

# Not the end of the story

Supporting teenage mothers back into education

**Believe in children**



**Barnardo's**

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# Foreword



Teenage mums attract little public sympathy and they are often written off. While pregnancy, particularly during the early teenage years, presents real challenges for both the mother-to-be and her family, it should not mean the end of education and the abandonment of ambitions for the future. As a father, I might have been horrified if my daughter had become pregnant during her school years, but I hope I would have done everything to ensure that this didn't destroy her future education and career prospects.

Barnardo's works with teenage mothers across the UK; overwhelmingly, they are girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who often lack a supportive family environment. Pregnancy is rarely the first major difficulty they have encountered, but for many, it precipitates an enduring crisis. Often excluded from school and

made to leave the family home, they are a vulnerable and isolated group. They are generally ill-equipped to care for their newborn child and unable to contemplate a return to education without considerable support.

Having a baby must not be seen as the end of the story, and as this report illustrates, it need not be. It is critical that these girls get the support they need: firstly, to get their babies off to a good start in life and, secondly, to resume their own education. Access to suitable childcare is an essential part of this, as well as housing and financial support for those who need it.

With this help, young teenage mums can still do well. The alternative is all too often a lifetime on benefits and the blight of poverty and low aspirations passing rapidly from one generation to the next. We cannot let that happen.

*Martin Narey*

Martin Narey  
Chief Executive of Barnardo's

# Executive summary

Teenage mothers who are not lucky enough to have supportive families are an isolated and vulnerable group. Becoming pregnant at a young age is strongly associated with deprivation and educational underachievement.<sup>1</sup> At an age when their peers are still in school or college or taking their first steps into work, teenage mothers risk being left behind – struggling to care for a baby on their own, dependent on benefits and constrained by a lack of suitable childcare.

*Not the end of the story* learns from Barnardo's services across the UK to report on the barriers experienced by 38 young mothers trying to re-engage with education and what helped them move forward. The research builds on the findings of a larger research project, Barnardo's *Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education*, which was carried out with a broad range of young people who faced a number of barriers to re-engaging.<sup>2</sup> The young mothers faced similar barriers but with the added challenge of having a baby. This was rarely the first major difficulty they had experienced.

This report aims to inform the development of policy, particularly in England, as a new law<sup>3</sup> will require all 16 and 17-year-olds – including the

20,000 girls who become mothers each year<sup>4</sup> – to stay in education or training until they reach 18. At present, nearly 70 per cent of this group are NEET (not in education, employment or training).<sup>5</sup>

This report is also relevant to policy development in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, aiming to learn from the best of policy and practice in each nation to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group and their babies.

## Barriers to education

Teenage mothers tend to have had poor experiences of school before pregnancy, which presents an ongoing barrier to their motivation to return to education. Too many were 'unofficially' excluded for being pregnant; for example, they were asked to leave school for 'health and safety reasons'. Government guidance emphasises that pregnancy is not a valid reason for school exclusion.<sup>6</sup>

All Barnardo's services encourage young mothers to resume their education. The support available ranges from specialist units where girls can complete their GCSEs, to antenatal and parenting courses, where they learn how to give their babies a better start in life and get used to attending classes again.

## Childcare

Childcare was the single most important factor in enabling young mothers to return to education. Willingness to use childcare was strongly influenced by its location; on-site nurseries were preferred, and the flexible Care to Learn benefit made a positive difference to girls in England, covering the cost of childcare while they attended courses.

## Housing and homelessness

Despite the popular stereotype of girls becoming pregnant to get a council house, many were unaware of the benefits available to them and struggling to make ends meet. Some were made homeless by their parents; others were living with their babies in unsuitable hostels. One girl told researchers: 'The room was OK, but there were crackheads on the landing.' Another said: 'It was horrible. There was shit going up the bathroom walls.'

Living independently was hard to manage, especially where girls had been housed away from their local communities. Until housing issues were resolved, they were generally unable to contemplate a return to education.

## Benefits to support learning

Two main benefits support young mothers returning to education:

**1. Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)** is available across the UK to 16 to 18-year-olds who stay in education or training. The young person receives £30 per week, but the whole week's payment will be stopped if they miss one day. This is a problem for young mothers when babies have frequent colds or childcare arrangements break

down. Those who take time out to care for their baby are disadvantaged by the eligibility cut-off age of 18.

