



A photograph of a man with long dark hair and a camouflage baseball cap holding a baby. He is wearing a dark hoodie with a large white 'D' on it. To his right, a woman with blonde hair stands looking off to the side; she is wearing a black puffer jacket over a white top and black leather pants. The background is a lush green forest.

IMPACT REPORT 2023

BRAVE FOUNDATION



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Cultural Acknowledgment

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

Brave's work also brings us into contact with people from diverse communities. Brave is committed to respecting the sexuality, gender, culture and heritage of each person we encounter, inside and outside our organisation.

ABOUT BRAVE

Brave Foundation is an Australian not-for-profit organisation that equips expecting and parenting young people with resources, referral and education opportunities to facilitate happy, healthy and skilled families over time.

Vision

We want to see future generations thrive

Mission

Collaboratively building a village of support, by creating a network of meaningful connections to ideas, people, services and resources

Purpose

To unlock the boundless potential of young parents

Our Values



INSPIRE

We want to see future generations thrive



INNOVATE

We champion and resource individual potential



CONNECT

We establish and strengthen collaborative relationships



INCLUDE

We embrace diversity and combat prejudice



EMPOWER

We will find and make a way



KIARA

In Her Own Words

When I entered the Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) program with Brave, the situation I was in was unsafe and unstable and had me feeling at a loss. I was 23 years old, I had an 8-year-old and another on the way, I was scared and felt like I had lost hope.



I believe my Brave mentors changed my life. I was experiencing homelessness & depression, I had no car & no belief that I was going to be able to achieve a nice life for my kids, let alone achieve any goals for myself.

My Brave mentors went above and beyond, they sourced information for housing programs and supported me in contacting them, right through until I had stable housing. They helped me source clothes for myself and my children and linked me with services that could help with furniture. They helped me get back on my feet by linking me with support programs to help my mental health and parenting programs to help me be the best mum I can be. They empowered me constantly, believed in me, and supported me. They were so patient with me in my journey of self-discovery.

They helped me get to a stable enough place in life to figure out what goals I had for my life. I have had an interest in Community Services since I was 13 years old. I have attempted to do my Community Services Cert III four times throughout my life, each time being unsuccessful, with not enough support or simply not believing I can do it. They allowed me to see that I could be and do anything, even as a young parent. They got me into my dream course, Community Services Cert III, helped me with the means to study at home, and have supported, motivated, and checked in with me since the start.



I now have stable, permanent accommodation for my children, I have a car and everything we need to live, that sounds like a necessity for some, but that's something I am so proud to have. I have sound mental health with regular ongoing support. I am so proud to say I am a week away from completing the first semester of my course and organising work placement.



I have so much belief in myself, I know that I can do anything, & I know that I am providing an amazing life for my children. I am going to raise strong independent girls, & I will role model that for the rest of their lives. Every aspect of my life from when I started with Brave, has changed for the better.

After completing my Community Services Cert III, I hope to do my Community Services Cert IV, and the amazing thing is, I know I can do it.



2023 AT A GLANCE

Participant Snapshot



415 young parents involved in SEPT

170
participants graduated or closed

245
currently in SEPT

95%
female participants

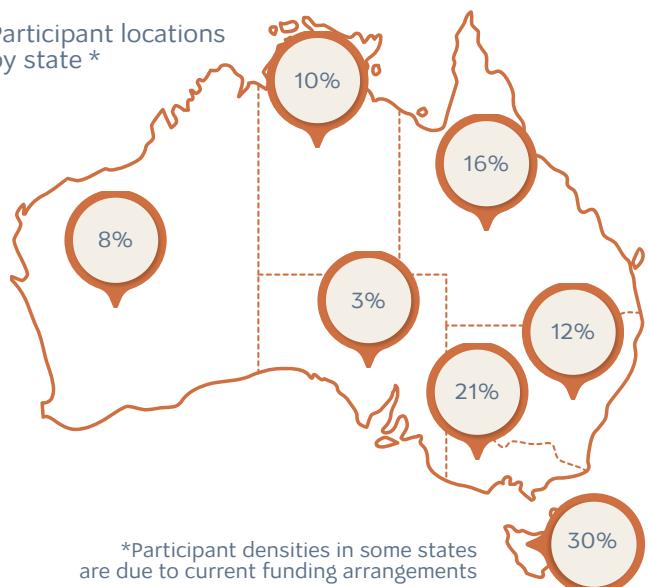
32.5%
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander participants

