



Understanding Thrive's Service Provision from the Perspective and Experiences of Teen Parents

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2018, the Thrive Teen Parent Support Trust (Thrive) commissioned a small-scale independent evaluation of Thrive's service provision from the perspective and experiences of teen parents.

The fieldwork for the evaluation was carried out in August 2018. In total 25 people participated in a series of semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. These participants represented 24 teen parents and one grandparent of a teen parent who had been supported by Thrive.

Context to accessing support

Core challenges that teen parents experienced prior to accessing Thrive included homelessness, substandard housing, limited financial means, limited support, a lack of parenting knowledge, family violence, and the involvement of Oranga Tamariki. Challenges were perpetuated by stigmatisation and poor experiences with other agencies. These challenges caused stress, anxiety and depression.

Support provision

Participants described receiving extensive support from Thrive, targeted effectively to meet their needs. The support encompassed knowledge provision, facilitating understanding, help, advice, advocacy and a trusted place to go to talk, express and deal with feelings and emotions. Access to suitable housing was a significant need and support that Thrive has helped participants with, as was helping to effectively access benefits and engage with agencies such as Oranga Tamariki, Housing New Zealand and Work and Income New Zealand.

Highly valued service

Participants highly value and were extremely satisfied with Thrive's support. Key aspects to Thrive's approach were commonly identified across the interviews as central to the effectiveness of Thrive's service provision, and related to the accessibility, relevance, responsiveness, trusted, and empowering nature of Thrive's service. Unlike past experiences with other services, Thrive was highly valued for its reliability and consistency – "they always do what they say they will do".

Significant impact

Thrive's support has made a significant difference to the lives and experiences of teen parents. Tangible support to meet basic needs and to instil parenting knowledge has removed key barriers to teen's ability to parent and has contributed to improve wellbeing. For over one third of participants, Thrive's intervention has alleviated stress, anxiety, and depression. For parents whose parenting has come under the scrutiny of Oranga Tamariki, Thrive's support has taken them from a position of hopelessness and uncertainty to being informed, and active participants with a measure of control.

Positive outcomes

Common positive outcomes resulting from Thrive's involvement are confident parenting, improved wellbeing and living situations, self-belief and a positive outlook, maturity, confidence, and the independence teen parents have gained to stand on their own two feet.

Improvement suggestions

Suggestions for improvement were minimal and mostly related to greater provision of Thrive's service. Some of the teen dads suggested that there could be greater scope in the support available to teen dads.

Conclusion

In sum, Thrive is providing extensive support to teen parents who experience key challenges detrimentally impacting their wellbeing and who have lacked the support needed in such situations. Thrive's support has had a significant positive impact on the lives and wellbeing of the teen parents who participated in this evaluation and has supported and empowered them to be confident in their role as teen parents.



1. INTRODUCTION

Thrive Teen Parent Support Trust (Thrive) is an Auckland-based non-profit organisation, established in 2010. Thrive offers intensive case management to provide information, support and assistance for teen parents who are facing challenges that may include housing, finances, education, whānau family support, relationship breakdown, parenting, and involvement with Oranga Tamariki. Thrive facilitates a teen dads group, and offers koha (clothing, baby equipment, nappies, blankets) to teen parent whānau in need of help at no cost.

In June 2018, and through funding from the Vodafone Foundation, Thrive commissioned this small-scale independent evaluation of its service provision from the perspective and experiences of teen-parents to:

- *contribute to Thrive's understanding of the strengths of its delivery and effectiveness; and*
- *identify and inform any areas for future advocacy, improvement and development.*

2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology informed this evaluation reflecting that the focus was on understanding Thrive's service provision from the perspective and experiences of teen parents. Fieldwork was carried out over three days in August 2018 and involved 25 participants who have been supported by Thrive: 24 as teen parents, and one grandmother of a teen parent.

One-to-one interviews

The fieldwork involved semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews with 16 participants¹ over two and a half days. Participants either met with the evaluator at Thrive's office, or the evaluator met with them in their home. Where home visits were carried out, the evaluator was accompanied by a Thrive staff member who facilitated introductions. The interviews were 30 to 45 minutes in length and were audio recorded with participant's consent.

Focus group

A semi-structured focus group was facilitated with nine teen parents² at Thrive's office on 29 August 2018. The intervening break between completing most of the individual interviews and the focus group provided the opportunity to reflect on key themes that had emerged in preparation for group discussion. The focus group approach enabled experiences to be shared and explored in a group setting, and which reinforced key themes presenting.