2. In England, **Care to Learn** will pay up to £160 (up to £175 in London) per child weekly to a registered childcare provider while a parent under 20 is studying. In the other UK nations, similar support is not consistently available, and in Wales in particular, there is no dedicated funding, leaving some young mothers resigned to a life on benefits.

The young women interviewed for this research wanted a better life for their babies and recognised their role in making the right choices.



1 Botting, B, Rosato, M and Wood, R (1998) *Teenage mothers and the health of their children*. (PDF) Office of National Statistics (ONS), Newport. Available at: [www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/population\\_trends/teenmothers\\_pt93.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/population_trends/teenmothers_pt93.pdf) (Accessed 11 February 2010).

2 Evans, J et al (2009) *Second chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training*. Barnardo's, Barking. Available at: [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga\\_20080025\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga_20080025_en_1) (Accessed 11 February 2010).

3 Education and Skills Act 2008 (Ch 25) Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) (E-text). The Stationery Office, London. Available at: [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga\\_20080025\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga_20080025_en_1) (Accessed 11 February 2010).

4 ONS and Teenage Pregnancy Unit (2009) *Teenage Conception Statistics for England*. (Website: updated 1 February 2008.) Available at: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00200/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00200/) (Accessed 17 February 2010). The total number of girls who become mothers aged 16-18 in the UK annually is under 25,000, 2.1 per cent of the age group. In Scotland it's 2,201; in Wales it's 1,233; and in NI it's 1,426. Sources: Information Services Division Scotland (2008), StatsWales (2009) and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2009).

5 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (2008) *Three teenage pregnancy indicators*. (Website: updated 10 February 2010.) Available at: [www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/policy-publications/opportunity-for-all/indicators/table-of-indicators/children-and-young-people/indicator-3/](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/policy-publications/opportunity-for-all/indicators/table-of-indicators/children-and-young-people/indicator-3/) (Accessed 10 February 2010).

6 Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2001) *Guidance on the Education of School Age Parents*. DCSF Publications, Nottingham; Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2007) *Teenage parents next steps: Guidance for LAs and primary care trusts*. DCSF Publications, Nottingham.

However, teenage mothers face a range of barriers and need support to return to education. The right benefits and housing for girls no longer in the family home are essential prerequisites, and suitable childcare is the single most important factor making it possible for them to return to education or training.

### Key recommendations

#### Recommendation 1: Needs assessments

In Northern Ireland, the School Aged Mothers (SAMs) Programme assesses all teenage mothers as ‘children in need’. This enables them to access funded childcare in order to continue their education and identifies specific support and learning needs. Barnardo’s recommends carrying out an assessment using the Common Assessment Framework or similar for all mothers under 18 years when they first book in with a midwife, providing access to a lead professional and a range of support to meet their needs.

#### Recommendation 2: Suitable childcare provision

Teenage mothers need childcare which is:

- publicly funded
- available to all teenage mothers (as it is for university students at present)
- on-site or nearby
- supportive to teenagers
- open to babies and not just two-year-olds.

In England, childcare provision for babies under two years old must be expanded in time for the new legal requirement for young people to take part in education or training up to age 18, which will include most 16 and 17-year-old mothers.

#### Recommendation 3: Unofficial exclusions

Barnardo’s believes that certification that a young person is not fit to attend school should come from medical professionals only. The reasons why a young person is not attending school should always be recorded and if exclusion is thought necessary (e.g. for disruptive behaviour), then the proper statutory processes should be followed.

#### Recommendation 4: Financial incentives to learning

Barnardo’s recommends that:

- a greater uptake of Care to Learn must be planned for and resourced in time for new legal requirements in 2013-15
- EMA is paid for each day of attendance on a course and deducted for each day missed without reasonable excuse
- age limits for EMA and Care to Learn should be extended for those who have fallen behind due to pregnancy and caring for their baby
- a benefit similar to Care to Learn should be made available to teenage mothers across the UK.

#### Recommendation 5: Maternity leave

Barnardo’s believes that maternity should not excuse young mothers from participating in education or training, but greater clarity and guidance is needed from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) about how much time young women may take as maternity leave. This should be flexible enough to respond to individual needs and take into account up-to-date research about which options improve long-term outcomes for both babies and their mothers.

