

2015 PLAY YOUR PART AWARDS FOR INSPIRING PREVENTION INITIATIVES SOUTH AUSTRALIA

To: Boystown SA

For: Penrose Young Parents Program

The Penrose Young Parents Program helps young families to grow well together. The program supports young parents and women aged from 14 - 25 in their third trimester of pregnancy and their infant or toddler children.

Penrose offers informal family activities, case work support, group work and workshops alongside dedicated child development programs, operating from a suburban house, which is not threatening or clinical in nature. The 'home like' setting allows young families to interact in social, life skills and workshop programs that accommodate all aspects of being a young parent and responding to young children safely.

Examples of support include assisting anxious young fathers and mothers to learn how to hold and bathe their newborn infants; building confidence in all aspects of newborn care; encouraging ongoing education and training of young parents, including literacy development; and focussing on the language and literacy development of young children as well as social skill development outside the program into the community.

The program started in recognition of the isolation and stigma many young parents and soon-to-be parents experienced in the community. This isolation was made apparent when young parents participating in education and training programs often ceased attending or attended irregularly.

According to Elisabeth Kobierski, National Manager, BoysTown, family supports are often limited and young people who had disrupted schooling are often not well informed about health and relationships, relying on themselves as they are reluctant to access mainstream health services.

Providing social and peer connectedness for often stigmatized and isolated young parents also reduces the isolation of their children. Additionally, the program team offers outreach support through home and community based activities to encourage access to other facilities, including the library, playgroups and child care.

The program encourages the role young fathers can positively take within families, either as sole parents or with their partners, which has seen an increased number of young fathers attending with their children.

The program grew from two day a week information sessions with speakers such as nurses and agency representatives to become a full time service, to encourage engagement with available supports and build peer supports. Weekly sessions are established with the young families, reflecting common interests, issues and needs of the parents and children.

The program is an early intervention and prevention initiative which engages young people as parents alongside their young children, with workers at times being the only positive role models for the family.

The service, funded by BoysTown, is in Port Pirie, South Australia where the Nyrstar Lead Smelter is located. The program works with the Lead Abatement Program associated with the smelter to reduce the impacts of lead such as preparing young parents to support infants through improved nutrition and hygiene.

Young people from all family types and cultural groups are welcome to participate in the program to support the education of young parents creatively, with practical skills such as first aid at home (accredited training), nutrition, gardening, cooking and advocacy with health and other agencies.

This is an inspiring prevention initiative that is building the capacity of young parents to increase the safety and wellbeing of their children.