¹ 14 female and two male.

² Five females and four males participated.

Key questions

Key question areas were the same for the individual interviews and focus group and explored:

- the main supports provided by Thrive and participant's overall experience of Thrive's support;
- how well Thrive had met participant's needs;
- the difference Thrive's support had made;
- outcomes of Thrive's support; and
- suggestions for Thrive to improve.

Collated results from four client surveys run by Thrive between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2018 also informed this report.

The participants

Of the 25 participants, 19 were female and six male. Teen parents ranged in age between 15 and 25 years, with a median age of 18 – the four parents no longer in their teens had been supported by Thrive as teen parents. Participants under 16 were either in the presence of their parent or participated with their parent's consent.

Most participants were Māori, Māori/European and Pasifika. Five participants identified as New Zealand European / New Zealander. Most currently had a child under one year of age. Participants either lived on their own, with family, or their partner.

Participants were selected and invited to participate by Thrive given the established relationships Thrive had with them. This is a potential limitation of the evaluation, though confidence in the findings is provided by the consistency of feedback received. Selection criteria included ensuring that both current and former clients of Thrive participated to enable experiences to be understood over time. Thrive recruited teen couples for the focus group to ensure the contribution of the voice of teen dads to the evaluation (and which resulted in the almost even mix of male and female participation in the focus group).

Analysis and reporting

Throughout the fieldwork information was defined and categorised through a continual review of interview and fieldwork notes analysed against the evaluation questions and for common recurring themes. Key themes that emerged were recorded and used as the basis for consideration in subsequent interviews and the focus group, and shared with Thrive, as the fieldwork progressed.

The interviews were rich with participants' expressions of their experiences therefore, quotes have been used extensively throughout this report to appropriately illustrate the key findings that emerged.



3. MAIN SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THRIVE

Participants indicated that they had been first introduced or referred to Thrive by either: Oranga Tamariki, Youth Horizons, Youthline, their doctor, Plunket, their friends or family.

Core challenges experienced

Core challenges experienced by participants prior to coming to Thrive included: living in temporary, substandard or overcrowded housing, homelessness, limited or no financial support, limited or no family support, no parenting knowledge, family violence, and dealing with the removal of a child by Oranga Tamariki.

Participants also reflected on the status of being a teen parent, and related that the stigma attached to this, perpetuated challenges, such as being turned down or overlooked for housing by landlords, and decisions being made about them but without their understanding or input.

Such challenges accord with those highlighted in literature summarised in the Waitemata District Health Board document “Review of services for teenage parents in the Waitemata DHB region” (undated, page 2)³ which states:

“According to Archibald (2004), pregnancy is not key issue but the accompanying social deprivation, such as lack of money, support structures, transport, life coping skills, “dropping out” of school and missing educational opportunities... Rawiri (2007) also emphasized that young Māori mothers and their children were often represented as negative. The stigmatization teenage parents face because of their age worsens their experiences, and ultimately, the outcomes for their children (Whitely and Kirkmayer, 2008).”

Extensive support from Thrive

The extent and range of support provided by Thrive reflects a service focused on meeting the holistic needs and wellbeing of its teen parents in order to support teens in their parenting and care of their children and to remove barriers to thrive.

“They implement things so teen parents have a foot to stand on, food, transport, moral support... This keeps you going a long way.”

Commonly participants talked about Thrive, and in particular, Thrive’s social worker, standing up and fighting for them, clearly explaining situations, identifying different options and the implications of these, and which empowered teen parents themselves to make their own informed decisions.

Participants recognised, and it was apparent from their shared experiences, that Thrive’s social worker works extensively to serve her clients.

³ Sourced from the Thrive website.

“Even if it’s midnight, [she] picks up that phone for me when I need to talk. She works at midnight, she works at weekends to support my family.”

“[She] has done a lot for a lot of people. She would work all hours to help. She’s done more than a superhero.”

She responds at all hours. She works weekends. She works hard to protect her clientele.”

This responsiveness is highly valued by the teen parents interviewed, as is the high standard of care and support that the social worker provides.

One participant expressed that Thrive treated their clients as family, or stood in the place of family to ensure that, in the absence of anybody else, there was somebody with the right knowledge, means and ability, to stand-up for and support teen parents and to work with them to be able to stand on their own two feet.