## Section one: Introduction

### Why focus on teenage mothers who are not in education or training?

1. Recent research with ‘at risk’ young people who were re-engaging in education and training through Barnardo’s vocational training and support services found that teenage mothers faced particular barriers to resuming their education.<sup>7</sup>
2. At an age when most of their peers are working towards further and higher education and a future career, teenage mothers can find themselves left behind. A lack of family support and a poor education can leave them socially isolated, dependent on benefits and constrained by the responsibilities of caring for a child alone.
3. Several young women interviewed in this research had abandoned aspirations they had before becoming pregnant, expecting their future to be limited to caring for their baby. However, as this report will show, with the right support and belief, they could resume their education and rediscover their aspirations, improving their own chances of success and the life chances of their babies.

### Policy context

4. From 2015 all young people in England between 16 and 18 years old

will be required to take part in some form of education and training.<sup>8</sup> This will include up to 20,000 girls, aged 15 to 17, who become mothers each year in England, many of whom face considerable barriers to participation.<sup>9</sup>

5. It is an indication of the barriers faced by this group that nearly 70 per cent of young mothers are classified as NEET,<sup>10</sup> compared with about 10 per cent of all 16 to 18-year-olds.<sup>11</sup> In the 2008 Youth Cohort Study, 30 per cent of 17-year-old girls cited their pregnancy or having a child as a barrier to entering education, employment or training, by far the most significant barrier identified.<sup>12</sup> In common with many other young people who have become marginalised from the educational mainstream, Dench states: ‘young mothers dip in and out of activities and statuses, there is a danger that the demands and stresses of their lives take over and that they will not find a way forward with... re-engaging in work or learning.’<sup>13</sup>

6. Expectations of a return to education or training are also reflected in the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, which includes a target to ‘increase the proportion of teenage parents in education, training or employment to 60 per cent by 2010, to reduce their risk of long-term social exclusion.’<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Evans, J et al (2009).

<sup>8</sup> Education and Skills Act 2008 (Ch 25), OPSI.

<sup>9</sup> ONS and Teenage Pregnancy Unit (2009).

<sup>10</sup> DWP (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Compare this with figures for mothers generally, which show that 57 per cent of mothers of children under five are in employment. ONS and Teenage Pregnancy Unit (2009).

<sup>12</sup> DCSF (2009a) *Youth cohort study and longitudinal study of young people in England: The activities and experiences of 17-year olds – England 2008* (PDF) DCSF Publications, Nottingham. Available at: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000850/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000850/index.shtml) (Accessed 10 February 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Dench, S, Bellis, A and Tuohy, S (2007) *Young mothers not in learning: A qualitative study of barriers and attitudes*. Report 439, Institute of Employment Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton.

<sup>14</sup> Parker, R et al (2005). *National evaluation of the teenage pregnancy strategy* (PDF). DCSF Publications, Nottingham. Available at: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/healthandwellbeing/teenagepregnancy/research/strategyresearch/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/healthandwellbeing/teenagepregnancy/research/strategyresearch/) (Accessed 16 February 2010).



7. Numbers of teenage mothers are already relatively small.<sup>15</sup> Mothers under 20 account for just over five per cent of all births.<sup>16</sup> Fewer than 4,000 babies a year are born to girls below school leaving age in Great Britain.<sup>17</sup> As numbers reduce further and the average age of motherhood generally increases,<sup>18</sup> those who become mothers at a young age and struggle to get back into education can be expected to be among the most isolated and marginalised. The needs of those young women and their children form the main focus of this report.

### This report

8. *Not the end of the story* learns from the experience of Barnardo's alternative education and youth support services across the UK, together with academic research, to report on the barriers young mothers experience when re-engaging with education and training and how they can be supported through that process.

9. The aim of the research is to influence and inform national and local policy to ensure that there are realistic options available to enable

young mothers to resume their education. Policy must recognise that teenage mothers have specific support needs that often require tailored provision, such as on-site nurseries and flexible courses.

10. Issues around teenage mothers attract opinionated debate. This research did not explore preventing teenage pregnancy nor the choices made by young women, which have been subject to extensive research and comment by others.

### Research methods

11. This research builds on the findings of a larger research project, published in Barnardo's *Second Chances* report.<sup>19</sup> The earlier research was carried out with a wide range of young people who were not in education or training, many of whom faced considerable barriers to re-engaging, including poor school experiences, housing issues, mental health problems and financial difficulties. The young mothers interviewed experienced a similar range of barriers but with the additional challenge of having a baby. This was rarely the first major difficulty they had experienced.

