



QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION WEEK – AWARD WINNER

Award Category: Regional Program

Award Description: Program that operates within part of, or across, a region to address some aspect of child protection.

Winner: Young Families Connect

BIO

There is no longer a need to regard pregnancy as a reason to leave school – *don't offer judgement just assistance*. Supporters of the Young Families Connect Program understand that *everything is normal, yet nothing is*. Young Families Connect has a clear focus - to remove the barriers to learning for pregnant and parenting students. The program works to implement the Education Queensland Pregnant and Parenting Students Policy within schools to ensure that they are a welcoming environment for pregnant and parenting students. The program is designed to increase the participation rate of pregnant and parenting students in education and to support them to complete education to senior level/certificate or successful transition to work, university or TAFE.

Young Families Connect is an activity of Education Queensland through a funded partnership with Mission Australia Communities for Children Inala to Ipswich. The program is evolving and under the new name of Young Families Connect is expanding the response to young families in schools.

Low rates of school completion are associated with the very limited support available to pregnant and parenting students to complete their education. The goal of Young Families Connect is to encourage and support all pregnant and parenting students to complete their education in the school of their choice, maintaining their own support network and independence. Young parents are far less likely than their peers to complete secondary education or to engage in post-school education and training without an initiative that meets their needs as new parents. Continuing education throughout the pregnancy, maintaining a relationship with the school after the birth and re-engaging as soon as practicable all have enormous benefits for both the mother and her child/ren.

The program supports young parents through both academic and parenting education and facilitates their re-engagement into education by targeting the education and support needs of young families, addressing social inclusion and reducing the isolation of disadvantaged families. Flexible learning options and timeframes also assist.

Young Families Connect is based at The Ipswich State High School and engages with students from a range of schools within the Inala to Ipswich Region. The Program has established strong partnerships both locally and nationally to support young people in maximising their opportunities. Students are connected to services, including Mission Australia Communities for Children, Ipswich Community Youth Support, Queensland Health School Based Youth Health Nurses, Family Planning Queensland, TAFE and various Universities, Child and Youth Mental Health Services, Ipswich Hospital, Mater Mothers Hospital, Child Health Nurses, Midwives, Childcare services, Goodna and Ipswich Youth agencies, Legal Aid, Centrelink, Child Safety, Mercy Family Services, Playgroup Queensland and Ipswich Women's Centre Against Domestic Violence.

Young people are hesitant to access mainstream services so school staff take on extra roles with absolute commitment, with care and compassion for young women and their right to an education.



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The next steps for Young Families Connect include establishing a crèche so that children can come to school and their parents can join the mainstream school. The crèche will be staffed by students completing children's services studies on site and fenced by construction students (VET program) who will also complete the landscaping and sand pit.

Location: Ipswich

Contact:

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