

## Review of Financial Wellbeing & Capability programs

### Submission to Department of Social Services

#### Executive summary:

Brave Foundation (Brave) provided feedback to the Australian Government Department of Social Services in its review of the Financial Wellbeing and Capability (FWC) programs in January 2024. FWC programs include services such as emergency relief, food relief, Commonwealth financial counselling and financial capability and financial resilience programs. As participants in Brave's Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) program often access and utilise these services it was an important consultation for Brave to engage in. Brave hopes its engagement and feedback will lead to significant changes and improvements which will support more seamless interactions for expecting and parenting young people and these services.

Below are Brave's responses to relevant survey questions provided to the Department of Social Services.

#### What do you consider is an effective Financial Wellbeing and Capability early intervention approach for a person at risk of financial stress and hardship?

Brave works with young people (14-25 years) with low financial literacy and who often start their financial journey navigating Centrelink as a new parent. They find it challenging to work out their entitlements and what documents they are required (including applying for their own identification documents). Online platforms that require a personal mobile device can also be very challenging as often a phone is shared, or credit is provided by someone else. Brave's experience has shown that navigating Centrelink is best facilitated with a social worker on site.

#### Things that Brave has found to work:

1:1 coaching with the client based on their own particular circumstances. Brave uses the Money Minded coaching approach through the Brotherhood of St Laurence which has been successful in transferring basic financial knowledge and skills to participants. It has also increased their confidence to manage their finances (self-reported).

CARE Financial Counselling for Debt management where this is needed. This is also in a 1:1 format with an expert to help to work through the problem and find a solution in a supportive manner.

#### Things that Brave has found that don't work:

Providing links to online forums and info sheets (regardless of how good they are); the forums are not attended, and info sheets not read. In 2021-22, Brave ran a series of virtual 'financial wellbeing' events which included a webinar and workshop for young parents. Participants were invited by their mentors and encouraged to attend. Brave offered these workshops three times and, on each occasion, only one or two participants opened the link however none completed the webinar or attended the workshops.

The Buy Now, Pay Later platforms such as Afterpay also impact young parents significantly. The threshold for approval is very low and it can lead to over commitments quickly. In these instances, Brave provides 1:1 advocacy, advice and coaching.

## **How can the sector and department better support organisations to provide wrap around services, and effective referral pathways for clients, particularly those with complex and multiple needs?**

In order for organisations to provide wrap around services and effective pathways, sufficient and consistent resourcing for roles is required to provide capacity for individuals within organisations to work collaboratively together and with others. Guidance, training and support is also required to apply appropriate information sharing processes. This would involve some legislative changes, but also cultural shifts away from service silo ways of working.

A major barrier to engagement with young parents and other vulnerable populations is having to talk to multiple services, multiple times and then not have the right information shared. Consider Victoria's Information Sharing Scheme to see how changes in this area have been implemented with positive outcomes, keeping women and children safer.

## **Do you have experience in working in place-based or shared decision-making models of service delivery? What are your reflections? Please provide examples.**

Part of our program is funded by the Tasmanian State government and as part of the funding agreement, Brave reports on how many other services it connected with and collaborated with (who also are funded by the Tasmanian State government). This leads to Brave actively seeking out and developing relationships with existing services and vice versa.

Brave now has experience working in both large and small placed-based services. Through invitation, Brave participates in large community led initiatives such as Burnie Works in North-west Tasmania. On a smaller scale, Brave staff are embedded in child and family learning centres in three locations in Tasmania.

An example of the positive outcomes of these relationships, is the referrals Brave can make for participants with specialist services. Brave refers directly into early intervention assessments through connections with health staff also working in these centres (participants don't need a GP appointment or wait until the child is at pre-school and screened). The centres prioritise young and socially isolated parents and Brave supports the attending of these appointments in a pro-active way. These relationships result in real support and change for a hard-to-reach population.

When spaces liked this are shared and services are not competing for resources, but encouraged to work together, solutions can be authorised quickly, and services delivered efficiently and effectively.

