeing the program.

The Pathway Plan was developed with support from the Brave Expecting and Parenting Teen Support and Education Working Group, convened in 2016, and the co-development phase we underwent with DSS as part of our Try, Test and Learn trial partnership.

**“Brave convened a working group to help them design the SEPT Program’s Pathway Plan. It was amazing to be able to see other teen parents like myself having a huge impact on how it looked.**

**We discussed a wide range of topics, including the importance of transport to get to day care and health-care appointments ...**

**I remember someone suggesting that they set up a space just for teenage parents to come to and I said ‘No! We don’t want that; we want to fit in and feel just like any other mum, not to be kept apart from everyone else.’”**

**– Ebony Curtis, 23, teen mum and Brave Foundation Board Director (you can read Ebony’s story on page 32)**

## MENTORING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The life-changing potential of having a dedicated mentor during one’s impressionable teenage years has been well researched and documented.

For example, one of the largest mentoring studies ever conducted – a five-year study that tracked the experiences of almost 1,000 Canadian children and teenagers – found that those with a mentor are significantly more confident in their academic abilities and considerably less likely to display behavioural problems. Girls in the study with an older mentor were four times less likely to bully, fight, lie or express anger than girls without a mentor.<sup>7</sup>

Brave Mentors come from a variety of professional backgrounds, including community and child services, social work and child protection. For expecting and parenting teens, particularly young mothers, having a Brave Mentor to provide emotional and practical guidance at such a pivotal time in their lives can be life transforming.

Our Mentors can help with...



### Support & guidance

The support of a caring and skilled adult who is willing to listen and offer non-judgemental guidance.



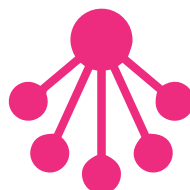
### Goal setting

Help for each young parent to develop a tailored pathway of goals and plans. The process is structured and documented, while also being flexible enough to respond to individual circumstances.



### Practical help

Help with everyday practicalities and ‘life issues’ such as attending health-check appointments, organising child care, finding suitable accommodation, obtaining a driver’s licence and applying for further study.



### Connecting the dots

Linking young parents into schools, TAFE, universities, specialist healthcare providers and other support services.

The mentor works with each young person and their family to support them prior to the birth of the baby (where possible), at the time of the birth and in the early stages of their parenting journey. They meet monthly (for intensive program participants) or quarterly (for connected participants), depending on their individual needs.

The mentor helps each individual to develop and achieve short to medium-term goals relating to their health and social and emotional wellbeing (and that of their child), and longer-term goals involving education, training or workforce readiness.

### AN EVIDENCE-BASED MODEL

The SEPT Program follows an early intervention pathway underpinned by the evidence-based First 1000 Days model.

This model reflects a wide body of research about the lifelong impacts of what each individual experiences and is exposed to during the first 1000 days in their lives – from conception through to the end of a child’s second year.<sup>8</sup> The program is underpinned by this evidence while also being co-designed with young parents to respond to their lived experience.

The Brave Mentor strategy leverages the critical window of opportunity when young parents are more receptive to offers of guidance and support and need to be linked into health and social service providers.

**‘The first 1000 days of a child’s life, from conception to two years of age, is an important foundational period which shapes their development and wellbeing. Children thrive when they have supportive environments in these early years.’**

– Australian Department of Social Services<sup>9</sup>

### BRAVE PATHWAY SCHOLARSHIPS

The Brave Foundation’s Pathway Scholarships have been created to minimise the financial barriers expecting and parenting teens face when endeavouring to continue their education and training or enter the workforce.

The scholarships reflect an understanding that many young parents experience unique challenges at this stage of their lives and cannot afford the necessary costs associated with attending school, TAFE or university, and finding and sustaining employment.

Scholarships provide funding in areas such as:

- school fees
- extra tuition costs, e.g. parenting courses or work-readiness training
- transport to an education provider or place of work
- driving lessons
- childcare fees
- textbooks and relevant course materials, including online subscriptions, and
- computers and computing peripherals including software programs and printing equipment.

The eligibility criteria for awarding these scholarships are aimed at selecting those expecting and parenting teens who are most in need of financial assistance.

6 ParentsNext is a federally funded support service that is compulsory for parents with children under six-years-old, who receive a Parenting Payment. ParentsNext aims to support each parent’s transition into education, training or employment.

7 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2013), <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/01/130115143850.htm>

8 Moore, T.G., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., & West, S. (2017). *The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper*. Parkville, Victoria; Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute.

9 Australian Department of Social Services website: <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-children-protecting-australias-children/the-first-1000-days>

# The Try, Test and Learn –SEPT Program trial

In mid-2017, Brave Foundation was awarded a \$4 million Try, Test and Learn grant from DSS to conduct a two-year trial of the SEPT Program. The trial began in March 2018, with enrolments opening four months later (July), and will end in June 2020.

The aim is to fill the gap that exists between the time a young person discovers they are pregnant and when they are required, through Centrelink mutual obligations, to engage with ParentsNext. The SEPT Program then continues to provide complementary support alongside ParentsNext and other local support services.

## TRY, TEST AND LEARN

The \$96.1 million Try, Test and Learn Fund is trialling new or innovative approaches to assisting some of the most vulnerable people in Australian society onto a path towards stable, sustainable independence.

The fund focuses on priority groups identified as being at high risk of long-term welfare dependency. The priority focus group for the SEPT Program trial is expecting and parenting teens under the age of 19, although the program also accepts parents under 25 who started receiving a parenting payment when aged 19 or under.

Projects selected for trial are chosen, in part, on the value of the evidence they will generate. Projects are being independently evaluated to produce high-quality policy evidence about the effectiveness of the interventions. In this way, the fund will enable the federal government to identify approaches that actually work and use this evidence to transform investment in existing programs or make the case for new investments.

The ultimate goal is to develop a modern welfare system that increases the capacity of individuals, reduces the risk of welfare dependency and maintains a strong welfare safety net.

## TRIAL LOCATIONS

Figure 2: SEPT Program trial locations



The SEPT Program trial is being delivered from 12 hub sites spread across major cities and regional centres in four states and the Northern Territory (Figure 2).

In each of the locations, community organisations serve as hub hosts. This reflects Brave Foundation's community capacity building model and desire to establish a village of support around young parents.

**New South Wales:** Newcastle and Wyong

**Northern Territory:** Darwin

**Queensland:** Ipswich and Logan

**Tasmania:** Greater Hobart

**Victoria:** Greater Melbourne and Geelong

Thirteen Brave Mentors support participants in these communities.

## PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

The DSS priority group for the SEPT Program trial is teen parents aged 19 or under. While teen mothers are the main participants, the program also welcomes young fathers.

The program can be accessed by young people under 25 years of age who live within a SEPT Program service area and:

- started receiving the Parenting Payment when aged 19 or under and are still receiving an income support payment, or
- are required through Centrelink mutual obligation requirements to enter the Australian Government's ParentsNext Program.

The two main pathways to joining the SEPT Program trial are:

- referrals from ParentsNext, other community support services and organisations such as schools and hospitals, or
- connecting directly with Brave Foundation.

The project may also support expecting and parenting teens who do not strictly meet the above eligibility criteria, but are at risk of long-term welfare dependence. Each case will be considered on its merits. These young people may be eligible to join as 'Connected participants'.





# Interim participation and delivery achievements

At the end of November 2019, 361 participants had been recruited into the SEPT Program trial and 270 of those (Table 3) were 'actively engaged', meaning that they were receiving mentoring and developing or progressing through their pathway plans.

Fifteen participants had successfully completed their pathway plans and graduated from the program, and the remaining 76 had been 'closed out' of the program for various reasons, including:

- disengaging from the program for longer than three months
- moving out of the service region
- losing their child pre- or post-birth (e.g. due to termination, miscarriage, death, no longer primary carer), or
- being referred for immediate crisis support rather than continuing with the program.

The trial's original participation target of 350 young parents over two years was therefore exceeded with seven months still remaining and recruitment and referrals continuing. This demonstrates the strong demand for this type of intensive support among expecting and parenting teens in these communities, as well as Brave's success in reaching and engaging with the target group.

There are two types of active participants:

**Intensive** – participants who receive monthly support and are connected into support services. They are actively engaged in mapping out their individual pathway plans and working towards achieving their goals with mentor support.

**Connected** – participants who meet with mentors quarterly. They are also connected into support organisations in their communities and working through a scaled down version of the pathway plan. These are young people who do not fit the eligibility criteria to be an intensive participant or who have been an intensive participant but no longer need that level of support.

**Table 3: SEPT Program participation by region and level of engagement (Intensive: INT and Connected: CON), as at 26 November 2019:**

Region	INT	CON	Total
Darwin, NT	22	9	31
Greater Melbourne, VIC	16	6	22
Greater Melb./ Western Melb., VIC	17	4	21
Western Melb./ Geelong, VIC	24	8	32
Greater Geelong, VIC	41	8	49
Ipswich, QLD	14	2	16
Logan, QLD	17	2	19
Newcastle, NSW	17	4	21
Wyong, NSW	15	4	19
Greater Hobart, TAS	36	4	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>270</b>

## AGE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The average age of participants across the entire program was 19.7, with participants in Logan, QLD recording the youngest average age, of 17.3, and those in Darwin, NT, recording the highest, of 22. The youngest participant to date was 12 years old and the oldest was 26 years old.

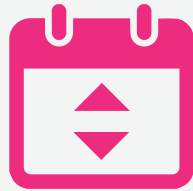
As you would expect, almost 96% of participants were young mothers or mothers-to-be. Fourteen young fathers and partners were enrolled in the program at the end of November 2019.

Of the 219 intensive participants, 50 (22%) were being supported prior to birth, 19 (9%) were being supported around the time of birth and 46 (21%) were being supported during the first months of their baby's life. The remainder were older mothers, up to 25 years of age, who had a child as a teen and are still receiving a Parenting Payment from DSS.

**PARTICIPATION IN THE FIRST 16 MONTHS**

**361** young parents recruited in first 16 months<sup>a</sup>

**350** was original 2-year target agreed with DSS



**19.7** average participant age

**12** age of youngest participant

**26** age of oldest participant

**43%** of active participants have a physical or psychological disability<sup>b</sup>



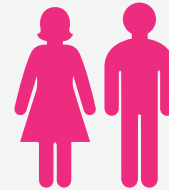
**20%** of active participants come from Indigenous backgrounds<sup>b</sup>

**9%** of active participants come from CALD backgrounds<sup>b</sup>

**270** participants were actively engaged in mentoring/pathway plans<sup>b</sup>



**256/14**  
mums dads



**123 (45%)** of whom are in DSS top priority cohort

**81%** of active participants were receiving intensive monthly mentoring



Of these:  
**50** were being supported prior to birth  
**19** were being supported at time of birth  
**46** were being supported during the first few months of their baby's life

**19%** of active participants were connecting with a mentor quarterly



**15** had completed pathway plans and graduated from the program<sup>b</sup>



**16%** enrolled but then disengaged part way through program



<sup>a</sup> All figures provided are based on recruitment and participation numbers reported to DSS as at 26 November 2019.  
<sup>b</sup> Results drawn from Peter Underwood Centre interim evaluation findings report (January 2020).

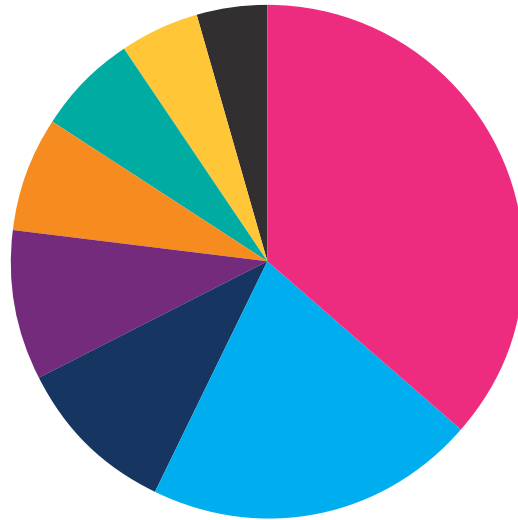
### ISSUES DISCUSSED WITH MENTORS

The three most common issues mentors discussed with program participants during their sessions were: education assistance; employment, training or workforce readiness; and mental health and wellbeing.

Figure 3 shows the high-level, proportional breakdown of issues recorded by mentors in Brave’s Penelope data management software during a five-month period in 2019.