12. The new research was designed to gather more in-depth information on the experiences of teenage mothers, to identify the specific barriers they face and to illustrate the support they needed to continue in education or training. It involved interviews with service managers, a range of workers, including three specialist Connexions advisers, and 38 young women, aged from 13 to 20 years.

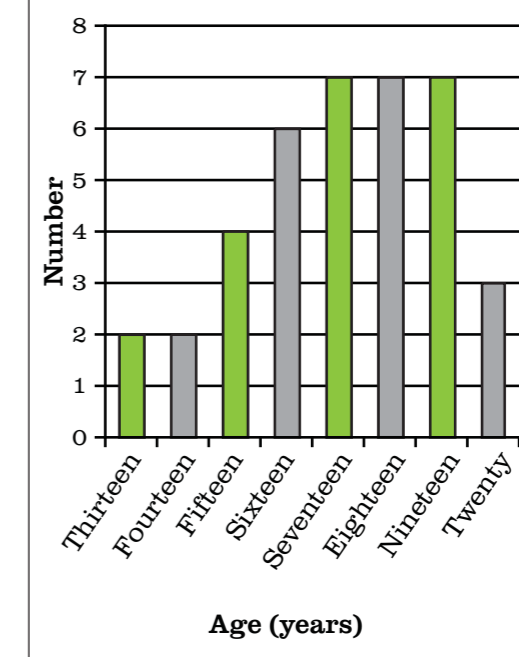
13. All the young women interviewed were using Barnardo's services, including:

- a specialist pupil referral unit for teenage mothers
- a range of support services for vulnerable young people, including parenting courses, supported housing and intensive support for young mothers whose children were on the child protection register.

A head teacher and a Connexions worker at a local authority who runs Batmans Hill Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), based in the West Midlands, also took part in interviews to extend the breadth of information.

Fuller details of the services involved are provided in the appendix.

**Ages of girls interviewed**



<sup>15</sup> ONS and Teenage Pregnancy Unit (2009).

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (2002) *The Poverty Site* (Website: updated 4 February 2010) Available at: [www.poverty.org.uk/24/index.shtml](http://www.poverty.org.uk/24/index.shtml) (Accessed 11 February 2010). Sources: ONS and ISD Scotland.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2002).

<sup>18</sup> The average first time mother is now 27.5 years old. ONS and Teenage Pregnancy Unit (2009).

<sup>19</sup> Evans, J et al (2009).

## Section two: Barriers faced by teenage mothers

14. This section explores the educational, social, practical and financial barriers faced by teenage mothers. It describes the support they needed when they were ready to re-engage with education and training, and explains some of the challenges and rewards of the process.

### Educational barriers

15. Both interviews for this research and academic literature<sup>20</sup> demonstrate clearly that young women who have babies in their teens tend to have had poor experiences of education and are disillusioned with school well before pregnancy. Negative experiences of school present an ongoing barrier to their motivation to return to education. Difficulties described in this section include:

- truanting and poor attendance
- school exclusion
- being bullied
- poor attainment.

### Truanting and poor attendance

16. A manager reported that more than 50 per cent of the girls attending the specialist unit she ran had been **'very poor or non-attenders at school'** prior to becoming pregnant. Project workers also observed that poor attendance before becoming pregnant was a common feature of young mothers' educational experience and the girls spoke about this in interviews. This is consistent with research by Dawson and Hosie, which found that less than

half of the pregnant young women and young mothers in their study were attending school regularly.<sup>21</sup>

17. The transition from primary to secondary school was commonly reported as stressful: **'I was all right in primary, but comp, bloody hell – it all started to go pear-shaped'**. Typically, attendance deteriorated at around 13 or 14 years of age. Karen, who had been in residential care, was **'mixing with the wrong people and truanting all the time'**. At the time she thought she had better things to do than go to school. Louise was **'always late... always on the mitch (truanting)'**.

18. Once girls became pregnant it was harder for them to keep up with the timetable. Pregnant girls at Rowan PRU gave examples of missing parts of lessons at school due to the need to use the toilet frequently and extreme tiredness, which resulted in them being given a part-time timetable or home tuition. Another academic research project found that girls were not always given extra support and missed too much school because of morning sickness and as their due dates drew near.<sup>22</sup>

### School exclusion

19. Exclusion from school arose as an issue both pre and post-pregnancy. Young mothers most readily recalled being excluded for pregnancy-related reasons, but with prompting, recounted times when they had been excluded

before, often early in their secondary school career.