Participants commonly stated that Thrive had done so much for them and provided multiple supports to meet their different needs. The breadth of this extensive support was relayed across the interviews and included reference to the different support highlighted in the table below. The support described encompasses knowledge provision, facilitating understanding, help, advice, advocacy, and a trusted place to go to talk about, express and deal with feelings and emotions.

<i>Main support Thrive Provided</i>	<i>Teen’s comments</i>
Provision of necessities e.g. clothing and bedding for baby	<i>“Lots of support, [the social worker] has done so much: housing, food, support with everything, the kids. When I was pregnant and stressed she was always there to help with the baby stuff, clothing, nappies”</i>
Securing a home	<i>“I was living house-to-house when I was pregnant. I wasn’t stable. Thrive got me this house. It made such a difference”</i>
Accessing benefits from other agencies This included Thrive intervening where benefits had previously been declined, incorrect advice had been given, the teen lacked knowledge, or was intimidated or reluctant to approach agencies	<i>“A youth organisation had told me that I wasn’t eligible for a benefit until I was 21. This was so stressful at the time. After being supported [by Thrive] I found out I was eligible because I was over 16 and because of my situation”</i>

Main support Thrive Provided	Teen's comments
<p>Transporting and accompanying teen parents to appointments with agencies</p> <p>This included to Work and Income New Zealand, Housing New Zealand, Oranga Tamariki, and Family Group Conferences</p>	<p><i>"They come to all meetings involving different organisations. Really helpful as there's always different people and its confusing, plans are always changing"</i></p>
<p>Teen parenting courses, one-to-one parenting advice and support, parenting pamphlets and resources</p> <p>Teens learnt about parenting and caring for a baby and tools to support their parenting. Learning with other teens supported sharing of like-experiences and social connections to be made</p>	<p><i>"I had no idea. I learnt to understand my baby's cues. Gave me the tools to deal with the stresses and the tough times with a child"</i></p> <p><i>"My thinking techniques changed. I used to be really stressed out"</i></p>
<p>Placement in teen parenting units (residential and non-residential)</p> <p>This included parenting education with other teens and an appropriate and supportive place where secondary schooling could be completed</p>	<p><i>"[Thrive's social worker] has made wonders for me. Absolute wonders. I got my daughter uplifted from me. Within those three days [she] got me into a parenting unit which is very rare... usually a waiting list of six months"</i></p>
<p>Effectively guiding teen parents through serious situations in which they had no prior experience and didn't know what to do</p> <p>Supporting teen parents with knowledge of the law, their legal rights, options and actions available to them and the pros and cons of different options</p> <p>This included situations that could potentially have led to negative life-changing outcomes e.g. removal of a child, homelessness</p>	<p><i>"I had missed a couple of appointments for my baby at the hospital. CYF intervened indicating concerns of neglect. I had to go through a number of interviews. Without [Thrive], I wouldn't have been able to take it all in. It was so difficult to deal with. Very stressful. [They] held a mediation and helped me to write a letter explaining it was a miscommunication, and to provide personal letters of support. We had to go through all that but all it came down to was that I never received the appointments because they didn't have my updated number or address. They apologised"</i></p>

Main support Thrive Provided	Teen's comments
Supporting arrangements / relationships with whānau members, as well as supporting other whānau For example: supporting siblings who are teen parents, connecting grandparents to services, calming family upon hearing their teen is pregnant	<i>"Thrive helped me build a positive relationship with my ex as he is the father of my children and we need to keep that relationship going"</i> <i>"[The social worker] smoothed things with my mum who was shocked at my pregnancy, me being a teen"</i>
A trusted and reliable place to go to talk, unburden, problem-solve and seek solace	<i>"I feel comfortable talking to her when I'm in need and want to talk. I just text and she calls. She calms me down"</i> <i>"She's always there. Someone to go to when I need to talk, when I'm angry and sad that baby's gone"</i>

Housing a significant need

Accessing housing was a support that frequently emerged as a significant issue for teen parents, and which Thrive commonly assisted with. Examples of this need and support included:

- A landlord fixing a mouldy and damp home after Thrive stepped in and following the teen having been previously unable to get action from the landlord.
- Thrive supporting a teen mum to remain in the Housing New Zealand home where she had lived with her mother until she passed away, and despite prior advice that this was not necessarily a possibility.
- Sourcing emergency housing in the case of homelessness.
- Supporting teens living in overcrowded housing and to alleviate the associated stresses and tensions impacting on stability and parenting.