**Figure 3: Issues mentors reported based on sessions with participants<sup>^</sup>**

- Education and employment – 36.4%
- Physical and mental health and wellbeing – 20.9%
- Housing and finances – 10.4%
- Disability and mental illness – 9.3%
- Child care – 7.2%
- Relationship issues – 6.5%
- Substance abuse – 4.9%
- Other (transport, crisis, legal issues) – 4.4%

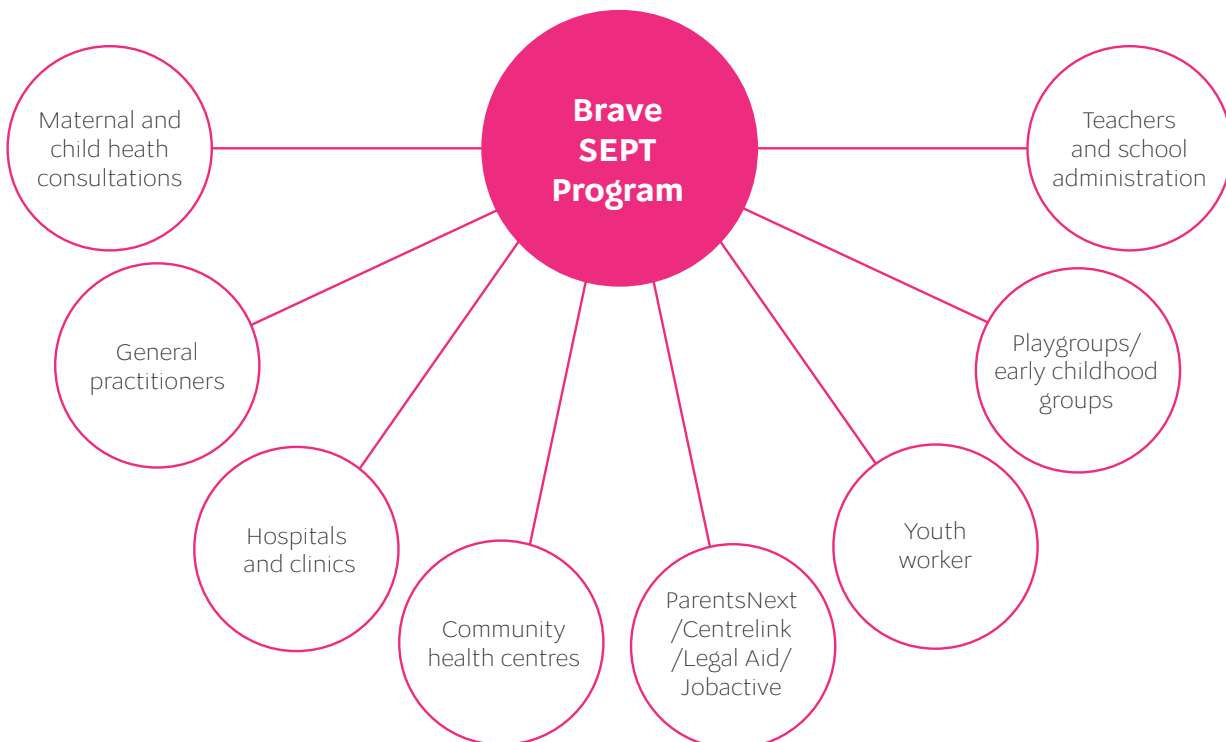


<sup>^</sup> Proportional breakdown of 752 issues logged between July and November 2019, determined by the PUC process evaluation study team.

### REFERRALS INTO THE PROGRAM

The majority of referrals into the program were from health providers, ParentsNext providers, non-profit organisations and education providers. Figure 4 illustrates the range of referral points identified across the service catchment regions.

**Figure 4: Referral points for SEPT Program participants**



Source: Adapted from Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) Trial Independent Evaluation: Interim Report (2020), Peter Underwood Centre, p7.<sup>1</sup>



## PARTICIPATION CHALLENGES

### Engagement drop offs

Around 16% of the overall 361 young people recruited into the SEPT Program up to the end of November 2019 dropped out before completing the program. Brave refers to these cases as 'Engagement drop offs'. They are counted among the program's 'closed cases' figures.

There are many reasons why expecting and parenting teens can find it difficult to commit to and complete a regular activity such as meeting monthly with a mentor and developing and following through on a goals-based pathway plan. The obvious reason is that they are either pregnant or a new parent.

Brave Mentors have also found that it can take several months to build rapport and gain a young person's trust, increasing the potential for drop offs in the early stages of the program.

Other, often interconnected challenges that many teen parents struggle with, which also impact on their ability to participate in self-empowerment activities, include mental illness, lack of family support, domestic violence and limited transport options.

It is worth noting that Brave mentors are also reporting that some previously disengaged participants have since re-connected with them to ask if they can resume their pathway program.

### 'Hidden' teen parents

Reaching and engaging expecting and parenting teens in DSS's younger-age priority group proved to be more difficult than expected. This is partly due to the fact that younger teens have often fallen through the gaps and are not linked into existing services, making them invisible to the service system. As a result, just under half the participants recruited during the first 16 months were under the age of 19.

A counter-balance to this problem was the abundance of ParentsNext Program participants who were in their early-to-mid 20s, who had been teen parents without receiving the type of one-to-one support Brave was offering. This cohort clearly stood to benefit from participating in the SEPT Program and therefore became a new priority, filling some of the places initially expected to be taken up by teenagers.

### The weather

A parent with a young baby, or a girl who is pregnant, is understandably reluctant to leave home when the weather outside is either very hot or very cold. This was a common seasonal problem in some regions and was exacerbated by the fact that many participants don't have a car and rely on family support, walking or using public transport.

Brave Mentors endeavoured to overcome climate-related problems by communicating with their mentees via text messages or social media, however the lack of face-to-face contact during the summer or winter months contributed to some participants disengaging from the program.

### Cultural barriers

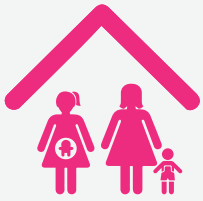
A number of cultural factors also affected our ability to engage with some young parents, particularly among Indigenous communities. The story below, from a Brave Mentor, sheds some light on the complex cultural and systemic barriers stopping many young parents from accessing the benefits of the SEPT Program.

**"An Aboriginal mother (not a young mother) who attended our pop-up playgroup asked for information about Brave. She informed the mentor that she knows several young mothers who are currently very disengaged and unable to care for their young children.**

**Aunties and grandmothers of the children within these families are stepping in to support and care for the children so that they are able to stay in the family without intervention from authorities. The Elders within the families are struggling with the levels of disengagement and not feeling empowered to support these children."**

**– Brave Mentor, Darwin**

## INTERIM DELIVERY ACHIEVEMENTS



**12** hub sites and delivery partnerships established across 4 states and the Northern Territory



**15** support organisations



**13** professional mentors recruited



**1,202<sup>^</sup>** mentoring sessions delivered in the 5 months from 1 July to 26 November 2019



**82%<sup>^</sup>** of participants attended their scheduled mentoring sessions in the 5 months from 1 July to 26 November 2019



**\$80,000+** allocated in scholarships and brokerage for participants



**750+** organisations in expanded Directory of Services

<sup>^</sup> Recorded by the new Penelope software system commissioned by Brave Foundation from 1 July 2019.

In addition to the high participation results already provided, a number of other achievements in delivering the trial are outlined below.

### **Scaled up rapidly**

We increased Brave's workforce 6-fold in four months; established the program trial at 12 hub sites located across four states and one territory; and opened enrolments within four months of the trial's commencement.

### **Established a collaborative village of support**

As the trial has progressed, we have continued to forge strong and constructive relationships with 12 hub organisations and 15 support organisations. This reflects the commitment of our senior management and the entire field delivery team to ensuring these pivotal relationships are open and resilient.

Brave's online Directory of Services has also been significantly expanded during the trial, with more than 750 services currently listed.

### **Launched the SEPT Program digital app**

The Brave Pathway Plan mobile application was launched in July 2019 and supports each young parent on their journey. Installed as an app on their smart phone, it is always with them to provide support and answers and follows their journey in the program.

The software is constantly filtering the most relevant and engaging information to assist each participant. It provides reminders, scheduling, helps locate appropriate services in the local area, and supplies easy to understand educational content from over 100 resources. Participants can also use the app to self-journal and monitor key milestones associated with goal progress.

Since the app went live, 70 participants have downloaded it and 10 are actively engaged and providing feedback to inform the app's second phase of development.

### **Awarded more than \$80,000 in Brave Scholarships**

Primarily, the scholarship requests have been for training courses, driving lessons and childcare fees. Scholarship amounts ranged from \$100 to \$1,500. Brokerage money from the scholarship fund pool is also being used to cover costs outside the scholarship scope, including helping young parents obtain their own birth certificates, and providing vouchers, food and beverages to encourage attendance at meetings and events.

Strict policy parameters are in place to ensure the scholarship and brokerage allocations comply with the core objectives of Brave Foundation and the SEPT Program.

### **High attendance rate**

The independent process evaluation verified that participants' attendance at individual mentoring sessions has been high, particularly given the voluntary nature of the SEPT Program. In the five months from 1 July to 26 November 2019, participants attended 82% of their scheduled mentoring sessions, while only 7% needed to be rescheduled, 4% were cancelled and 7% were recorded as 'no shows'.

Sessions were held in a wide range of convenient locations, including at the hub site office or another service provider's office; in a cafe, park, shopping centre or hospital; at the local swimming pool; in the participant's home; or over the phone.

### **Our Pathway Plans are working**

Importantly, the early impact of the Brave Pathway Plan is evident in the fact that around 70% of our actively engaged SEPT Program trial participants are on track to achieve their goals.

The vast majority of SEPT Program participants are getting back on track with their education and training, and taking better care of their health and wellbeing and the health of their child. Soon, if not already, these brave young people will be ready to enter the workforce and become proud and productive members of society.

# Governance and management

One of the keys to Brave Foundation's success in delivering the SEPT Program trial is the robust and agile nature of our governance and management framework. The structure has been designed to provide:

- a targeted and responsive frontline delivery platform across four states and one territory
- strong national governance and management
- a rigorous risk management framework
- constructive two-way communication between the delivery and management teams
- open sharing of practical insights and lessons learned from stakeholders within the SEPT Program Hub sites, and
- consistent and accurate progress monitoring and reporting practices between Brave and DSS.

An organisational structure diagram is provided in Appendix A.

## OUR BOARD

Brave Foundation has an 8-member Board of diverse and knowledgeable professionals from across Australia. The Board meets every two months and is responsible for governing the SEPT Program as well as the Foundation.

Our Board membership epitomises Brave's commitment to informing everything we do through the prism of the lived experience of expecting and parenting teens. We are fortunate to have a number of highly skilled Board Directors who also have personal experience of either being a teen parent or having been raised by one. Two of these Directors, Ebony Curtis and Chris Ryan-Peek, share their personal stories in this report.

### Teisha Archer

- Joined the Brave Board in 2015.
- Has a strong background in philanthropy, fundraising and marketing at organisations such as Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute.
- A mother of two, Teisha had prior experience serving on boards of national and state-based not-for-profit organisations.

### Bernadette Black

- CEO and Founding Director since 2009.
- A transformational leader with extensive experience in policy, advocacy, stakeholder relations, media and communications, and corporate relations.
- Had her first child at 16; now a mother of three.
- Named Barnados Australian Mother of the Year in 2009, Telstra Tasmania Business Woman of the Year in 2016 and Tasmanian Australian of the Year in 2019. Also a Harvard Kennedy Alumnae.

### Noor Blumer

- A Board Director since 2017.
- Had her first child at 17; now a mother of four.
- An accomplished lawyer, Noor established and is current Director of Blumers Personal Injury Lawyers.

### Rolfe Brimfield

- Joined the Brave Board in 2019.
- Has extensive human resources (HR) and operational management experience, with 15 years working at senior and executive levels.
- Currently in a senior HR management role at TasWater.

### Ebony Curtis

- Had her first child at 16; now a mother of three at the age of 23.
- Joined the Brave Board in 2018 after representing the organisation as an ambassador and advocate.
- Currently studying law at the University of Tasmania.

### Gary Lottering (Chair)

- A Board Director since 2014.
- Over 20 years' experience as an executive manager within the corporate sector.
- An Accredited Associate with the Institute of Independent Business and currently works as Principal Director of IntreSol Consulting and Director of Campuses at Alphacrucis College.
- Gary's experience working in the tertiary



education sector and as a senior consultant to federal government agencies and associated stakeholders, has been particularly valuable in providing strategic oversight for Brave's delivery of the SEPT Program trial.

### **Peter Murphy**

- A Board Director since 2019.
- Specialises in not-for-profits, education, aged care, and superannuation.
- Currently holds chair and directorship roles in a range of organisations across the Christian and secular community, while also a partner with management consulting firm, Robertson and Chang.