141
pregnant on referral

548
children (151 unborn)

55%
aged 19 or younger

Participant locations by state *



Before Brave no-one ever asked me what I wanted. Meeting one-to-one & being asked what I needed, I almost cried. She saw me as a person, not just as a parent.



32%
live rural or remote



52%
have housing insecurity concerns



22%
are affected by family violence



61%
have known mental health concerns

Since 2018, Brave has supported
over 1,400

expecting & parenting young people

79

participants involved in the SEPT Digital Delivery Pilot



Program Outcomes

92%

said SEPT motivated them in their life & parenting

73%

felt less stressed because of the program

98.5%

said their mentor was genuinely interested in them & their children

95%

said their mentors met or exceeded expectations in helping them build relationships with other families & friends

96%

felt comfortable talking to their mentor

82%



graduated from SEPT

3.19

average goals achieved

75%

achieved at least one goal

49%

enrolled in education/ training

35%

gained employment

100%

of participants would recommend SEPT to other young parents

Making progress in three or more family or personal wellbeing outcomes

83%

parents-to-be

89%

parents

Participants set at least one goal related to...

Education or training

Housing

Life skills

Parenting

Employment

Health & wellbeing

Financial Stability

0% 20% 40% 60% 80%



The benefits my baby has, is her mum is healthy & happy. I'm able to navigate what she needs, help redirect her if she needs it. I'm able to also think what I need in moments to help react calmly in what sometimes can be overwhelming situations.



CEO'S MESSAGE

This past year has been a time of extraordinary growth within Brave and among the incredible group of young parents who participated in our program across the country.

We have had the opportunity to see participants achieve so many of the goals that they have set for themselves. Each working intentionally on building their confidence as parents, while at the same time working on life matters like establishing a safe home, completing school, undertaking training, commencing work, and connecting with local community groups.

Their commitment is remarkable.

Our ability to develop and mature as an organisation is directly linked to our focus on elevating the voices of young parents with lived experience, and their generosity in choosing to share those experiences with us. Our progress is also only made possible by the relationships we have with many aligned organisations and by the support we have received from government, philanthropic partners and our Board of volunteer Directors who oversee the governance of Brave.

As you will have the opportunity to read in our Impact Report, we have worked hard over the course of 2023 to innovate many aspects of our work and to deepen the quality of our program. We have introduced new systems and frameworks and generated data and insights that help us to understand the impact of our work. All these enhancements are laying important foundations to support us in achieving our aspiration of becoming a Centre for Excellence in working with young parents.

Our team of mentors and their team leaders have contributed extensively to the design and implementation of a staggering number of continuous improvement projects, while focusing on their core job of mentoring young parents. Our program support staff have been working collaboratively and diligently to ensure that each innovation has an evidence base and is designed and implemented with direct contribution from our employees, partners, funders, and young parents.

The scale and pace of change over this last year has been both exciting and challenging, but that is nothing new for Brave. We are an organisation that was founded, designed, and is led by a village of individuals with shared lived experience of young parenthood. We are motivated by our mutual commitment to unlocking the boundless potential of young parents, so that future generations may thrive!