It is of note too that housing and accommodation featured as one of the top three issues for teen parents in each of four client surveys conducted by Thrive between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2018 and completed by 57 teen mums and dads.

Support to work with agencies a key need

Help with understanding, navigating and working within the requirements of government agencies such as Oranga Tamariki, Housing New Zealand, and Work and Income New Zealand, was also commonplace. Teens described feeling disadvantaged, disempowered, and lost in engaging in these processes themselves. Thrive's involvement supported teen parents to understand their rights and to access entitlements, why certain processes were happening, and what they could do to effectively respond to and engage with agency's requirements.

For example, one teen mum described the 'whole of whānau' approach Thrive took in supporting the father of her children to obtain contact with them after this had been prohibited. Thrive supported

the teen dad to enroll in all necessary courses and supported the parents to engage together in a family-based programme.

“It went from CYF saying no contact, to him being able to spend as much time as he likes with the kids. Best of all was the family programme as we could all go together as a family and we learnt a lot about how to do things with the kids.”

Highly responsive

Not uncommonly, there was an immediate or dire need for support and which was swiftly responded to by Thrive, for example:

- finding emergency housing in the case of homelessness;
- supporting a teen mum to access a benefit after she was made redundant and at-risk of losing housing with no money to pay for rent; and
- securing a place at a teen parenting unit for a teen whose child had been uplifted at birth and to immediately support her in the process of working to having the child returned.

Several participants reflected on past experiences of support from other agencies to describe the support provided by Thrive. In doing so, a clear picture emerged of important elements to Thrive’s approach that were highly valued by teen parents and identified as key to a service that responded exceptionally well to meet their needs. These are highlighted in the section below.

4. KEY ELEMENTS TO EFFECTIVE SERVICE PROVISION

Participants were extremely satisfied with and grateful for Thrive’s support. Through participant’s sharing of their experiences, common aspects of Thrive’s approach emerged as integral to the highly valued and effective service experienced. Thrive is experienced as:

- welcoming, non-judgemental and culturally appropriate;
- client centred and responsive to individual needs;
- knowledgeable, informative and empowering;
- honest and reliable – they do what they say they will do; and
- accessible, responsive, and quick to act.

Welcoming, non-judgemental and culturally appropriate

Participants described Thrive as providing a welcoming and non-judgemental environment and which encouraged participation and proactive engagement.

“You’re greeted. You’re not walking into a cold place. Already your soul is broken because you’re not being able to parent fully as a parent should. In any other case you’d walk into the building ‘oh another useless teen, another wairangi mother, another wairangi father.’ You never get that in Thrive. It’s ‘haere mai. There’s a cup of tea over there...’ They make your embarrassments their embarrassments. They actually foster the teen parents. Their whangai... They whangai’d us. Treated us like family. Thrive puts the clientele at the epicentre.”

Thrive is described as catering to all cultures and ethnicities, and very culturally sensitive, respectful and appropriate. This was seen through Thrive's multi-lingual social worker and her engagement with clients in reo Māori, Samoan, and Niuean, the body language, tone of voice, and smiling faces of staff, appropriate use of humour, and for example, the ability to start a meeting with karakia if this is what is wanted. Participants valued that no-one is treated as lesser or judged because of their ethnicity, background or circumstance.

Client centred and responsive to individual needs

Teen parents are made to feel that they are at the centre. Participants appreciated that Thrive understood and responded to individual needs.

“Before Thrive, the first social worker I had always wanted to do things their way. Thrive understands me more. [Thrive's social worker] asks what I want and then she contributes her ideas. We share ideas to get a better answer.”

“They always understand me which makes them different. That other place didn't listen to what I wanted.”

“They moulded the Thrive kaupapa around their clients. When the baby was uplifted, they didn't take a step back. They stepped right in... They stepped right in because I was lost. I didn't know what to do. What was our next move? How are we going to do this? What is this going to look like? Thrive removed all of the angst. They told me just to focus on the care of the baby and they'd take care of the rest. And by jingers they did.... They made mine and baby's togetherness really effortless.”

Knowledgeable, informative and empowering

Participants commonly talked about the way Thrive's social worker would explain and break down information in ways that they could easily understand. They felt safe and comfortable because they could see her wealth of knowledge and experience and valued that it was clear she understood their needs. They also valued that the social worker outlined different options and their implications and provided full information that empowered teen parents to make their own informed decisions, choices, and to take action. Because of this, participants talked about having developed the ability to see different perspectives and ways at looking at a situation. They themselves became action-focused.