### **Chris Ryan-Peek (Treasurer)**

- A Board Director since 2014.
- A seasoned senior risk and finance professional with management experience, who is also a proactive business partner across a number of industries.
- Chris's mum was a teen parent. He is now a father of two.

### **NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE**

The Board appointed a National SEPT Program Steering Committee (NSC) to operate for the duration of the two-year trial and foster a culture of collaboration among all program stakeholders.

The committee serves as a forum for sharing information from across the hub sites and Brave's head office, monitoring progress and helping to recalibrate the delivery model. The NSC has met 10 times since the SEPT Program trial began. As of February 2020, the NSC comprises:

- three members of the Brave Foundation management team
- one previous teen parent
- seven stakeholders from the SEPT Program Hub sites
- two representatives from community organisations, and
- one DSS-commissioned Try, Test and Learn grant evaluator.

DSS's Grant Manager attends as an observer.

### **PROJECT REVIEW COMMITTEE**

The Board commissioned a Project Review Committee at the start of the SEPT Program trial to oversee compliance with the Try, Test and Learn grant requirements. This committee comprised the CEO, three Directors and key stakeholders. It met monthly for the first six months and was then disbanded, having served its primary purpose of ensuring a sound establishment process for the trial.

### **OUR MANAGEMENT TEAM**

At the time Brave was awarded the Try, Test and Learn grant in 2018, our organisation had a passionate team of 2.5 employees. Now, we are a more dynamic, multi-skilled team of 21.

Brave's CEO and Founder, Bernadette Black has been the driving force behind the organisation and our success to date. Bernadette is incredibly passionate about addressing the needs of expecting and parenting teens and providing the Brave delivery team with the leadership and resources to ensure this happens.

The following new internal leadership positions were created during 2018-19 to support the CEO with delivering the SEPT Program and fulfilling all the Try, Test and Learn grant requirements:

**Chief Operating Officer** – this one-year contract position was established in October 2019 to oversee day-to-day people management, reporting, evaluation and other operational requirements of the SEPT Program trial.

**Chief Mentor and Stakeholder Manager** – This role is accountable for ensuring the SEPT Program is implemented in line with the agreed outcomes, including grant compliance, reporting against project deliverables, and ensuring that Brave's organisational objectives are also being achieved.

**Team Leaders (North and South)** – two team leader roles were created to support the Chief Mentor and provide coaching and support for the mentoring team. Both appointees were previously SEPT Program mentors who were promoted.

**Board Director, Ebony Curtis:  
From teen parent to budding lawyer**

“I was pregnant with my daughter Ruby when I was 15. My Catholic high school didn’t know what to do with me!

Thankfully, they heard about Bernie from Brave Foundation and reached out to her. She gave a talk to all the Year 9 and 10 students about her journey.

Afterwards, she pulled me aside and told me that it was still possible to finish my education and achieve my life goals. That was a huge turning point, because up until then everyone, even my best friend, was predicting I wasn’t going to finish Year 10.

I returned to school six weeks after Ruby was born and put her into day care. I kept in touch with Bernie and set myself goals to keep moving forward. She was the closest person I had to a mentor in my life back then.

It would have been wonderful to have had the intensive support that a SEPT Program mentor provides as I suffered badly from post-natal depression and anxiety and lost all my school friends.

My goal was always to study Law. I studied hard but my ATAR score fell just short. So, I enrolled in all the introductory Law subjects instead. I’m now 23, married, the mother of three gorgeous children, and completing my fourth year of Law at the University of Tasmania.

Being on the Brave Board has really given me a sense of purpose. I feel particularly privileged to have been able to help shape the design of the SEPT program and its Pathway Plan.”



**Brave Director, Chris Ryan-Peek:  
Guided onto a better path**

Brave’s Director and Treasurer, Chris Ryan-Peek currently provides internal assurance on financial controls and process for the ANZ Bank’s Australian Banking Division.

Growing up in a disadvantaged, welfare-dependent family, Chris knows only too well the challenges many SEPT program participants and their children struggle with.

He was born in Hobart before his mother had turned 16 years old. She came from a military family that had broken down after her father returned from fighting in the Vietnam War. Chris’s grandmother raised four children on her own until she remarried.

Chris’s father – his mother’s then teenage boyfriend – was absent from their life during Chris’s early childhood. Chris lived with his mother until he started school, however by then she had fallen in with the wrong crowd and was abusing drugs and alcohol.

At the age of six, his mother signed him into the care of his grandmother, who eventually ended up looking after his two younger siblings and three young cousins (children of his aunt, who was also a teen parent).

Chris’s life path could have followed a similar downward trajectory to his mother’s life experience. However, he was lucky to have the influence of mentors and later the support of a local church to help him choose and walk a different path.

**“If you can intervene and help people early with the kind of mentoring Brave provides, then that makes all the difference and helps break the pattern of intergenerational teen parenting and welfare reliance.”**

**– Chris Ryan-Peek**



“You cannot overstate the importance of having a mentor who can reassure you that, even though you’re pregnant, that doesn’t mean everything else in your life has to end.

Sometimes, all you want is for someone to actually say ‘Congratulations!’ and mean it.”

– Teen parent, Hobart



# Brave young parents

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT HELPS ASHLEY BLOSSOM

### **Ashley, 19, single mum to Isla, 17 months**

“I was in a long-term relationship when I fell pregnant with Isla, but I left him half way through my pregnancy. And I don’t have a very good relationship with my family, so I was kind of doing pregnancy solo.

If I hadn’t met my first Brave mentor three days into becoming a new mother, I don’t know where I’d be right now. I don’t think I would have been able to finish school. I feel like I’d still be either in an unhealthy relationship or living in an unhealthy environment at home.

I first met Bec from Brave in the maternity ward and she gave me her contact details. When Isla was six weeks old, I got in contact and we met up and I got started on the Brave program. That was in August 2018.

I was a bit deflated and at a low point at the time, because I was going through a lot with becoming a new mum and not having any emotional support. And then everything started to kick off with Brave, you know – making calls and plans and having something to work towards. It helped improve my mental health and kept me focused on where I was going.

The emotional support has made the most difference to me and my daughter... being able to go to my two Brave mentors Bec and Steph and know they are there to help. That’s just a huge thing – to know I’ve got people who believe in me and who I have in my corner.

When I was living at home, I was in such a toxic environment. Having Brave help me get out of that situation and be in a better home environment has really helped me blossom, in a way. It has made me feel more confident.

I wouldn’t be as emotionally healthy as I am today, and I wouldn’t be as good a mother as I am today. Being able to have goals and meet them – to have accomplishments – and put

myself in a better situation for my daughter and myself has really helped me feel good inside myself and be a good mother.

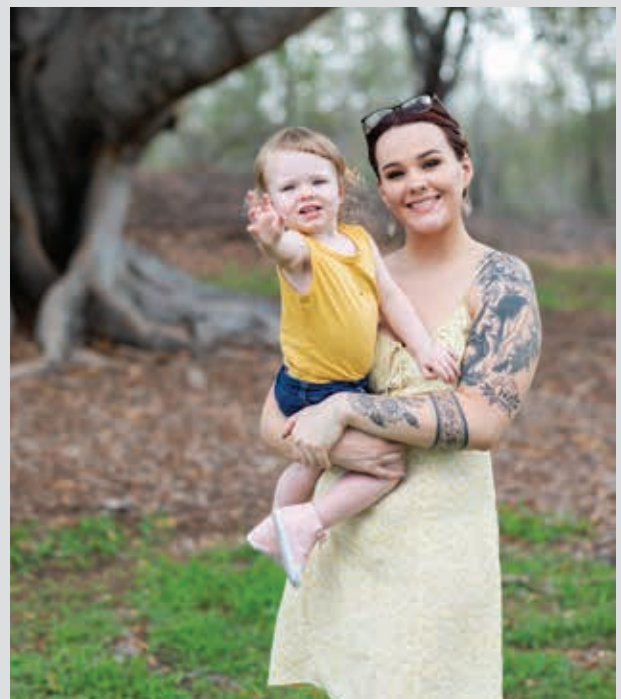
I’ve just been so inspired by the entire Brave program and the help that I’ve received.

Getting to know my two mentors and what they do for young mums has given me this new sense of passion and I want to do the same sort of thing as a career. I never thought I’d go to university, but now I’ve completed school I want to work towards going to university so I can study something in human services.

Because of the support I’ve had from Brave, I feel like I’ve got a better future that I’m looking forward to now. I’ve finally got a safe space to help me grow as a better person, to heal and be happy. I feel really lucky and grateful.

I wish every young parent out there could have the same opportunity.

It should be mandatory.”







“The emotional support has made the most difference to me and my daughter ... being able to go to my two Brave mentors Bec and Steph and know they are there to help. That’s just a huge thing – to know I’ve got people who believe in me and who I have in my corner.”

## THE POWER OF A TOOTHBRUSH AND A NEW MATTRESS

*Jane* tries very hard to be a good mum. She was telling her two Brave mentors that she knew that feeding her daughter food from McDonalds was bad, even though she didn't understand why. She had bought some nuggets and fries from the supermarket for her daughter to eat instead, thinking that would be healthier.

The mentors suggested she cook some chicken nuggets herself, but *Jane* thought she would never be able to make them. The mentors arranged a cooking class during a playgroup session and *Jane* not only made chicken nuggets, she made bolognaise, meat balls and steamed five different kind of vegetables. She was astounded that chicken nuggets were so easy to make and was so proud of what she had achieved.

The mentors also discussed personal hygiene with *Jane*, as her two-year-old daughter had never had her teeth brushed. An incident occurred when *Jane* bit into an apple and broke two of her own front teeth. The mentors provided a toothbrush and toothpaste at the hub so *Jane* could brush her teeth. She then bought her daughter a toothbrush and toothpaste.

Around this time, *Jane* spoke to her mentors about the condition of the second-hand mattress she and her daughter were sleeping

on. It was on the floor, filthy and stunk of human excretions, milk and animals. *Jane* had scrimped and scraped to save \$100 to buy a bunk bed online. The mentors spoke to her about applying for a Brave Scholarship, which they used to buy two new mattress ensembles for *Jane* and her daughter.

*Jane* came into the hub very distressed the day after the mattresses were delivered. She thought they were too good for her. She was crying and saying she just thought they would be the cheap foam mattresses. She was sure there had been a mistake and that the wrong mattresses had been delivered.

*Jane's* mentors had not envisaged what a huge impact Brave Foundation's provision of two good quality mattresses for *Jane* and her daughter would have. Sleeping on a filthy mattress had been degrading and distressing. Since the mattress delivery, *Jane* has been taking greater pride in her hygiene, feeling more valued and also showing a greater sense of belonging. With support from her mentors, she is feeling strong enough to start her journey with Centrelink.

The outcomes we are seeing in *Jane* in terms of improved confidence and parenting skills are quite remarkable in such a short time.

And since the mattresses arrived, *Jane* says she has never slept so well or felt so good.





## BRAVE BRINGS BO OUT OF HIS SHELL

Bo, 22, is a single dad raising a 5-year-old son in Tasmania.

When he was introduced to the ParentsNext program in March 2019, Bo was an early school leaver who lacked a sense of direction and was constrained by severe social anxieties. He was receiving support from HeadSpace for anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, however his circumstances were hindering him from reaching out for additional support.

ParentsNext quickly referred Bo into the Brave SEPT Program and he attended his first meeting with his new mentor, Katrina, before the end of the month. He has been actively engaged in the program and setting and achieving goals ever since.

Not having a driver's licence was a huge barrier for Bo, so Katrina helped him to apply for a Brave Scholarship, which enabled him to start taking driving lessons. He now has his licence and his own car. Katrina also helped him find a new place to live, which he moved into just before Christmas.

With Katrina's nurturing guidance and support, Bo is showing marked signs of improvement. His social skills, and those of his son Ashton, have dramatically improved. He is blossoming into a self-confident young man and father, and has formed friendships with other young parents in the SEPT Program.

Bo is now looking ahead and planning his career. He is considering a number of training and employment pathways, including applying for an IT traineeship. He is also pursuing his passion for woodwork, to see where that might lead.



**“Brave helped me connect in with YFC [Young Families Connect], and having that network of more experienced mothers around me helped a lot.**

**I wouldn't have known YFC even existed if it wasn't for Brave, and the same goes for a lot of other support services that were so close to me but I had no idea about them.”**

**– Brave SEPT Program participant**

## HIGH ACHIEVER FINDS SAFE SUPPORT

*Durah*, aged 18, is a single mum with a six-year-old daughter and a one-year-old son.

She migrated to Australia when she was a young child and recently completed Year 12, achieving an ATAR score of 96. This secured her a place studying a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Law, at a leading university from March 2020.