20. Some girls admitted that they had been excluded for poor behaviour well before their pregnancy, including one who was **'thrown out in Year 7 for spitting and swearing'**, sent to another school and again **'kicked out for swearing'**. Others acknowledged that they had been hanging about with the wrong people who caused trouble, **'like setting off fire alarms and bringing vodka to school'**. Another girl explained that she felt so angry about the bullying she experienced at primary school that she threw a chair at someone and was excluded for two weeks in Year 6. Others spoke of their early experiences of exclusion from school, but were not as clear about the reasons behind it.

21. The 1998 Social Exclusion Unit report<sup>23</sup> on teenage pregnancy and long-standing Government guidance<sup>24</sup> both emphasise that pregnancy is not a valid reason for a school to exclude a child and that schools have a duty to meet their needs.

22. Despite this guidance, teenage mothers in Barnardo's research had experienced exclusion on apparently spurious grounds. For example, Natalie in Wales had been advised by the school (not a medical professional) that the stress of taking GCSE exams while seven months pregnant risked bringing on a premature labour and so had left with no qualifications. Clare in Yorkshire confirmed this view of health and safety and said: **'They told me I couldn't go to that school any more because it was "too dangerous" as there were too many places where I**

**could get knocked down.'** A Connexions worker at Rowan PRU in Rotherham, South Yorkshire was frustrated about being referred young women who had been asked to leave school for alleged health and safety reasons. Siobhan in Northern Ireland got into a row with her school about uniform. She became pregnant at 15 and asked permission to wear maternity trousers to school for comfort. The school insisted she must wear its uniform, a skirt, so she left. Although these girls had not officially been excluded, the effect was the same: they had left school because of their pregnancy, and this decision appeared to have been encouraged or tacitly accepted by their schools, without alternative provision being made for them to complete their GCSEs.

23. Our research concurs with earlier research findings<sup>25</sup> that teenage girls who become pregnant and leave school early form a group of hidden or unofficial exclusions. In some cases, the decision to leave may be their own choice but there is evidence that some are encouraged, implicitly or explicitly, to make this choice. For example, Lall found many cases where the school was unsupportive when a girl got pregnant and as a result, girls excluded themselves. Dench reported that some young women were asked to leave their course after becoming pregnant or were persuaded not to return after the birth.<sup>26</sup> Others excluded themselves, reporting that the school 'didn't want to know'.

24. As we have seen, numbers of school-age mothers in England are very small, fewer than 4,000 each year. This means schools are presented with an exceptional case and clearly

<sup>20</sup> Hosie, A (2007) 'I hated everything about school': An examination of the relationship between dislike of school, teenage pregnancy and educational disengagement. In: *Social Policy and Society*, 6 (3) pp.333-347. University Press, Cambridge.

<sup>21</sup> Dawson, N and Hosie, A (2005) *The education of pregnant young women and young mothers in England*. University of Bristol, Bristol.

<sup>22</sup> Lall, M (2004) *Exclusion from school: Addressing the hidden problem of teenage pregnancy – research report 28*. Sheffield Hallam University Press, Sheffield.

<sup>23</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Teenage Pregnancy*. ODPM Publications, Wetherby.

<sup>24</sup> DfES (2001); DCSF (2007).

<sup>25</sup> Lall (2004).

<sup>26</sup> Dench, Bellis and Tuohy (2007).

a few of the schools attended by girls in this research were perplexed by their responsibilities in the situation. However, these young women have the same entitlement to education as their peers. Allowing their education to become extensively disrupted at this stage has a long-term impact on their life chances and those of their babies.

### Being bullied

25. Bullying was a common experience among girls interviewed in this research, both before they fell pregnant and as a consequence of pregnancy. Those who had experienced bullying before pregnancy offered it as a reason for retaliation, poor attendance and moving schools, all events which disrupted their education.

26. Girls who became pregnant while still at school were often subjected to sexualised and sexist bullying. A girl at Rowan PRU said: **'In mainstream school you get people saying "she's a slag" and "she did this" or "she did that" but no-one can call you a slag at this school cos we're all the same.'** At another unit, Amber said the **'lads called her names'**.