Jill Roche

CEO



ACHIEVEMENTS

Enhance & Deliver Core Program

- Introduced a Central Intake Panel
- Renewed Directory of Services as part of website redevelopment
- Introduced Outcome Star tool
- Designed SEPT Theory of Change
- Awarded Outstanding Work with Regional Young People at NSW Youth Work Awards

- Implemented new Client Management System
- Completed Social Return on Investment evaluation
- Started journey to becoming Centre for Excellence
- Established Measurement, Evaluation & Learning Framework
- Established internal Continuous Improvement Working Group
- Commenced independent evaluation with University of Tasmania, Peter Underwood Centre
- Designed & implemented Model of Participation

Generate Evidence & Ensure Sustainability

Develop & Deepen Funding & Delivery Partnerships

- Meetings held with Australian & state government representatives
- Philanthropic funding secured for development of Young Dads program
- Maintained network of over 130 delivery partners
- Secured new funding partners

- Appeared at Parliamentary Inquiry into ParentsNext
- Five submissions made on behalf of young parents to Australian & state government inquiries
- Supported DEWR to consult young parents for redesign of ParentsNext

Systemic Advocacy



Becoming a Centre for Excellence

Brave has started a journey toward becoming a Centre for Excellence and is growing in recognition as an authoritative leader in working with expecting and parenting young people. The purpose is to:

- Make a difference in the lives of the expecting and parenting young people and their children through best practice approaches based on evidence.
- Be sustainable as an organisation.
- Contribute to the evidence base and sector (community, health and education) knowledge about 'what is needed, by who, what works, and in what circumstances' in supporting expecting and parenting young people.
- Influence government policy and budget decisions regarding young parents to better respond to the needs of those with lived experience.

To achieve these aims, Brave's initial focus throughout the year was to review and upgrade the existing infrastructure, to grow the evidence base and to use this evidence in decision-making and the delivery of high-quality services to young parents and their families.



My mentor is amazing... she is a huge support. I'd have lost my marbles without her. She helped me put a plan in place... motivated me to feel I can accomplish a lot... she helped refer me to places that can help me with things.

Conference Attendance

Brave attended and presented at the following conferences and events in 2023:

- Australian College of Midwives National Conference
- Australian Young Pregnant & Parenting Network Symposium
- National Employment Services Australia Conference
- Outcomes Practice & Evidence Network Symposium
- Youth Affairs Council Victoria Rural Youth Sector Conference
- Western Australian Council of Social Service Women in Focus webinar series

Employee Engagement Survey

Brave staff shared their thoughts and feelings about working at Brave and the results were a positive reflection of staff engagement.

100% I know what I need to do to be successful in my role

96% Brave allows us to make a positive difference

75% Overall engagement at Brave

Media Coverage

Media coverage profiled Brave in local, state and national media outlets and industry publications in 2023:

- The Guardian Australia
- The Mercury (Hobart)
- Philanthropy Australia
- Newcastle Weekly
- Central Coast News
- The National Tribune
- Ipswich News Today
- Tasmanian Times
- Newcastle Herald
- The Educator Australia
- Riverine Herald

Awarded Outstanding Work with Regional Young People at the NSW Youth Work Awards



Below:
CEO Jill Roche with Newcastle mentor Danni at the NSW Youth Work Awards

CECILIA'S STORY

Cecilia* was 18, attending an all-girls' high school and in a relationship with her boyfriend of seven months when she discovered she was pregnant. Her family was concerned about her ability to manage parenthood due to her and her partner's ongoing mental health concerns. This added to the anxiety she was feeling about completing high school while visibly pregnant.

Cecilia heard of Brave from her partner's mother. Because of her rural location, she was connected to a Brave mentor in the Digital Delivery team. Her mentor's positive approach and excitement during their first conversation helped her feel validated and less alone.

When she said congratulations, I remember getting a bit emotional 'cause it had been, like, really tough in my life... She was the first person, other than my partner, to be like properly excited and happy and, like, this is OK, like you can do this and like this is how we are gonna deal with it... It helped me get into a good mindset about it, 'cause it can feel quite overwhelming.

Together, they developed a Pathway Plan focusing on goals for financial stability, independent housing, completing high school, maintaining positive mental health and preparing for her child's arrival.

Breaking it down, like I mean, like we have these big goals... And yeah, actually, the conversation became, like, how can we actually get there... OK so you know what practical steps to do today, tomorrow, the next day... that makes that possible for myself.



*Not real name or image

Her mentor both advocated for Cecilia and supported her to advocate for herself. For example, she lost her job after a short-term mental health crisis and her mentor supported to learn how to lodge her concerns with the Fair Work Commission. She also provided valuable informational support in that and other areas.