A full-time student, this high-achieving young woman receives a Parenting Payment from DSS and also works part-time. However, she is struggling to afford food and clothing for her children while also covering the cost of school and childcare fees, so she can continue studying and working.

*Durah* has limited family support as her parents are both dead and she is estranged from most of her siblings. At the time she was referred to Brave, she was not connected into other services or formal support networks, and was initially wary of agency involvement. However, she opened up after our Brave Mentor listened to her situation and explained the kind of support available through the SEPT Program.

She successfully applied for a Brave Scholarship to buy a laptop, which means she no longer needs to walk to the local library every day to correspond with her education provider. Her mentor also helped with obtaining some preloved clothing.

*Durah* is confidently progressing towards achieving the goals in her Brave Pathway Plan, which include finishing her Law degree, and paying for her childcare fees and after school care fees.

## CAITLYN WANTS A CAREER HELPING OTHER FAMILIES

Caitlyn, 21, has two young children to different fathers and had experienced domestic violence in her previous relationships. Her four-year-old daughter, *Eva*, is currently in foster care. Caitlyn and her current partner are raising her 18-month-old son *Jordan*.

Although academically talented, Caitlyn's circumstances meant she was at risk of not

completing her school education. She has been receiving intensive support through the SEPT Program trial since late 2018.

This is how Caitlyn, describes her experience of being supported by Brave Foundation and her SEPT Program mentor.

“The support I get from this program means everything to me at the moment. Brave and my mentor have been such a great help ... like with getting my registration sorted so I could get my car back on the road and keep going to school, or just having a chat if my mental health is having a bad day.

I feel a lot more supported, because I don't exactly have a family around me. I now feel like I have people who do care about me and who will support me through whatever I need to go through. So it's made a really big impact on me in that respect as well.

Brave is helping me realise I can get the confidence I need to be able to eventually bring *Eva* home while also doing the best I can for my son. I get really scared that I'm not doing enough, because I get really traumatised about what happened with my daughter and put a lot of pressure on myself.

My mentor has been helping me to take some of that pressure off and reminding me that I'm doing the best that I can by *Jordan* and that he's healthy and he's happy and he's loved. I'm getting more confident with my parenting and bonding more with *Jordan* and playing with him a lot more.

**“If it wasn't for the support I've been getting, I probably wouldn't have graduated from school last year and I wouldn't be about to start university.”**

If it wasn't for my mentor's support, I'd probably be in a really bad spot mentally in terms of my depression. Now, I'm meeting new people and making new and better friends from the ones I had. Having new friends gets me out of the house so I'm not stuck here in my little dark bubble. I'm also sorting through issues with my partner because I don't put up with things that I used to put up with, because I know that I deserve better – that's also thanks to my mentor and others I've met through Brave.

If it wasn't for the support I've been getting, I probably wouldn't have graduated from school last year and I wouldn't be about to start university. I feel like my goals are achievable now.

When everything happened with my daughter, that's when I realised that I really want to help other families and give families chances. Because it's not just about whether they're doing a bad job at parenting; it could be that they don't know any better, or that they haven't had the education, or they just don't have access to the support they need.

With this support from Brave, I now feel like this future is achievable for me – that I can actually get to where I want to be. It's just made everything feel like it's getting closer and I can actually reach where I want to go.”





“Brave is helping us to build bridges that link these young parents and parents-to-be, who have high needs, into health services and other support networks.”

**Jenny Chaves**, Mission Australia

# Brave Mentors

Thirteen trusted professional mentors have provided guidance to more than 360 young parents since the SEPT Program trial opened its doors in 2020.

Our mentors come from a range of professional backgrounds and personal experiences, however they share strong common values and a passion for helping to improve the lives of expecting and parenting teens and their children.

## BEA FINDS HER 'SUPERSTAR'



Rebecca 'Bec' Hoare is Brave's SEPT Program Northern Team Leader, based in Ipswich. She began working with Brave as a mentor, which is how she met Ashley, whose story we shared on page 34.

"Ashley is my 'superstar'! She's a very strong young woman and I admire her a lot.

From the day I met her at the hospital, she was just so open, warm and welcoming to me as a mentor.

Some of our young parents can be reserved and don't open up straight away, but Ash was so energised and jumped straight on board with the program. She was so keen to meet with me and learn because she really wants to improve herself.

She's gone through so many personal struggles over the past 18 months since I've known her. Her family moved interstate, so she's isolated and doesn't have family around her to support her. And she's had some issues with Isla's father, which I've helped her seek mediation to resolve.

I've helped her return to school, referred her into the local Young Families Connect Program, connected her into a playgroup, and we've partnered with the Ipswich Community Youth Service to find her and Isla a new home.

We've also had lots of small wins along the way too, like when Ash got hit with her first electricity bill after moving into her new place. It was too high because she'd been signed up to a plan she didn't need. Sometimes it's just about helping with those basic life skills and lessons, like

helping a young person understand their first utility bills.

The way Ash talks about and behaves with Isla is my hope for every parent to be with their child. They are inseparable and have such a beautiful relationship. Ash is signing up for parenting courses and doing everything she can to learn how to be a better parent. She wants to give Isla the world.

Ash is definitely not going to be one of those young parents who falls through the gaps. She's got plans and she's going places."

**"I studied Psychology at university and was working in the criminal justice system when someone encouraged me to apply to become a Brave Mentor.**

**The one-on-one case support was new to me and was a little daunting at first. But it quickly became clear how much I can relate to these young people and how I can help them.**

**My family is Ethiopian and my mum had her first child at 15. They fled to Sudan due to civil war, so I was born in Sudan and until the age of 14 I was playing games in a refugee camp, because I was not fortunate enough to attend school. I finally started school when I was 15 and I had to push hard to get where I am today.**

**So many of our participants initially can't believe that there's an organisation like Brave that's going to stick around and help them for the long term. They're so used to experiencing transient, 'light touch' services.**

**It's great that we also get to work with some of the young fathers, as there's not a lot of moral and practical support around to help them learn how to cope with their situation.**

**I cannot wait until the day when the participants from this trial are themselves Brave ambassadors and mentors and are sharing their own personal development stories with the next generations of young parents!"**

**Zen Tebeje, 29, Brave Mentor, Western Melbourne**





# Brave's delivery partners

## BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND CONNECTIONS

Brave's SEPT Program follows a community capacity building model that focuses on linking expecting and parenting teens into the existing support available within their local communities.

To achieve this, we rely on intensive, collaborative relationships with our 12 hub site delivery partners and 15 primary support organisations (listed on the inside cover). All Brave team members are responsible for making sure our key partnerships stay healthy and resilient.

In this report, we share feedback from our partners, as an indication of the strength of these relationships and the benefits our collective efforts are passing on to the young parents Brave exists to support.

**"Vulnerable parents and their children need support like this. Close, one on one, empathetic, non-judgemental, intensive support. The SEPT Program is needed."**

**Frank Haslett**, Red Cross, Geelong, Victoria

**"The SEPT program in Darwin has developed well. From small beginnings of identifying what other services were around to managing fear of another 'southern process' coming in, the Brave mentors have worked tirelessly to manage relationships, be inclusive and seek partnerships that facilitate strong mentor relationships.**

**The mentors have significantly brokered new partnerships in the sector and brought together broader services who support young mothers in the region. This includes working closely with Royal Darwin Hospital maternity nurses to strengthen support services. Brave mentors have also trialed new ways of engaging young and expecting mothers.**

**The Brave mentors have worked with dedication and compassion to reach out and engage young and expecting teens. The mentors have connected services and worked alongside other agencies who have relationships with young mums to support them. Strategic placement and time allocation from the mentors has facilitated strong local partnerships."**

**Mal Galbraith**, FAST NT, Darwin





## EXTENDING THE VILLAGE OF SUPPORT IN IPSWICH

### Jenny Chaves

Program Manager, Mission Australia, Communities for Children (Inala to Ipswich)

"We reached out to DSS with our Communities for Children partners, Ipswich Young Families Connect (YFC) and the local hospital health service. We asked them to bring Brave's SEPT Program to Ipswich because it was very light on up here in terms of the support available for teen parents.

Brave was able to layer onto the existing support platform provided by YFC; that's been the main success factor. It's about working with what's already there; not about starting from scratch when we already have assets established in the community.

This program can value-add to existing support platforms and it can also plug in gaps in our existing services across the region. This particular cohort can fall through the gaps at times. Brave is helping us to build bridges that link these young parents and parents-to-be, who have high needs, into health services and other support networks.

I definitely support continuing to fund this program so we can engage with these young people at the earliest possible stage in their parenting journey, and so that their children are also supported at an early life stage. This prevents many problems from occurring later in their lives."

**"Brave's mentor can offer more emotional and social welfare support than we are able to provide here at the school."**

### Corrine Harper

Program Manager, Young Families Connect @ Ipswich State High School

"We host one of the Brave mentors here at our YFC Program, which operates out of Ipswich State High School.

We're currently at full capacity with our SEPT Program participation, with about 20 young parents receiving support. The majority of these young parents are living independently, a few are clients of ParentsNext, four of them are indigenous girls and two have intellectual impairments.

Now that we're 18 months down the track, I'm really noticing the benefits for the students. The Brave SEPT Program is helping us to retain enrolments by addressing some of the hurdles these girls face in terms of the costs involved in going to school. The Brave mentor also works with them through the school holidays, whereas YFC workers don't. It's comforting for everyone involved, knowing that our mentor will be there for them during the holidays, especially at Christmas time because that's a really difficult time emotionally and financially for young parents.

A school's core business is naturally education and we do really well in developing a flexible and supportive environment that enables young mums to bring their children to school with them. But their needs are much more complex than that. Many of these young mums have experienced, or are currently experiencing, domestic violence and abuse, or the impacts of drugs and alcohol. Some are living in poverty and have no support from immediate family. Brave's mentor can offer more emotional and social welfare support than we are able to provide here at the school.

The young mums who graduated last year all made a big effort to go to the school formal. It's lovely to see that they are still having that important rite of passage that they otherwise would have missed out on. This program is supporting them to come back as mature-age students and continue their educational journey."

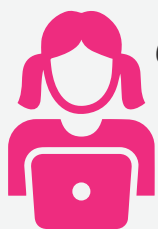
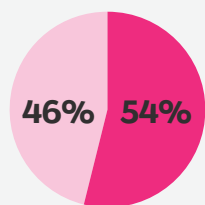
# Interim SEPT Program outcomes and impact

**70%** of active participants (189) are on track to achieve their overall pathway goals and graduate from the program in 2020<sup>1</sup>



**54%** of the 270 active participants have already met at least one goal in their pathway plan<sup>2</sup>

**46%** are working towards meeting their first goal<sup>2</sup>



**66%** of active participants (178) aspire to undertake education, training or employment by the end of the SEPT Program<sup>2</sup>

**31%** of active participants (84) have already returned to education or training<sup>2</sup>

**8%** of active participants (22) have gained employment while undertaking the program

**15** of overall program recruits (4%) have achieved all their pathway plan goals and graduated<sup>2</sup>

**80** intensive participants (36%) are meeting maternal and child health check milestones<sup>1</sup>

## DELIVERING POTENTIALLY LIFE-CHANGING OUTCOMES

Over the past 20 months, Brave Mentors have been guiding more than 360 expecting and parenting teens on their individual Brave Pathway Plan journeys. At the end of the first 16 months, 15 participants had achieved their short and medium-term pathway goals and graduated from the program.

In addition, 189 young parents – 70% of the 270 active program participants at that point in time – were on track to achieve their overall pathway plan goals relating to education, training, employment, health and wellbeing, parenting and covering their basic needs.

Internal monitoring of participants' progress by Brave Foundation and an independent process evaluation indicate that the trial is on track to deliver potentially life-changing outcomes for the majority of participants and significant savings to the Australian welfare system in coming decades.

An overview of the interim evaluation findings is provided on pages 48–55. The study team also looked for evidence about the benefit of the SEPT Program trial for participants.

DSS has commissioned the University of Queensland and the University of Melbourne to conduct an independent evaluation of the programs being funded by Try, Test and Learn. This wider evaluation encompasses the SEPT Program trial, however, at the time of publication, Brave is not aware of the status or findings of this study.

**Note:** Interim outcome and impact results provided are based on 361 overall program participants and 270 active (i.e. intensive or connected) participants as at 26 November 2019, after 16 months of delivering the trial.

<sup>1</sup> Based on an internal Brave Foundation assessment of progress being made on 270 active participants' individual pathway plans in the first 16 months of the trial. It should be noted that participants were (and continue to be) at varying stages of goal achievement depending on when they joined the program and the different circumstances and barriers facing each young person.