“We wrote a list of the things I needed help with on day one and Thrive stuck to that list. I learnt how to go through things and see different points of view. It really opened my mind. Don't just think of one thing. Changed mindset.”

“We had our list. What we needed to do, what we have done, what we've achieved, what we yet need to achieve.”

“She got me to identify and prioritise what I needed help with, what's most important, what was the first thing I needed, and we went from there.”

“She makes you feel that you can do it, she makes things achievable. This makes you try harder and take control.”

“We problem-solved together and I could make decisions.”

“I felt safe and trusted what I was being told. Confidential. I felt listened to. The right questions were being asked. She asked me about my feelings. This gave me a sense of relief. She talked about what other people have done in similar situations. She outlined the negative and positive of different options. I was helped to create a plan based on likely outcomes and the steps that needed taking. The plan has given me a brighter side to look at things and the ability to make decisions on what to do next. I’ve gone from feeling helpless, lacking knowledge, to being able to decide if, what action to take.”

Honest and reliable - do what they say

Participants value that Thrive are open and honest about what they can do to help and the realities of their situations and what is likely to happen following different courses of action. Particularly valued, and in comparison to experiences commented on with other agencies, is Thrive’s consistent follow-through and delivery to what they say they will do. As a result, participants were never let down and trusted Thrive’s support.

“They are straight up with you and deliver. When they say something they come through and do it. Been one of the people who actually follow-through and do what they say they’ll do to support. People here treat you like a normal person. Not like other places that look at us like we are troubled youth. I don’t get on with those people but get on with the people here”.

“Different organisations send me on a wild goose chase. Say they’ll come and see me, I cancel things, they don’t turn up. CYF said they’d help me with a scan for baby, then after it they said they couldn’t pay for it.”

Accessible, responsive and quick to act

Participants were amazed at the speed of Thrive’s responsiveness and how quickly they could make things happen.

“They help and support you straight away. I’ve tried other services, but they weren’t as helpful and didn’t give that ‘we can help you’ feeling. You go away knowing that they’ll help or be there if you need them.

“It’s a safe, very supportive, free service. And that’s important.”

“I had been trying on my own to get a house for so long. With Thrive it took just a month to get into this place.”

Overall, participants were highly satisfied with the extent to which Thrive met their needs. All participants said that they would rate Thrive as a ‘four’ or ‘five’ if rating them on a scale of one to five (with one being poor and five excellent). In explaining the reasons for these ratings, participants confirmed the importance of Thrive’s approach, and how significant it was that Thrive was trusted to always follow through.

“They understood what my needs were.”

“[Thrive’s social worker] understood my needs better than I did. She’s very hands-on. She told me you ‘need this and can’t live on this’.”

“She gets me. Actually helps. My old social worker talked shit. She follows through.”

“They do what they say they’ll do.”

“They follow things up and don’t just leave it. They do something.”

“Always on time, always texts to say how are you.”

“Sticks to what she says.”

“Easy to talk to, makes me feel comfortable.”

“Have a lot of humour.”

“Highly responsive, always there for you.”

“Always there when needed, always someone to talk to, to support you, to go to. And someone who speaks for me.”

“Because they are so responsive and always there when I need them, I go back, and am not scared to ask for help.”

Because of Thrive's highly valued approach and exceptional meeting of individual needs, participants have gone back to Thrive for subsequent advice and support and indicated that they saw Thrive as the place where they could go if they needed further guidance. Most participants have recommended Thrive to others or indicated that they would recommend Thrive to other teen parents.

5. IMPACT OF THRIVE'S SUPPORT

The extensive tangible support that Thrive has assisted with, such as supporting teen parents to secure housing, clothing, benefits, furniture and food, has removed key barriers to teen parent's ability to parent, and enabled them to focus on their parenting and life with their child/children. So too has parenting tools and knowledge.

Moreover, a significant and related impact of Thrive's support has been the alleviation of stress, sadness, anxiety, and depression, which over one third half of the participants (nine) indicated Thrive's support had enabled.

Alleviated stress, anxiety, depression

Participants described high stress levels upon learning they were pregnant and this was impacted by feelings of hopelessness, having no home, no parenting knowledge, and the realisation that their teen years and life were to change significantly. Depression and stress were extreme where teen parents faced the possible or actual removal of their child from their care. Teen parents also struggled when they were without the tools and knowledge to understand and effectively respond to the challenges of caring for a baby.