 I felt like this stuff with like with my online school, for example, 'cause that was such a difficult thing to sort out. It was just awful and I felt like I was always, like it was never going anywhere. And I was just getting really frustrated and she was just really good at kind of backing me and supporting me. Like she would call them, or she would do research into things... And just feeling like I had support with practical stuff that I don't really talk about to other people. Yeah it was really, really helpful.

Cecilia saw her mentor as a critical support during her transition to parenthood.

 [Mentor] was one of the first people I messaged when my daughter was born... I think just 'cause she'd been on the journey with me the entire time... I felt like we planned and worked together to get to this awesome point and because of that, it was possible to be in a really good spot when I did give birth, you know what I mean? And so it felt like an achievement for both of us.

Despite significant hurdles, Cecilia accomplished all her goals. She finished school, secured a rental property, continued to work on her mental health and self-care, got a part time job and was managing the family's budget. She attributes her significant personal growth to the support she received through Brave.

 I think it really gave me confidence that, like, I can manage my life. I can, I can do what I want, I can build a life that I'm proud of, and this kind of gave me that, like dignity almost back, you know?

The sense of confidence and agency she gained through mentoring also "really helped them [her parents] to feel less anxious about everything" and helped her provide a secure and stable life for her daughter.

Cecilia recognises she will continue to face challenges in life but participating in SEPT has enabled her to build resilience, which she feels will be sustained.

 I've grown up a lot, because of getting pregnant so young. And I think it has only been that way because of [Mentor]... I still have like struggles and like challenges or it's just kind of life, yeah. But I think it put me in a really good position now that I'm able to deal with things that might be difficult that come up.





CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Brave's Continuous Improvement and Practice Governance Framework provides the principles, organisational structures, and systems that support achievement of best outcomes for participants and continuous improvement objectives for the organisation. The year has seen much progress in this space, including:

- Established Continuous Improvement Working Group and annual workplans.
- Developed Measurement, Evaluation and Learning Framework and Theory of Change.
- Introduced three validated measurement tools (baseline assessment of participant empowerment, Outcomes Stars, and Session Rating Scales).
- Developed a Model of Participation and re-established the youth advisory group.
- Reviewed the Model of Mentoring and commenced design of a new Mentor Handbook.
- Engaged a young Aboriginal Advisor (with lived experience of young parenthood) in the Darwin program.
- Introduced a 'Welcome Pack' and 'Graduation Pack' for participants.
- Introduced a Central Intake Panel.
- Implemented a new client management system.
- Designed a Practice Framework to better support practice.
- Reviewed a Supervision and Support Model for mentors.

Measurement. Evaluation & Learning

Brave is at a foundational stage of embedding an evaluation culture and in 2023 significant steps were taken in this space. Brave developed the Measurement, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MEL), Theory of Change, and introduced three validated measurement tools to capture and report on a higher quality data. The MEL provides the organisation with a set of principles and processes for the systematic collection and dissemination of insights and key learnings. Importantly, the SEPT Program Theory is a living theory that will continue to evolve alongside program development as new evidence insights are generated.

PARTICIPATION & AMPLIFYING VOICES



Model of Participation

A Model of Participation has been developed to ensure the direct, ethical involvement of young parent participants in organisational decision-making. The model details a platform for establishing a contemporary, evidence-based, appropriate system for embedding the voice of lived experience of young parents. It recognises that a system is required to prioritise and actively empower young people who have been involved in Brave's services to have their voices heard and inform improvement in the design and delivery of services and programs. A whole of organisation approach has been implemented, with leadership providing the environment for learning and innovation. The organisation provides young parents with opportunities to participate in the youth advisory group, document review, continuous improvement, and media.

I'm so glad I got told about Brave at the hospital & I said yes.

Advisory Group

In the establishment of the advisory group, Brave received 12 expressions of interest from SEPT graduates which resulted in the onboarding of eight active advisory members.