<sup>2</sup> Results drawn from Peter Underwood Centre interim evaluation findings report (January 2020). Refer to page 48 for further details.

## POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE WELFARE SYSTEM

The primary purpose of the funded Try, Test and Learn initiatives is to test whether an early intervention such as the SEPT Program works to reduce long-term reliance on welfare.

According to the process evaluation's interim findings, of the 270 participants who were actively being mentored and working through their pathway plans at the end of November 2019, 66% (178) had set goals to undertake education, training or employment by the end of the SEPT Program. (All participants are encouraged by their mentors to set goals in these areas; however it is important to note that the varying circumstances, stages of parenthood and time spent in the SEPT Program at that point in time, mean that some participants may not have been ready to identify education or work-related goals.)

After the first 16 months of the two-year trial, 84 participants had returned to education or training and 22 had found work, with the majority of participants expected to follow suit while achieving their education and/or work-related goals in the remaining eight months of the trial.

This gives an early indication of the potential flow-on cost savings to the welfare system resulting from this trial. However, a longitudinal study monitoring participants' progress and level of welfare reliance in the 5–10 years following the trial's completion would be necessary to assess the SEPT Program's longer-term impact.

## QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE OF EARLY OUTCOMES

Qualitative evidence has been collected by Brave Foundation to identify early indications of the trial's short- and medium-term outcomes and early impact. This evidence includes direct feedback received from individual participants (including 11 recorded interviews), delivery partners, support organisations and our frontline delivery team.

A selection of this evidence is presented in this section.

### Evidence direct from program participants

"If it wasn't for the support I've been getting, I probably wouldn't have graduated from school last year and I wouldn't be about to start university."

"It means a lot to have this kind of support. I really wanted to get off Centrelink, but I just didn't know how. As a young parent you aren't even aware that those supports are out there a lot of the time."

"If I didn't have Brave I wouldn't be able to be as emotionally healthy as I am today, I don't think I would be as good as a mother as I am today."

"Quite honestly, [if it wasn't for my Brave Mentor] I think I'd probably be dead in a ditch somewhere. *Hannah* would be living with my mum and I would either be dead in a ditch or I would have put myself in a coffin. Now, I'm a lot happier. I can actually smile and go out and feel like I'm actually part of the world."

"Sometimes ... Brave can be the difference between someone keeping their family together or losing it and having their children end up in foster care."

"I feel like you guys have helped me so much and pushed me in the right direction of where I need to be."

"I'm getting more confident with my parenting, as well as meeting new people and making new and better friends."

"Because of the support I've had from Brave, I feel like I've got a better future that I'm looking forward to now."

"I've noticed a big change in myself. I can actually go out and do things on my own now, without having to always bring someone with me, not for too long but it's still more than I used to."

"I finally got a safe space to help me grow as a better person to heal and to be happy, I have a future that I am looking forward to now."

## Qualitative evidence direct from delivery partners and stakeholders

Len Grahame,  
Wesley Mission, NSW

“Without the assistance of Brave and their staff, I would not be able to achieve over 71% job outcomes or further study for my students ...

I strongly request that you ensure that this established and proven program continues to support teen parents in hub site locations such as Wyong and Waratah, beyond the current funding expiry date.”

SEPT Program stakeholder interviewed for independent process evaluation

“... even though we recognise that they’re a vulnerable patient cohort, we don’t have targeted services specifically for that age. So, I think having that dedicated support was key to achieving better outcomes for them.”

Mal Galbraith,  
FAST NT, Darwin

“The mentors have significantly brokered new partnerships in the sector and brought together broader services who support young mothers in the region. This includes working closely with Royal Darwin Hospital maternity nurses to strengthen support services.

Brave Mentors have also trialed new ways of engaging young and expecting mothers.”

Nikki Irwin,  
Wesley Mission, NSW

“SEPT mentors have supported many young parents that we work with in ParentsNext to complete their HSC and other education courses.

They have also supported some young people to move into employment and support the positive transition into childcare.”

Jenny Chaves,  
Mission Australia

“The gap that exists in many mainstream services is that ‘walk-beside mentoring role’. We simply don’t usually have people doing those regular visitations and connections like these Brave mentors are doing ...

It’s so critical that they get this deep level of support because it’s not just their own health and welfare that needs to be considered; it’s also about their babies and giving them the best possible start in life as well.”

Margie Nolan,  
Department of Education, TAS

“This program provides invaluable support that is not only making a difference to teen parents, but most importantly is having an indirect and most important influence on the development and learning of the children of teen parents.”

Mary Tresize-Brown,  
South East Local Learning and Employment Network, VIC

“The SEPT model offers a level of individualised support to young parents that is not available elsewhere in the community.

The young parents in the Young Parents Education Program benefit from the holistic support of a Brave Mentor. The brokerage available for transport, equipment etc is highly needed.”



## TRANSFORMING LIVES IN WYONG AND WARATAH

**“This proven Brave program is working extremely well at the local level and changing lives for the better.”**

**Len Grahame**, Wesley Mission

In partnership with Wesley Mission, the Brave SEPT Program has been supporting more than 31 expecting and parenting girls and young women in Wyong and Waratah, NSW.

Brave Mentors, Mel and Jo, work alongside the Wesley Mission team and have become an integral part of the wrap-around services available to young parents.

Len Grahame, Wesley Training Group Manager, says the collaborative efforts of both organisations are helping “these young mothers feel worthy, respected and valued as they should in society”.

“Without the assistance of Brave and their staff, I would not be able to achieve over 71% job outcomes or further study for my students,” explains Len. “Our students at Wyong and Waratah are 98% young mothers, and they do need a lot of support to achieve their goals. This proven Brave program is working extremely well at the local level and changing lives for the better.”

**“A number of my participants have been successful in putting pathway plans in place that have given them the ability to move forwards toward work and/or study.**

**For example, we referred one of our young parents, Kristy, to Brave’s SEPT program in 2018. Since working with Brave she has completed the Getting Ahead Program and gone on to complete a Certificate IV in Community Services.**

**Kristy has been working very hard to juggle personal problems with being a mother and student. She is such a hard worker, but at the same time she would not have been able to succeed in her educational goals if it were not for the assistance and support that has been given to her by the Brave SEPT Program.”**

**Michelle O’Connell**, Work Coach, Parents Next

## STORIES FROM BRAVE MENTORS

Brave Mentors are continually submitting updates about participants’ pathway journeys and achievements for reporting to DSS, the NSC and Brave management. Three examples of these reports (there are dozens), which indicate a wide variety of outcomes for participants, are provided below.

One participant was successful in gaining her licence with help from a Brave Scholarship to pay for her driving lessons and also some of the fees associated with the testing. She wanted to obtain her licence so she could apply for an apprenticeship in the building and construction industry and be able to drop her son off at day care on the way to work.

We see a high number of girls who are pregnant as the result of sexual assault or because they have been pressured for sex. The hospital midwifery team have recognised that Brave Mentors are able to quickly build relationships with each teenager and move her quickly into more safe and stable situations, while creating goals for the future.

One participant was secretly seeing an ex-boyfriend (and keeping this from her mother) who had previously had an AVO against him for domestic violence against her. After the Brave Mentor talked with the participant about healthy relationships, she decided to finally separate from this guy and deal with the issue.

The mentor was able to refer her to appropriate support services. This young woman is now continuing with her study, mending the relationship with her mum and healing herself.

# Independent process evaluation

## EVALUATING PROGRAM DELIVERY AND EARLY BENEFITS

Brave is committed to continually improving the SEPT Program’s content and delivery model and measuring our impact on expecting and parenting teens, their families and the wider community.

During 2019, we commissioned the University of Tasmania’s Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment (PUC) to conduct an independent qualitative process evaluation of the first 16 months’ operation of the SEPT Program trial. The research team issued an interim report in January this year. A summary of their key findings is presented here. The report will be finalised later this year once the trial is complete.

The researchers examined the delivery of the SEPT Program trial to identify what is working well and areas that can be improved. They also analysed the interviews and data collected to uncover evidence of the program’s early outcomes in terms of how it is benefitting participants.

The research drew on two groups of data:

- 15 interviews with Brave-SEPT staff and stakeholders, and
- a review of almost 350 items of SEPT Program documentation and information.

“Working on our evaluation of the SEPT trial has been a captivating experience for our team. We found many examples that demonstrate Brave’s responsiveness and nimbleness when there were challenges that needed to be addressed.

We have also personally experienced the collegial, genuine and warm way in which the Brave team works. While lots of people intend to be collaborative, we appreciate how Brave is walking that talk in our work with them.

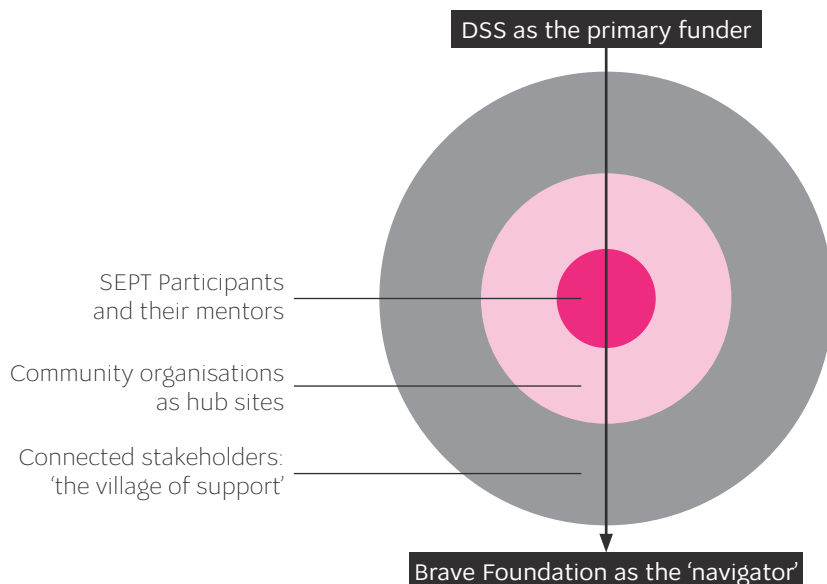
Some members of our team also were quite emotionally moved by participants’ stories. It really opens one’s eyes to the difficult life situations many of these young people face while also trying to do the best for their child.”

– **Professor Kitty te Riele**, Deputy Director (Research), Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment

## POINTS OF DIFFERENCE

The study team examined three key points of difference in the SEPT Program approach compared to other programs provided for expecting and parenting teens. Their findings are outlined in Table 4.

**Figure 5: The SEPT Program collaboration model**



**Table 4: Findings in relation to key points of difference in SEPT Program**

### **The primary prevention approach**

- The SEPT approach is different from a crisis-response type of intervention. It intervenes early to provide support to young parents, reducing the likelihood of them ending up in crisis. It adheres to the proven principle of providing support during the first 1000 days of life.
- The ideal window of opportunity is during the antenatal period, as soon as a teen discovers she is pregnant and has decided to continue with the pregnancy. This is a critical time for connecting the girl with a mentor and into key services, to give her a stable support base for transitioning into motherhood. Early connection into antenatal care reduces the risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes.
- Brave Foundation actively sought connections with key services (e.g. hospitals and healthcare services) well-positioned to provide referrals at the optimal time for early intervention.
- However, the program has flexibility to also reach slightly older parents (under 25), who started receiving the Parenting Payment at 19 or under and who are still receiving income support. This can include young parents referred through ParentsNext.
- The Pathway Plan provides an interactive planning framework for mentors to support and empower an expecting and parenting teen from pregnancy through the first years of their child's life.

Note: Research findings about how SEPT interfaces with ParentsNext appear on the next two pages.

### **The intensive collaboration model**

- The SEPT Program's collaborative model is illustrated in Figure 5. Stakeholders commented positively about the way this model is working, for their organisations and for the young participants.
- Brave Foundation has established and maintained a close and constructive connection with DSS and the Try, Test and Learn (TTL) evaluators, despite several changes in personnel since the trial began.
- Overall, it seems that the TTL processes facilitated the collaboration between Brave and DSS but created some friction between Brave and hub partners/stakeholders during the early stages of the trial, particularly with those that had also applied for TTL funding and missed out. Over time, these tensions have declined, largely due to Brave's pro-active efforts and open-door policy.
- Brave has been very aware of not duplicating programs and services that already exist in the 12 SEPT hub sites and their local service catchments. Instead, the aim has been to complement and increase the capacity of existing services. This intention was acknowledged in the researchers' interviews with personnel from delivery partners as well as from Brave.
- A wider 'village of support' has been actively grown beyond the hubs to support expecting and parenting teens. Brave's Directory of Services plays a key role in this and has been significantly expanded and promoted during the trial.
- Managing stakeholder relationships while also supporting an increasing caseload of program participants, can be challenging for mentors and is one drawback of the model. Brave has addressed this by bringing in three new team members to focus on stakeholder relationships and coordination.