Thrive helped to alleviate stress, sadness, anxiety, and depression, through the provision of targeted support and tools that meet teen parents' core needs, as well as through the close contact and care provided.

"I was a kid just out of high school, had lots of friends, they were going to the ball and I got pregnant, home with kids. I did go through post-natal depression. Thrive helped me out of all the anxiety, depression, stress. I was still a child, a kid myself, taking on that big responsibility of being a mum. I've come such a long way. Can stand on my own two feet."

"I was so stressed about housing. Thrive got me somewhere nice to live and it made such a difference."

"After my baby was gone I was so angry, so sad. [Thrive's social worker] would contact me, talk to me, try and take me for walks, and get me laughing. She's always there for me."

"I learnt new thinking techniques, baby's cues, how to deal with baby. It made me so much less stressed."

"They helped me mentally. "I wasn't real happy when I was pregnant. I didn't know how I was going to help myself... Thrive made me feel at home. I was so excited every time I had our parenting group coming on. Thrive made me feel so much better about myself."

Knowledge and ability to engage effectively in Oranga Tamariki's processes to prove self as suitable parents

In a smaller number of cases, Thrive's support is attributed to having made it significantly easier for teens to understand and navigate Oranga Tamariki processes. This has supported them to move from a position of hopelessness to have knowledge, hope and a measure of control, with outcomes having included contact being restored with a child, having a child placed in their care, and working effectively to have a child returned.

For participants whose parenting had come under the scrutiny of Oranga Tamariki and who were needing to prove their suitability as a parent, significant challenges were a lack of knowledge of their rights and the rights of their family in such situations, trying to understand the different processes taking place, and what they needed to do to see their child or have the child returned to their care.

Through Thrive's support, participants in such situations talked about the knowledge they gained about what was going on, that they were kept informed, and had all their questions answered. They learnt how to engage effectively within Oranga Tamariki's processes and the actions that they needed to take to best help their situations. They moved from having things done to them, to being active participants in the processes taking place.

"When OT took baby, I had no clue. Professionals walked in. I'm a young mum. Just had a baby. They came and asked me all these questions... I had no clue of it all. Now I have all this knowledge of how they do things. And why they do things... Now that I have all this knowledge and done all these things they have made a gateway for me to visit my daughter and prove to them... [Thrive] is there for me at every meeting and every FGC... makes sure it is fair for everyone. That everyone is calm. [Thrive's social worker] is there to support my family and the rights we have... [She] gives me the hope, she gives me the knowledge, she gives me courage, she tells me what to do, go there, go here..."

"I wouldn't have been able to see my daughter without Thrive."

"With OT, the hardest thing was talking to them about what I wanted. They have more power. [Thrive] helped me to communicate how I felt. It gave me more control."

"It was really important that we did ABC and not BC and A. OT was there to take the baby. Thrive was there to give me the foot to stand on – 'hang-on she's just completed this, which you said she couldn't do. I did the parenting course Thrive told me to do. They kept me ahead of the game No-one else would've explained it as Thrive did. What I needed to do and what I needed to show and prove."

"I didn't know what the heck was going on and she would shake the professional team up. I now know how things work. In order to communicate it needs to be by email so there's a paper trail but if you're a normal person you ring, but there's no paper trail, no evidence that there was that discussion. Through Thrive you learn that. And that paper trail helped to get baby into my care. If I didn't have that paper trail, I'd be a worry wart now..."

Improved wellbeing, independence, and a foot to stand on

With core necessities in place, and parenting confidence and knowledge, participants talked about the independence this has given them to be able to stand on their own two feet and to live a stable life with their child/children.

“It has meant that I do things for myself. I can do my own shopping and don’t have to rely others. I am looking after baby. Looking at what is next.”

The significant difference that Thrive’s support has made to participant’s wellbeing and who they are today became clear when participants were asked about what might have happened if they had not known about, our engaged with Thrive.

“I wouldn’t have known about the teen parenting unit. “I would have been depressed and felt trapped. I’ve now connected with other young mums who understand what it is like.”

“I’d be homeless.”

“I’d be still in a damp, mouldy, depressing house.”

“I’d be another stereotype and not come to anything. I’d be stuck and have to rely on mum to help me more than she should have to. I wouldn’t be studying.”