The group has met monthly since July and activities have included:

- Collaborative development of a group agreement.
- Member input on an effective meeting structure and processes, including member co-facilitation.
- Creating a new name for the group that reflects their shared identity and purpose
- Empowering the Voices of Young Parents (EVYP) Advisory.
- Review and recommendations for the new SEPT participant Welcome Pack.
- Participation in external consultation opportunities to advocate for the needs and interests of young parents.
- Creation of promotional materials for Brave that include their personal journeys.
- Nomination of three strategic projects for 2024 that have been approved by Brave's Continuous Improvement Working Group.

Early Years Summit

Young parent and SEPT participant, Ella, travelled to Canberra in February for the first national Early Years Summit. The focus of the summit was to ensure that children and families are at the centre of policy making. As such, Ella was invited by Australian National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollands to share her experience as a young parent during a session, so she stood and addressed the plenary from the floor. She was supported at the summit by her mentor Danni and CEO Jill Roche.



Above:
Young parent Ella with her mentor
Danni at the Early Years Summit



I got the opportunity to go to the Early Years Summit. It was really cool that Canberra wanted to know the insights of young parents.

Ella

Consultations

As an organisation founded, designed and led by a village of individuals who share the lived experience of young parenthood, this perspective is centred in all Brave does. These voices help guide and inform the work in the development of key frameworks and documents, and in continuous improvement work planning.

Brave conducted a number of consultation workshops and interviews with young parents, Brave mentors, and other key stakeholders in 2023, hearing from more than 100 people.

Consultations completed in 2023



12
focus groups
with young
parents



5
1:1 interviews
with mentors



12
1:1 interviews
with young
parents



10
interviews
with partners

ParentsNext

Brave was actively involved in the Australian Government's consultation process for the development of a new voluntary government service to support parents with young children that will replace ParentsNext.

Brave made a submission to the parliamentary inquiry in late 2022 and CEO Jill Roche appeared at a public hearing in January. In the following months, Brave organised a number of focus groups to provide a platform for young parents to share their experiences, feedback and ideas on what the new service should look like and what would be helpful for other young parents.



[Mentor] advocated for me & provided modelling that meant I grew confidence & the ability to speak up for myself & advocate for myself & my daughter. I don't like having challenging conversations with other people but I can now, because of my mentor. I can use my voice & it has helped me put in good boundaries for my daughter. I think self-advocacy is a really important skill, especially as a mother - it's important to model it.



INNOVATION

Digital Delivery Pilot Evaluation

An evaluation of the SEPT Digital Delivery Pilot is underway and involved interviews with participants and staff, and analysis of survey results from the beginning of the program and at exit.

Preliminary results highlighted the transformative impacts the Virtual Mentors have on many young parents' lives due to the flexible, holistic and relational support they can offer participants over at least a 12-month period. This is despite additional challenges for engaging young people via technology. There are promising trends for outcomes relating to personal growth, parenting and family structure, or community influence for participants receiving support through digital program delivery.



I was overwhelmed. Just thinking about being a single mum. It was amazing just to have someone outside my family to support me... knowing she was there to support me & help me with the change to be a single mum, it was just so helpful... & just someone who is accepting of who you are.

Peer-to-Peer Mentor Pilot

An evaluability assessment of the Peer-to-Peer Mentor pilot is currently underway. The assessment includes a review of program documents and interviews with participants and staff.

The preliminary findings suggest further design and development is required prior to re-testing and evaluating the model. However, there is clear value in offering young parents an opportunity to obtain support from peers with similar lived experience after participating in SEPT. In particular, young parents find value in being connected with more experienced peers who can genuinely relate to them, not just as young parents but as past participants of SEPT. Decisions about the most effective avenues for offering peer support within Brave's service delivery will be made in consultation with the Continuous Improvement Working Group and EVYP advisory members after the conclusion of the evaluability assessment.



I believe in myself more...I have [mentor]'s voice in the back of my head saying, 'you can do this... & it's ok to have bad days, but just remember you are a good mum.'