### **The development of a strategy through the prism of lived experience**

- A central component of how the SEPT Program was developed is that end users are actively involved in the program's design and delivery.
- The researchers found multiple examples of people with teen parenting experience being involved in the design and rollout of the program (for e.g. Brave's CEO, a number of Brave's Board of Directors, and several teen mothers who participated in the original working group and a test group).
- Some stakeholders felt that, in the early days of the trial, Brave staff did not fully grasp the complexity and severity of the lived experiences of many program participants. However, that awareness improved as the trial progressed.

### COMPLEMENTING PARENTSNEXT

The SEPT Program is designed to fill the gap between when a young person finds out they are expecting and when they are required to enter the compulsory ParentsNext Program. Among the 270 active SEPT Program participants at the end of November 2019, 26% were enrolled in ParentsNext, while the vast majority were not (Figure 6).

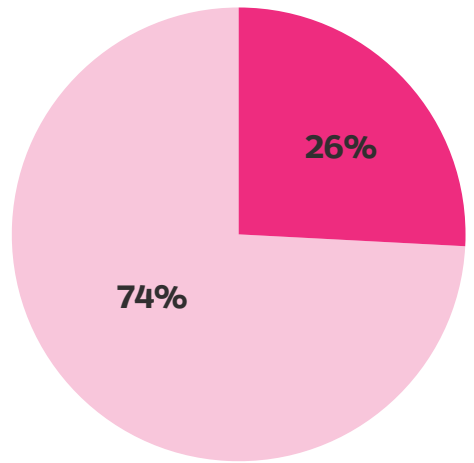
The research team found that the two programs are complementary and have been working well together in local hub communities. Importantly, if SEPT Program participants achieve suitable education or employment outcomes, they may be diverted from being compelled to enter ParentsNext.

The interim report states that: ‘The genuine collaboration between ParentsNext and Brave is a success story in itself, both for participants and for these organisations’. It cites examples of Brave Mentors liaising with and supporting the work of their ParentsNext collaborators, and vice versa. In some instances, Brave Mentors sit on local ParentsNext steering committees and give feedback on how their young mentees feel about ParentsNext.

The researchers noted that: ‘The voluntary nature, flexibility and wide range of valued goals are considered a benefit of SEPT compared to ParentsNext’. The goal-setting component of both programs is also complementary, with the SEPT Program giving young parents an introduction to goal setting and intentionally working through

barriers, so that by the time they engage with ParentsNext coaches they share a common language. Table 5 gives a comparison of the two programs.

**Figure 6: SEPT Program participants enrolled in ParentsNext**



- Currently enrolled in ParentsNext
- Not enrolled in ParentsNext

**‘The genuine collaboration between ParentsNext and Brave is a success story in itself, both for participants and for these organisations.’**





**Table 5: Similarities and differences between SEPT and ParentsNext**

	SEPT Program	ParentsNext Program
<b>Similarities</b>	<p>Help participants develop a pathway plan for education and workforce participation.</p> <p>Help participants access services in their local community to help them progress in their goals.</p> <p>Meet regularly on a one-on-one basis with a participant.</p>	
<b>Differences</b>	Participation is voluntary.	Participation is compulsory for parents who meet all eligibility requirements. Attendance to the appointments is compulsory in order for parents to keep receiving their parenting payments.
	Participants work with a professional mentor.	Participants work with a coach.
	Focused on three individualised goals covering health and wellbeing; basic necessities such as housing; and education, training or employment.	Focused on pre-employment plans.
	Catered specifically to expecting and parenting teens under the age of 25.	Catered to any parents with at least one child under the age of 6 and who has not been employed in the last 6 months.
	Appointments are relatively casual and may be carried out at various locations.	Appointments are structured and carried out at the ParentsNext provider location.
	<p>Flexibility around the time frame of the SEPT program.</p> <p><i>“So the beauty of Brave is that they’ve got a little bit more time to step people through and go, ‘if we do this, this is the next step, this is the next step, this is the next step, and we can be there with you for all of those steps’. So, it’s a great supportive approach with the prevention approach.”</i> (Statement from a ParentsNext interviewee)</p>	<p>Specified amount of time to work with participants:</p> <p><i>“Being that it’s a federal contract, we have only a certain amount of time that we can actually work with participants. So, we find that programs like SEPT where it’s not as stringent on a time frame, where there’s more support. there’s more sort of linking into local services ... helps us keep the participant on track to where they want to be.”</i> (Statement from a ParentsNext interviewee)</p>

Source: PUC evaluation interim report, page 8.

## IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS AND CHALLENGES

The PUC study identified a range of positive early results, including:

- The relatively high level of attendance (82%) among program participants for scheduled sessions with their mentors, and the high proportion who engaged in intensive monthly sessions.
- The benefits of mentors establishing trust and rapport over time, providing intensive case management support, and having ‘organic’ informal discussions as well as structured conversations. This enables important issues to be raised by a participant that they may not feel comfortable discussing with anyone else.
- The important role mentors play in helping young people to work through multiple, overlapping life issues and navigate the service system: *‘There are so many youth agencies, job agencies, drug and alcohol [services] ... that just navigating them becomes a real issue. And I think that that’s been the benefit [of] having individual case management for these girls.’* (Stakeholder interview statement)
- The availability of the flexible Brave Scholarship fund to actively help participants overcome barriers.

The research also identified several barriers and challenges faced by the program delivery team (Table 6).

**Table 6: SEPT Program implementation barriers and challenges**

Barrier/Challenge	Description
<b>Pushback on the Pathway Plan template</b>	Stakeholders and mentors identified a number of issues and gaps with the Pathway Plan template.
<b>Staffing issues</b>	Appointing the right people as mentors was an early challenge. The flexible nature of the mentoring role did not necessarily align with the more structured role of a social worker. Brave adapted its recruitment strategy accordingly.
<b>Brave-Hub partner relationships</b>	Building constructive relationships with some hub partners was challenging at the beginning of the trial, for reasons already mentioned. Some stakeholders wanted to have more say in the way the program was being run at their hub locations and it took time in some locations to clarify respective roles and responsibilities.  These issues were progressively resolved through Brave team members’ proactive efforts.
<b>Mentor-mentee relationships</b>	Given the complex circumstances most young parents find themselves in, it can take mentors several months to build rapport and trust. It is important to balance the need to establish rapport with creating healthy boundaries.
<b>Engagement drop off</b>	64% of the 91 ‘closed cases’ as at 26 November 2019 were due to ‘Engagement drop off’. (At the time, this represented 16% of overall enrolments in the program.) This reason for closing a case is of concern, because of the high proportion of closed cases it applies to and because these disengaged young parents clearly need support.  Further information about this issue, drawn from the interim evaluation findings, is provided on page 27.
<b>Low participation from the original priority group</b>	Further information about this issue, drawn from the interim evaluation findings, is provided in the ‘Hidden teen parents’ section on page 27.

## EVIDENCE FOR ACHIEVEMENTS

The PUC research team found that individual success within the SEPT program is different for each participant because their goals can be quite different. They identified evidence for achievements in five areas, with the caveat that their findings need to be read alongside those of the broader TTL evaluation commissioned by DSS.



### 1. Specific goals set by participants

- An analysis of 73 participants' pathway plans found that their goals could be organised into three main categories, outlined in Table 7.
- Successes in relation to these goals are interconnected, with basic needs, parenting knowledge, health and wellbeing overlapping, which points to the 'major impact that can be achieved through a holistic and supportive approach by mentors'.
- Just over half of the 270 active participants had already achieved at least one of their individual goals, while the remaining participants were working towards achieving their first formal goal (possibly because they were new participants and/or experiencing life challenges). In addition, 15 participants had achieved all their goals and graduated from the program.

**Table 7: Types of goals in SEPT Program participants' pathway plans**

Goal category	Examples of goals being set
Education, training or employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completing high school or a vocational certificate</li> <li>Pursue further university study</li> <li>Finding a work experience or employment opportunity</li> </ul>
Covering basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtaining a driver's licence (a common goal)</li> <li>Securing affordable housing so they can live independently (away from unhealthy or unsuitable home environment)</li> <li>Learning how to manage their finances</li> </ul>
Parenting, health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving their physical and mental health</li> <li>Ensuring the health of their unborn/newborn child</li> <li>Finding a day care centre and supporting their child's transition into care</li> <li>Improving level of social activity</li> <li>Developing a supportive circle of friends/other mothers (e.g. by attending a playgroup)</li> <li>Improving sense of self-empowerment</li> <li>Being more attentive and 'present' for their child</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from PUC evaluation interim report, pages 54-55.



## 2. Pathway to education and employment

- The report states that: ‘... two-thirds of participants aspire, based on their own goals, to undertake education, training, or employment during or by the end of the SEPT Program, while almost a third of program participants have already returned to education or training.’
- Many participants are well on the way to completing their education and are now thinking ahead to further education options, with the support of their mentor. One example of this was a mentor helping a participant source a Brave Scholarship to pay for out-of-pocket expenses for three certificate courses she wanted to complete while also studying Year 11 and 12.
- The program is building participants’ confidence and self-esteem, which then empowers them to pursue employment.



## 3. Basic needs

- Mentors are helping participants meet their basic needs in relation to housing, transport, finances and safety. These are important outcomes that provide an essential foundation that enables young parents to pursue education and/or employment.
- The Brave Scholarship ‘is an effective strategy for meeting basic needs where expecting and parenting teens experience financial hardship.’
- ‘In addition, through networking, collaborations and the village of support, mentors at times are able to provide access to resources and opportunities that expecting and parenting teens cannot afford. This not only refers to basic material goods but also to the kinds of outings that more well-off families take for granted, and that not only support family connectedness but also help build cultural capital and school readiness.’
- The most beneficial approach is to meet young parents’ needs in a way that empowers and supports them to work out the solutions for themselves, rather than having someone simply trying to fix their problems for them.



## 4. Parenting, health and wellbeing

- The good health and wellbeing of participants and their children is a valuable outcome of the program in itself, as well as being an enabler of other outcomes, such as education and employment.
- Rather than judging the young parents for making ‘bad’ decisions, mentors are advocating for them and empowering them to be the best parents they can be.
- SEPT Program participants’ wellbeing is also positively influenced by the social connections being formed with their mentors and other program participants. Instead of feeling judged, the program provides them with a place to feel valued and supported.



## 5. Community capacity building

- At the broader level, the SEPT Program’s collaborative model appears to be having a positive impact on building local community capacity to support expecting and parenting teens.
- Local stakeholder organisations were becoming more aware of services relevant to the needs of young parents, learning from each other and engaging in more efficient referral processes.
- Brave’s approach: ‘... shows how enhanced community capacity building, like enhanced health and wellbeing, is both a valuable outcome in its own right and an important enabler of achieving the headline goal of engagement with education.’



## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAM DELIVERY

The final section of the report presents four implications from the research findings to support continuous improvement during the final six months of the trial and the SEPT Program's ongoing implementation.

The report acknowledges that: 'Brave has already made improvements in response to feedback from expecting and parenting teens, mentors, hub partners and stakeholders'



### 1. The place of SEPT in the landscape of support for young parents

The collaborative model is a strength of the SEPT Program. However, the services system is complex and differs from community to community. Young parents can feel confused and overloaded if connected into too many, or inappropriate, services.

An increasing focus for the SEPT Program could therefore be to add value to what is already available in regional and local communities by providing a stable (i.e. long-term) coordination function. To achieve this, the program could be further localised, to be more responsive to local conditions and needs.

There is also an opportunity for Brave to further improve how it communicates and manages relationships with hub partners and stakeholders, to increase the sense that everyone is on the same team and has a shared purpose.



### 2. The work of mentors

Stakeholders the researchers interviewed praised the commitment, passion and hard work of Brave Mentors, while also commenting that they often appeared to have too much on their plate.

One suggested solution was to enable mentors to be more focused on their young mentees by having stakeholder relationships managed centrally within Brave. The appointment of the Chief Mentor and Stakeholder Manager, and the southern and northern regional team leaders, have helped to address this issue.

In relation to feedback about the specific skills and capabilities most suited to the mentoring role, the report states that: 'Overall, the implication seems to be that the recruitment of and selection criteria for mentors need further consideration – or perhaps simply need to be communicated more clearly.'



### 3. The Pathway Plan

Some participants found the Brave Pathway Plan template very useful and easy to adapt to their situation, while others found it less valuable and/or too rigid. Better communication about the purpose of the pathway plan and how it ought to be used would therefore be valuable.