“I just wouldn’t be here to be honest if it wasn’t for Thrive. I just don’t know where I’d be.”

“To be honest, if it wasn’t for Thrive, I wouldn’t be the person that I am today. I wouldn’t know anything which is a big one. I wouldn’t have had the chance to be with my daughter in the first place.”

6. POSITIVE OUTCOMES RESULTING FROM THRIVE’S SUPPORT

“I’ve gained so much strength, so much wisdom, so much confidence, to be able to stand up amongst our families to do with this child. I am so far ahead of myself in terms of what needs to be done for our family as a whole thanks to Thrive. And I’m going to have bad days and that’s ok. I’m human.”

Participants’ reflections on the positive outcomes and changes that have resulted from Thrive’s support showed recognition of Thrive’s purposeful focus on supporting and working with teen parents to develop knowledge and skills to see them stand on their own two feet and to build self-belief, pride and confidence.

“Thrive gives you just enough to build you up. And they keep up the acknowledgements.”

Commonly, teen mums talked about having matured, and having developed the confidence to do things on their own and to be confident in themselves.

“Helped me be more mature. She’ll get me to do something I’ve never done before. I’m shy and didn’t talk to anyone I don’t know. Before if someone asked me something I’d shake my head and not engage. They got me out of my shyness. Advised me to say something. The aim was to get me confident because [Thrive’s social worker] won’t always be around. When I need something, I need to ask myself. Before I wouldn’t. [The social worker] would do it before. I’ll now call WINZ.”

“Before I was very shy and quiet. Now I ring and ask questions. Before my cousin would do all the talking.”

“I feel like I’ve grown as a person. I feel like I’ve matured more.”

Of note too, is the feedback from teen mum and dads responding to four surveys conducted by Thrive between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2018 where all 57 respondents indicated that as a result of Thrive’s help, they now felt confident to access local supports and services.

Participants have become confident as young parents, and confident in their parenting, supported by the knowledge and tools that they have gained from parenting courses and one-to-one parenting support.

“Built my confidence. Made me feel more confident in myself. Learnt strategies to be a stronger parent.”

The development of this confidence is also seen by the 18 out of 18 teen parent respondents to a Thrive survey who indicated that as a result of Thrive’s support they feel more confident to meet their baby’s needs.

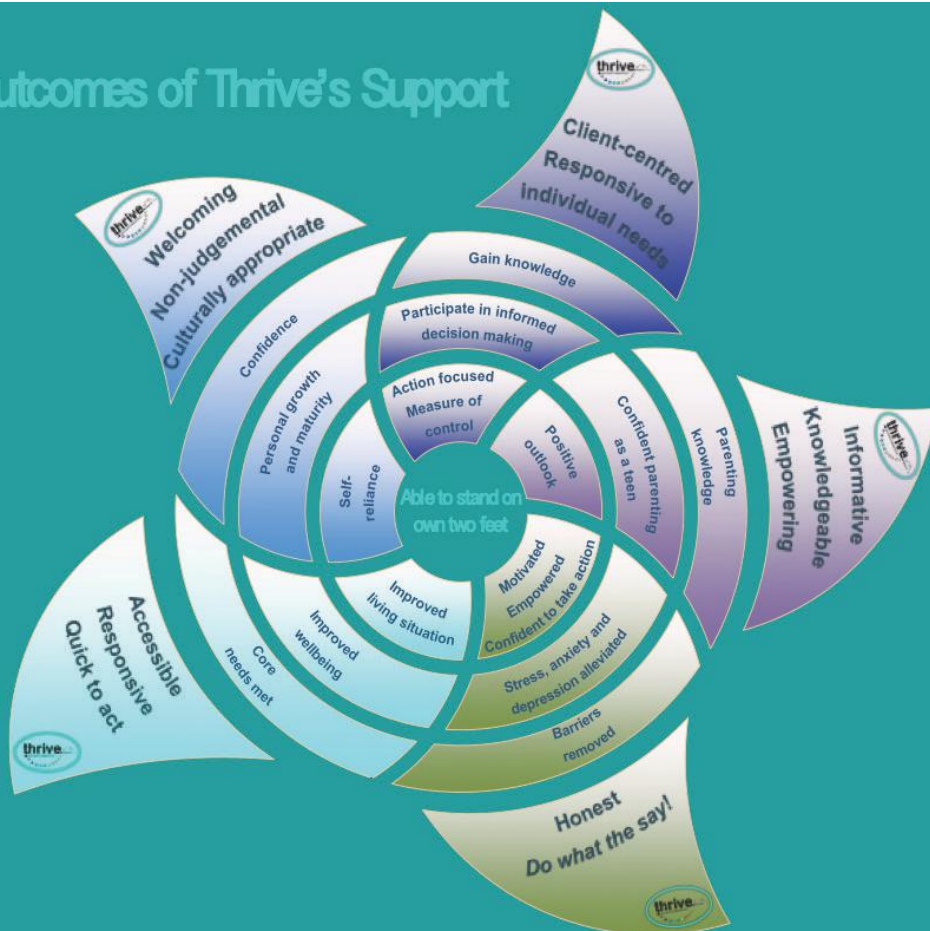
Better living situations, improved wellbeing, confidence, and self-belief have led to a much more positive outlook and future, including for some, plans to enrol in or complete tertiary study or gain employment.