Young Dads Program

The majority of participants in the SEPT program are young mums but increasingly there has been growing interest from young dads. To date, Brave has been able to adapt the current program for any young dads; however, experience and feedback from participants indicates that in order to support successful outcomes for fathers more rigorous research into an evidence-based gender-specific approach is required.

In 2023, Brave was successful in securing multiple philanthropic grants to research, design and pilot a dedicated young dads pilot program in Newcastle and Victoria in 2024.





NINA'S STORY

Nina* was referred to the SEPT program by a midwifery centre when she was 19 and her daughter had just been born. She was initially reluctant to participate due to struggles with social anxiety.

“...at the start, I was very overwhelmed by it, just because with new things, I’m very unsure of trying new things and opening up to people like that.”

Her mentor's persistent check-ins gave Nina an opportunity to get to know her mentor over the phone. Her calm and open nature helped Nina feel comfortable and created a safe space for her to open up, despite her anxiety. Until that point, Nina had been isolating herself at home, but meeting with her mentor got her out of the house.

“It was reassuring, and it just helped me get out and... after you'd see how you'd feel so much better because you actually just got out and achieved something for the day.”

Having a mentor gave her the opportunity to talk about her feelings and use her as a sounding board and she benefitted from the resources her mentor provided her.

“The catch ups we had... and just talking about things... she would help me see the more positive side of things rather than the negatives... so I think that really helps. She gave me resources for counselling and things like that...she's always great with resources... always. If I have a question, she'll send a link straight through.”

Her mentor also went beyond just sharing information and provided practical support by walking alongside Nina as she took some daunting first steps.

“If there was counselling I wanted to do, she'd offer to go with me to the session and take my daughter for me, sit with her whilst we did the session. Um, she was always supportive, just always and always tried to help where she could.”

Nina wanted to complete a Community Services Cert III and, as her mentor had a background in Youth Work, it was a shared interest and point of connection along with her mentor's belief in her.

“She told me I could do it... She believed in me... She very much believed in me... and I think that's really important because, even though I had the family support... it's different having someone that doesn't know your life come in and help you.”

Nina and her mentor worked together on her pathway plan and this goal-focused collaboration helped Nina achieve the goals she set for herself. Her goals included completing her Community Services Cert III, returning to work, engaging her daughter in a playgroup and enrolling her in a daycare, identifying and engaging with a hobby, engaging with a counsellor, and purchasing her own home.

 It was helpful, because I feel like as a young parent... it's really hard to figure out what you want to do... So it's nice to be able to sit down with someone and have realistic goals written down and someone helping you achieve them. Towards the end of the program, I actually completed all my goals... She [mentor] was my number one supporter.

Nina has now completed the SEPT program, having achieved her goals, including purchasing a house for her family, which was an important dream for her. She had been working as a commercial cleaner, but she has recently started on a new employment pathway as a Support Worker.

Although Nina was sad her formal participation in SEPT has ended, she has joined a walking group her mentor has set up with another group of young mum's and Nina benefits from getting out in the fresh air to connect with others. She generally feels more capable and is an advocate for Brave, recommending the program to other friends who have become pregnant.



*Not real name or image

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lived Experience

Brave acknowledges and appreciates the courage and contribution of people with lived experience of young parenthood, their supporters and mentors who work with them.

Funders

- Federal Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet (Office for Women)
- Tasmanian Department of Premier & Cabinet
- Paul Ramsay Foundation
- RM Ansett Trust (managed by Equity Trustees)
- Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation
- Shine On Foundation
- Other philanthropic foundations

Partners

- Caroline Chisholm Society (Vic)
- Dale Young Parents School, St Philip's Christian College (NSW)
- Darrandirra Child & Family Centre (NT)
- Palmerston Child & Family Centre (NT)
- Young Families Connect (Qld)
- Family Learning, Northern Adelaide Senior College (SA)
- Hobart City Mission Small Steps (Tas)
- North West First 1000 Days, Burnie Works (Tas)
- NEST Program, Anglicare Support Youth
- Enhanced Maternal & Child Health Service (Vic)
- King Edward Memorial Hospital (WA)
- Baby Sleep School (National)







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