### 4. Data tracking and file management

There has been significant effort to collect data and track outcomes during the trial. However, over the longer term, 'back of house' processes for collecting and transparently managing data and tracking outcomes could be further improved. This would help to address gaps in available data and increase the consistency and quality of the information available.

# Brave lessons learned

## AN EXTREMELY SHORT LABOUR

To quickly rollout the SEPT Program across four states and one territory, Brave has scaled from a 2.5-person organisation to a 21-person team spread across four states and one territory. This began with increasing our workforce 6-fold within four months.

This growth was not without its growing pains as Brave's internal policies, practices and stakeholder relationships were rapidly transformed to establish the trial and meet the project's delivery schedule.

Fortunately, the agile nature of our organisation combined with the drive and commitment of everyone involved, including our delivery partners, enabled us to achieve this feat and retain our focus on the most critical issue – supporting and empowering vulnerable expecting and parenting teens across Australia.

### The importance of cashflow

A key lesson from this experience has been the importance of having a cashflow model that aligns with the program's delivery requirements. The interval cashflow model adopted as part of Brave's funding agreement with DSS was not appropriate for supporting such a major and rapid scaling up process.

Having access to a greater proportion of the federal grant funding at the front end of the project would have facilitated a smoother establishment phase for the trial. Instead, our initial efforts were constrained by limited cash flow and it took well into the second year of the trial to achieve a healthy financial rhythm.

**“We identified the risk factor of having just one mentor working locally over a two-year trial period and suggested a job-share position to Brave, to minimise the risk of losing relationships if a mentor's role is not sustained.**

**This has proven to be highly successful as it brings two skill sets and mind sets together for the benefit of the trial.”**

**Mal Galbraith**, FAST NT, Darwin

## TEETHING PROBLEMS

### Difficulty keeping some participants engaged

– it has been difficult keeping some participants engaged in the program given the barriers many face to becoming and staying involved. Limited or no access to convenient transport to travel to mentoring sessions is one such barrier.

To help address this issue, Brave revised our initial policy, which discouraged mentors from visiting participants at home. Mentors are now permitted to visit their mentee's home for their first meeting, provided they take another mentor or support person with them.

### Making the SEPT Program more locally

**responsive and cohesive** – Some delivery partners and support organisations provided feedback during the process evaluation that Brave could make better use of local knowledge and services within some hub locations, and also increase communication and autonomy at the local level.

Brave's potential to provide a stable, long-term coordination function across relevant services in local communities was also identified as an important value-add from the trial.

We reviewed our internal approach to mentor inductions, onboarding and training in response, and new mentors now receive an on-site induction with a stronger focus on providing warm introductions at the local and regional levels.

The aim is to develop strong collaborative stakeholder relationships and give our field delivery teams the flexibility to adapt and respond to local area needs. The southern and northern regional team leader roles provide additional capacity in this respect.

**Listening more, talking less** – The National Steering Committee was established to maintain strong communication between stakeholders across Brave's delivery network. However, some stakeholders have provided feedback that the existing committee format does not allow sufficient opportunities for two-way discussion and contributions from all members. The structure of NSC meetings is being reviewed as a result.

## GROWING PAINS

**Expanding the two-worker model** – Feedback about mentors' heavy caseloads and difficulty covering their large catchment areas was taken on board, and in October 2019 the two-worker model being trialled in Darwin was extended into three locations in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania.

**Appointing regional team leaders** – The roles of Northern and Southern Team Leaders were established to assist the Chief Mentor and Stakeholder Manager and strengthen coordination, training and support for mentors in the field.

**Deepening the mix of mentor skills and experience** – The intensive one-to-one nature of the support being provided by Brave Mentors, together with the challenging circumstances of many SEPT Program participants, calls for a rich variety of professional knowledge, skills and experience.

We have found the role aligns well with the experience of candidates from community and child services backgrounds, as well as those with social work backgrounds. Brave's recruitment approach has matured as a result, with the aim of developing a mix of complementary professional qualifications and capabilities across our mentoring team.

**Improving data capture and reporting** – We are continually improving our ability to capture both quantitative and qualitative information about participant progress. All mentors now enter progress updates into Brave's Penelope database system, commissioned in mid-2019, which feeds into the DSS DEX system.

This has enhanced the consistency and quality of data capture and reporting, although the style and level of detail entered still varies between mentors. The Brave Pathway Plan template has also been adjusted to capture more meaningful and consistent information about each participant's journey.

"I've been working with young parents for 14 years and this is the first time I've seen any serious investment from government to help support these young people.

We have 115 births a year at our local hospital involving young women under the age of 18. We have been able to assist around 20 of those young mums through the SEPT Program trial and want and need to help many more.

We need to see significant change in the level of funding and support being provided at the federal, state and local government levels to help these young parents and give their incredibly vulnerable children the best possible start in life. Otherwise, the community will continue to bear far greater costs over the longer term."

**Jenny Chaves**, Mission Australia

"In Darwin, there is a great need due to young women from remote communities being sent here for the delivery of their baby. At times, these women have limited family support around them.

The Brave process has identified significant need in this area. An extended support service would provide flexibility of delivery along with greater capacity to network with existing remote support services in the community.

Further funding could build on the opportunity for FAST and Brave to support more young women in Darwin, develop stronger partnerships and provide stronger networking into communities."

**Mal Galbraith**, FAST NT, Darwin



# Keep this baby growing: 5-year plan

## BONDING COMMUNITIES AND SAVING YOUNG LIVES

We have tried, we have tested, we have learned ... and we now know, resoundingly, that the SEPT Program model works. This report clearly demonstrates that the program trial is delivering far-reaching benefits, as we all hoped it would.

The SEPT Program is a tangible investment in community bonding and capacity building. Most importantly, it is connecting some of Australia's most vulnerable teenagers into services, education and, ultimately, training and employment opportunities that will enable them to lead independent and productive lives.

This program has the capacity to break cycles of intergenerational teen parenting and disadvantage and contribute to saving the Australian Government billions of dollars in welfare costs.

It is being rigorously tried and tested in partnership with the Government and more than two dozen delivery partners and support organisations, many of whom have contributed testimonials in this report and also provided separate letters of support. Brave Foundation's delivery approach has also been assessed through an independent process evaluation, which returned positive findings and constructive guidance for future improvement.

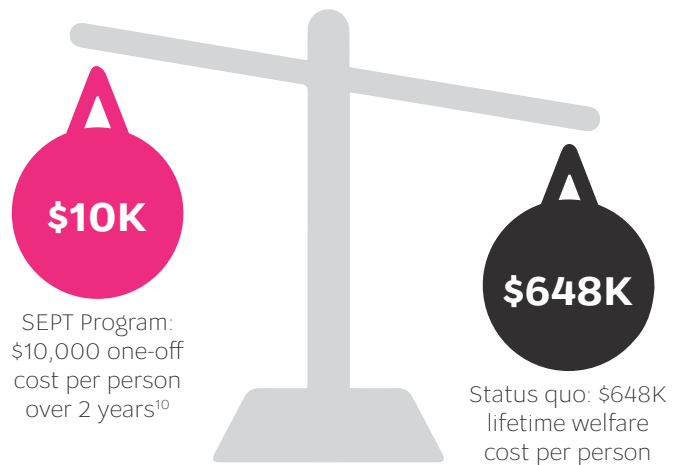
The following strategic recommendations indicate how Brave proposes to consolidate and expand the level of support provided through the SEPT Program.

## THE NUMBERS STACK UP

**It costs approximately \$10,000 to support one teen parent during the full two-year SEPT Program.<sup>10</sup> This is in stark contrast to the potential cost of \$648,000 in actuarial lifetime welfare costs for young parents who start receiving the Parenting Payment at the age of 18 and under (PwC Australia, 2017).**

The maths make sense. The SEPT Program is achieving the intended results and, over the longer term, will generate huge economic savings for the Australian taxpayer and wide-ranging positive ripple effects across the wider community. This is a very successful early outcome for the Government's vision with the Try, Test and Learn Fund.

Figure 7: SEPT Program comparative cost benefit



## KEEP THE SUPPORT COMING

Try, Test and Learn enabled Brave's SEPT Program to scale so its benefits could be assessed and proven at the community level. Brave is ready to maximise and leverage the Government's critical seed funding to deepen our reach into our existing hub communities and grow our village of support across Australia.

If this doesn't happen and we don't receive transitional funding to continue the program:

- hundreds of vulnerable young parents will be halted on their pathway to work, which is currently within reach
- generational disadvantage and disconnection from work will be reinforced
- 18 staff members recruited for the trial (out of a workforce of 21) will be out of jobs
- countless communities and young parents will be denied access to a program that enhances community capacity and bonding and strengthens social cohesion, family by family, and
- The learnings from the SEPT Program will not be implemented, scaled and shared. This will be a major missed opportunity for the Australian Government in its aim to help disadvantaged young people transition off welfare.

Brave Foundation is committed to working with the Government to ensure the continuation and expansion of the SEPT Program.

## 2020–25 FORWARD PLAN

### Recommendation 1: Phased expansion of the existing SEPT Program footprint

The locations and timeline for our proposed phased expansion of the SEPT Program are outlined in Figures 8 and 9. The forward plan will include an organisational structure that responds to learnings from the trial and prepares Brave for sustaining the program over the long term. At its heart will be the collaborative localised delivery approach and, where appropriate, the two-worker mentor model, which have proved so successful during the trial.

**PHASE 1: Limited expansion in Year 1, 2020–21:** Sustaining and consolidating the 12 original SEPT Program hubs; establishing the program in South Australia; and increasing Indigenous participation.

**PHASE 2: Full national expansion in Year 2, 2021–22:** Expanding into Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

**PHASE 3: Doubling operations in further local government areas where teen pregnancy rates are highest, 2022–25:** Through a mutually agreed, sustainable funding approach.

### Recommendation 2: Transitional funding

**Brave Foundation requests transitional funding of \$4.58 million per annum for a minimum of two years, with a deadline of 27 March 2020 for this funding to be confirmed.**

We ask that this include 11 months' funding to be provided up front from 1 May 2020. This would provide continuity for the program beyond 30 June, avoiding any disruption to day-to-day program delivery and participants' pathway journeys, while also enabling Brave to continue the existing SEPT Program for a full 1,000-day delivery cycle.

As of mid-February 2020, the trial has been running for just over 580 days. Funding Brave (at a minimum) to continue the trial for 1,000 days will better align the first SEPT Program cycle with the evidence-based First 1000 Days model and support more robust evaluation.

This funding could be drawn from:

- consolidated revenue

- collaboration between departments impacted by expecting and parenting teens: for example, between DSS and the departments of Employment, Education and Health.
- the Family and Social Services Portfolio, and/or
- the Employment Portfolio embedding the Brave SEPT Program as a bespoke voluntary program for expecting and parenting teens in the ParentsNext service offering.

An early intervention, pre-ParentsNext SEPT Program pathway would provide expecting and parenting teens with the opportunity to take practical steps towards education, training and employment and avoid the welfare trap. This would potentially minimise or eliminate the need for further cost and support from the federal ParentsNext program for this specific cohort.

### Recommendation 3: A cashflow structure that aligns with the expansion plan

The future funding model for the SEPT Program needs to be designed to fit the program's delivery needs. For example, where the program is being expanded into new states or regions, sufficient funding needs to be provided upfront to enable the smooth rollout of those new operations.

As outlined on page 56, one of Brave's key learnings from the Try Test and Learn trial has been the need to alter the funding model from that of a traditional grant to providing a grant that factors in both growth capital (to cover establishment costs in communities) and business-as-usual (BAU) funding to cover normal operating expenditures.

Brave would welcome the opportunity to work with the funding provider to develop a new funding model that aligns the timing of cash flows with the program's expansion requirements as well as meeting the requirements of normal operating expenditures. Ideally, this would result in growth capital being provided at the start of each expansion phase, and BAU funding being provided at the start of each quarter and paid on a quarterly basis.

This new funding approach would give Brave the capacity to expedite the program's expansion into new communities while minimising the impact on existing program delivery.

### Recommendation 4: Jointly exploring alternative funding models

Brave Foundation wishes to work with the Australian Government and other key stakeholders to explore alternative outcome-focused funding models, for example, the licensing model currently being trialled by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

We will also provide a *SEPT Social Impact Recommendations* report to the Government in October 2021, prior to transitional funding ceasing.