“I’ve matured. I can now stand on my own two feet. Thrive motivated me to do better for my kids. I’m confident in my childcare. Changed my perspective on my life. Thought I’d just be on the benefit and not do anything. They helped me to enrol to do a social work certificate. Now I volunteer, I’m studying, have a nice home. Found out who I am.”

“I live a lot better. I was really sad when I was pregnant. I could’ve still been like that. It was a big help. Now a big difference. Overall wellbeing.”

The following diagram depicts and summarises the positive impact and outcomes that teen parents have experienced as a result of Thrive's support, along with the highly valued elements of that support that were outlined in section 4 of this report.

Elements and Outcomes of Thrive's Support



7. SUGGESTIONS FOR BETTERING THRIVE'S SERVICE

Participants were asked for suggestions on how Thrive might better its service to meet the needs of teen parents. Very few participants could think of ways that the service could improve, given it had met their needs so well. Suggestions for improvement mostly tended to focus on ways that could enable Thrive to do more of the same on a greater scale.

Increased scale of service

Several participants considered that Thrive needed to be more widely known about, a larger service, and located across Auckland, suggesting a need for:

- greater marketing and visibility

"So many people I know should know about Thrive. They need to spread the word. Thrive needs to be bigger."

"So many young mums don't know about Thrive and don't know where to go. It needs to be put out more."

- more staff

“These one’s actually help unlike other agencies.”

- more than one Auckland office to cover Auckland’s wide geographical spread.

“I wish there was a Thrive in east, a Thrive in south and all run by the one place. Or a more central office to take care of north, south, east and west.”

More for teen dad’s

Some of the six male participants thought that the level of support available to teen dads was much less than for mums and that there could be a greater focus on the scope of support for teen dads.

“When shit goes down it will always be the females. Balance it out. Give dads the same amount of support and have parent things for dads too. Mainly you just get sent to counselling.”

Considerations for parenting courses

A suggestion from the focus group related to parenting courses in general (and possibly not just those provided by Thrive) and the need for activities to be more engaging (and more dad focused), not run on a Saturday, and accommodated in a bigger space, with better food.

Communications

Two individual suggestions related to communication from Thrive. One male participant felt that the communication he had advising that Thrive was unable to keep helping him would have been better communicated if it had been accompanied by reference to alternative supports that he could access.

A teen mum reflected that all the contact between her and Thrive had occurred in tandem with her and her mother, which meant that at times, some questions were awkward to answer in that context. It would have been easier to answer particular questions and have one-to-one discussions without her mother being present. This teen was 15 at the time, and possibly this was the reason why Thrive chose to engage in this way.



8. CONCLUSION

The teen parents interviewed for this evaluation highly value the support that they have received from Thrive. Participants value Thrive for having done so much for them, both in terms of providing tangible support to meet their essential needs, as well as being the one organisation that stood up for and supported them to become active participants in external processes and decisions that significantly impacted them.

Through the non-judgemental, trusted, and reliable service that Thrive provides, which is responsive and empowering, participants moved from a position of hopelessness, stress, depression and anxiety, to being knowledgeable, informed, empowered, and positive in their outlook. In general, participants described living a more positive life. This was evident from the position of an evaluator who was privileged to engage with participants who were clearly confident in themselves and their parenting and described having come so far following Thrive's intervention.

Thrive has been highly recommended by participants to other teen parents and is viewed as a trusted place for participants to come back to for advice and support if needed.

Thriving :
young people,
parents & :
••• families