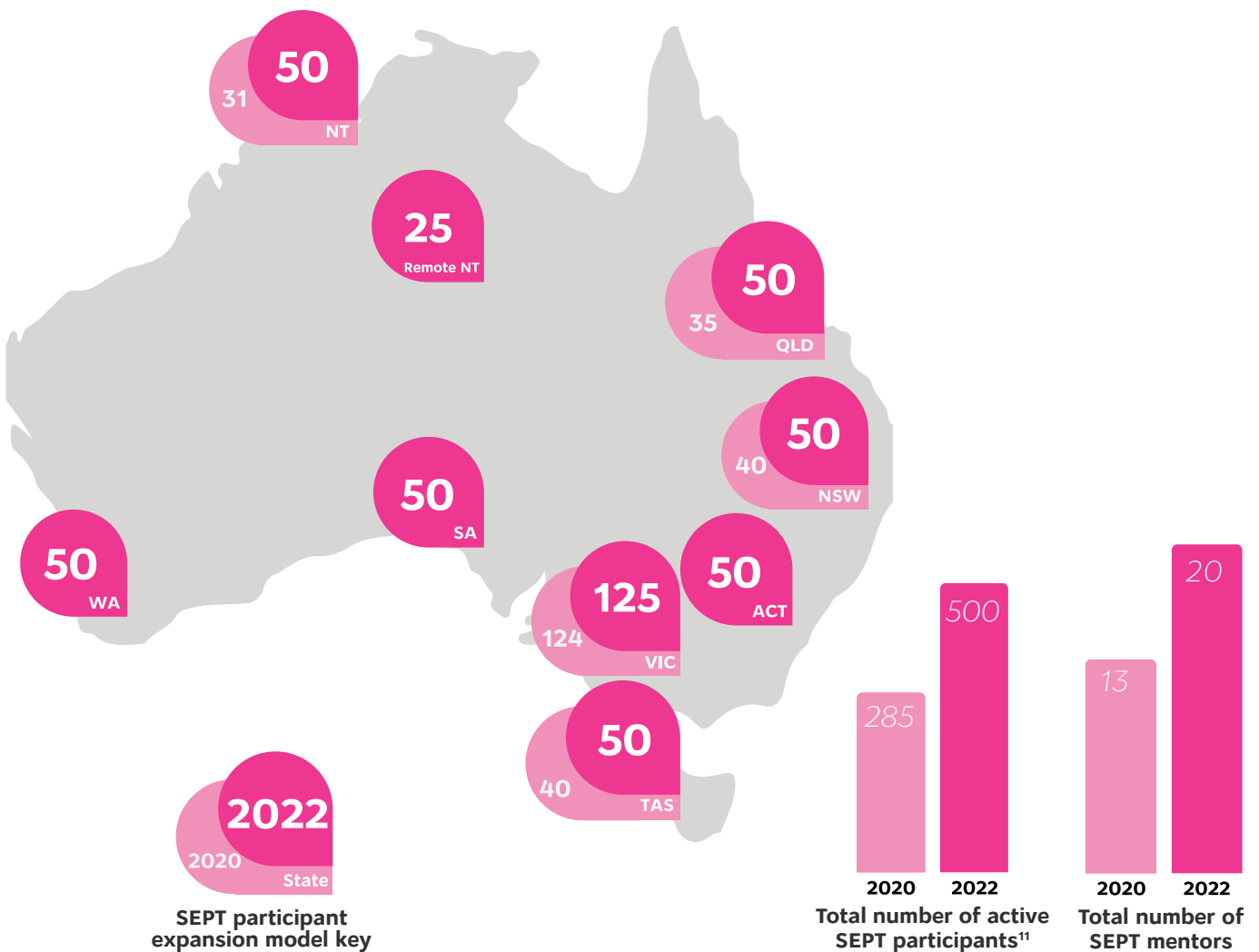
### Recommendation 5: Establishing a sustainable funding model

Brave Foundation asks that the federal Minister for Families and Social Services agrees to confirm the timing and integration of a sustainable funding model for the SEPT Program, once the *SEPT Social Impact Recommendations* report has been considered, subject to the resulting decisions.

### Recommendation 6: Long-term commitment

Subject to the above deliberations, Brave Foundation will continue delivering the SEPT Program, as the preferred provider, through sustainable funding structures from July 2022, in partnership with the Australian Government and local communities.

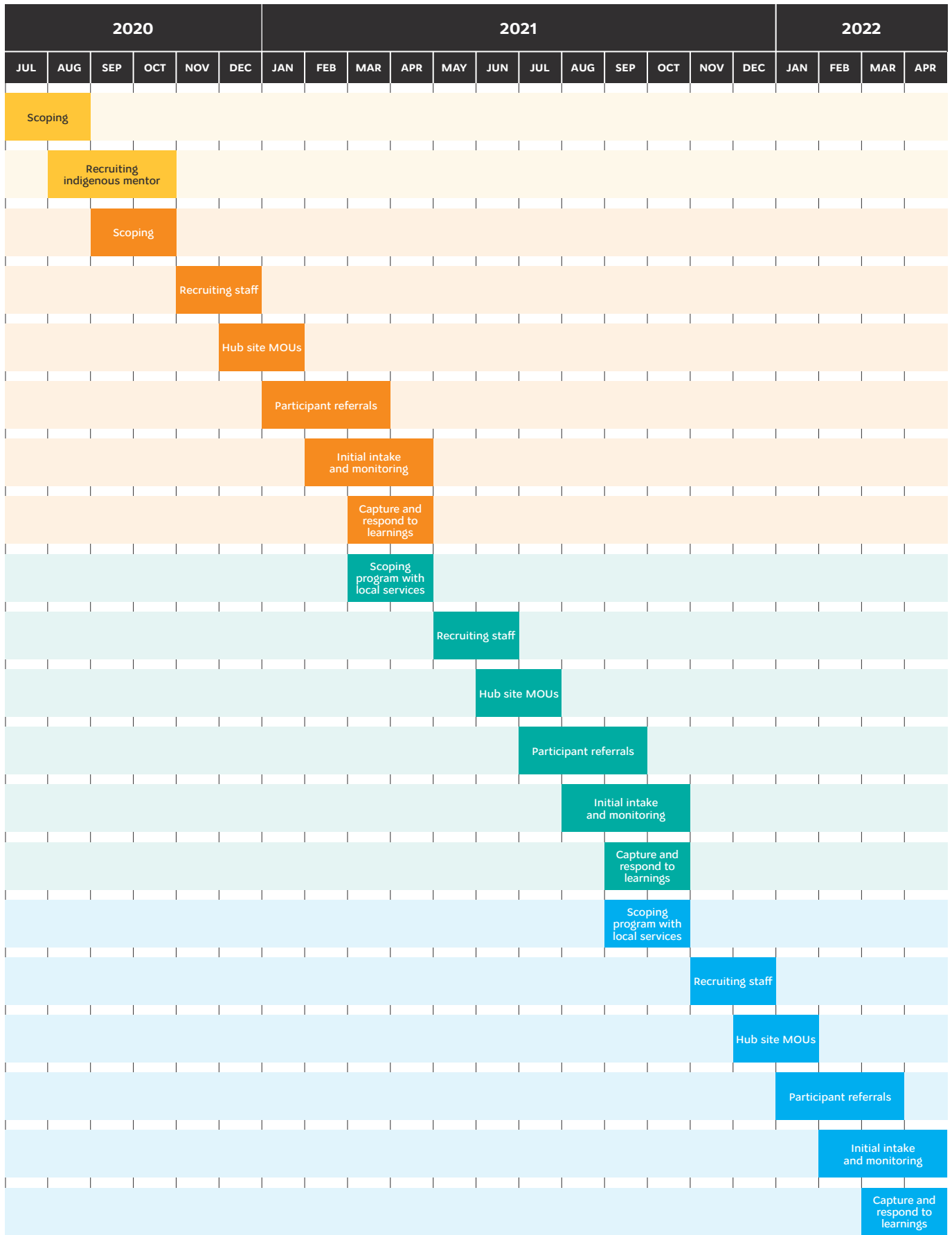
**Figure 8: Brave-SEPT Program: Proposed service capacity increases for 2020–2022**



<sup>10</sup> Based on internal Brave Foundation calculations for delivering the program to between 400 (\$10,557 per person) and 500 (\$9,871 per person) active SEPT Program participants during the first two years (2020–22) of the proposed forward plan.

<sup>11</sup> The 2020 figure of 285 is based on 270 active program participants as at 26 November 2019 plus the 15 participants who had already graduated at that point in time.

**Figure 9: Timeline for transitioning to an expanded national SEPT Program**



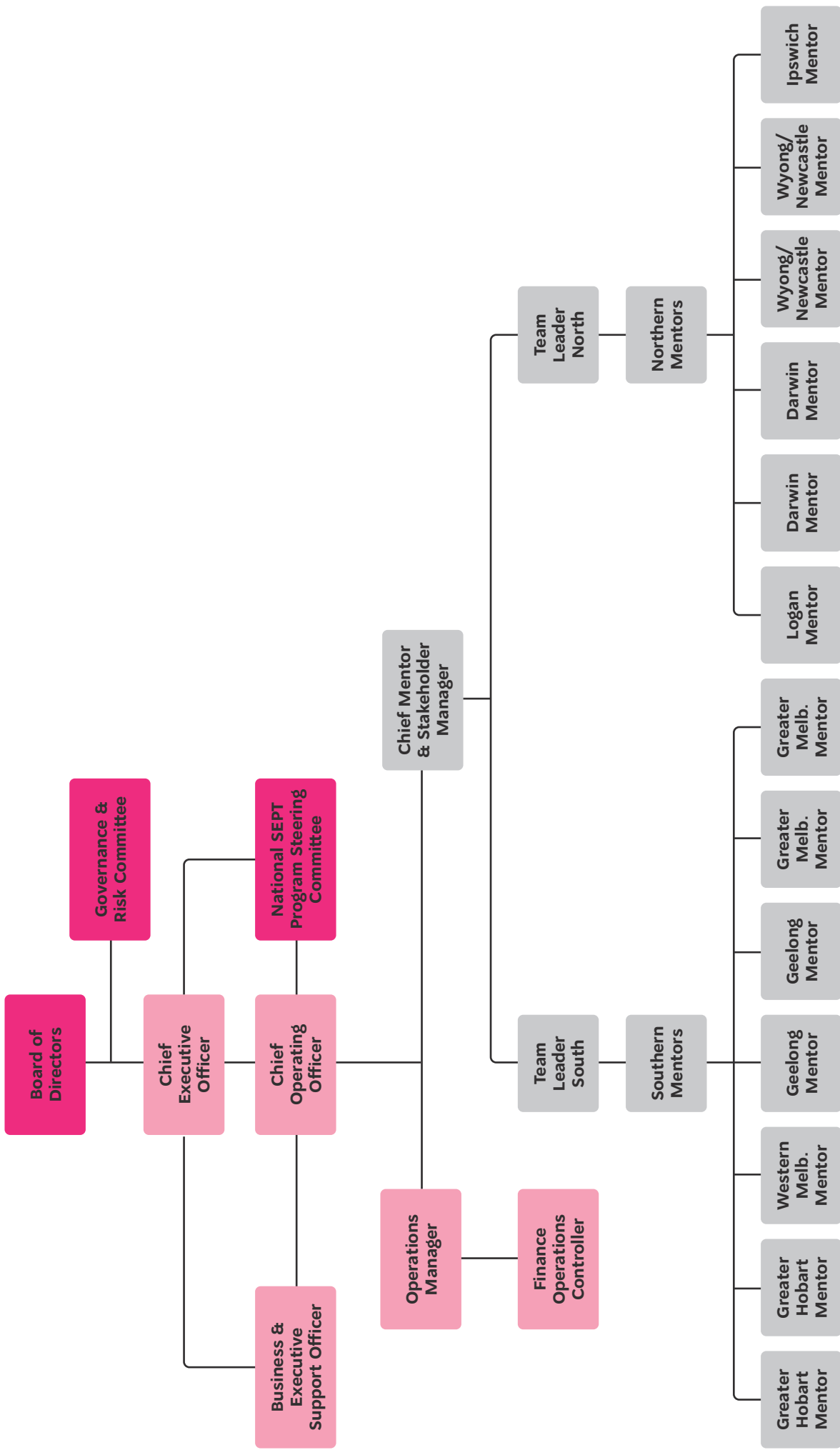
■ NT   ■ SA   ■ WA   ■ ACT





Appendix A:

# Brave organisation structure 2018 – 2020







---

**“I wish that every young parent out there could have the same opportunities I’ve been given through this program.**

**It should be mandatory.”**

**Ashley, 19, Brave SEPT Program participant**





## Contact

Brave Foundation  
[bravefoundation.org.au](http://bravefoundation.org.au)

[info@bravefoundation.org.au](mailto:info@bravefoundation.org.au)  
0448 088 380

PO Box 14, South Hobart,  
Tasmania, 7004