27. Bullying and, more generally, the stigma associated with being pregnant while at school was keenly felt by many of the girls interviewed at Barnardo's services. This has also been noted in other research, with bullying, exclusion from peers, a lack of support and negative attitudes from teachers all contributing to girls' decisions to leave school early.<sup>27</sup> Experiences of stigma and name-calling extend well beyond the

school gates and into the community,<sup>28</sup> adding to the social isolation of teenage mothers and making them less likely to take up maternity, nursery and parenting services.

### Overcoming educational barriers – what helped?

28. All services were more or less directly introducing young women to the idea of continuing their education. The message about the value of education was being conveyed at all levels. Some, working with the most vulnerable girls, approached it very informally, focusing on topics young mothers would find directly relevant, such as baby first aid and baby massage.

29. Several of the young mothers left school with few qualifications, because their education had been disrupted by pregnancy and their attendance was previously poor. They had a lot of work to do to catch up with their peers, at the same time as caring for their baby. Many had difficulty in seeing the relevance of the school curriculum. In common with other young people interviewed for *Second Chances*,<sup>29</sup> they responded to more practical subjects.

30. Those who had the opportunity to attend a specialist PRU, like Rowan or Batmans Hill, usually gained some GCSEs. Many preferred the atmosphere of specialist units, benefiting from smaller classes and more attention from teachers. At Rowan PRU, each student followed an individual curriculum. As one teacher explained, her role was more that of a tutor working on a one-to-one basis to encourage learning.

They appreciated the on-site nursery and the company of other girls in the same situation. By encouraging girls to continue their GCSE studies throughout pregnancy and to return as soon as possible after the birth, these units demonstrate that there is nothing about pregnancy or motherhood that need disrupt education in the long term.

31. At Batmans Hill PRU, Connexions workers helped older girls through the Raising Aspirations programme. Caring for a small baby, often without family support, saps time and energy. So, courses, run in small manageable steps, helped young mothers to see how they could get back into education or training. The Raising Aspirations programme starts with 'no-pressure taster courses,' such as jewellery-making, and includes an AQA accredited parenting course called Busy Mummy. One of the aims of these courses is to encourage mothers to use childcare and build their confidence in being able to leave their baby with other carers.

32. At Rowan PRU, 16 to 18-year-olds were encouraged to attend a 12 week Parents with Prospects course which developed their parenting, social and employability skills and gave them a qualification equivalent to a level 1 GCSE<sup>30</sup> accredited by Edexcel.

33. PRUs like Rowan and Batmans Hill took a holistic approach to the young women they worked with, supporting them with other issues in their lives including custody arrangements, housing problems, relationship difficulties and benefits advice. Staff at Rowan PRU included workers with social work training, a Connexions adviser and a full-time volunteer who helped graduates from the Parents

with Prospects course take forward their new plans for future learning and work. The two nursery workers did more than just care for babies; they also modelled good parenting and encouraged girls to relate to their babies and care for them independently.

34. For school-aged mothers, small groups and one-to-one tuition in specialist units can be a good option. However, specialist units working with teenage mothers are not common and their small size inevitably limits the range of subjects available. They should form part of a range of provision available to pregnant teenagers. Consideration also needs to be given to creating conditions at mainstream schools which are more supportive to the needs of teenage mothers, so they can continue to have access to a wide range of qualifications.

35. Conditions at mainstream schools should follow the existing clear guidelines from the Department of Health (DH) and DCSF<sup>31</sup> and, as for their disabled students, schools should make 'reasonable adjustments' for girls to continue with their education. Given that adult mothers continue in the workplace until late into pregnancy, schools should not cite health and safety as a reason for girls to leave school.

36. At college level young women benefited from being able to take short taster courses at times when they felt ready to attend college. College courses commonly start in September, or sometimes January, meaning that girls who have to wait a long time to start a course risked becoming demotivated. Some were waiting for their baby to be old enough to start at a college nursery, which was usually two years old.

<sup>27</sup> Lall (2004); Dawson and Hosie (2005).

<sup>28</sup> Morrison, N (2009) Swell idea: Is teenage pregnancy always a disaster or could it be a rational choice or disadvantaged girls? *The Times Educational Supplement* (online) 6 February 2009. Available at: [www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6008366](http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6008366)

<sup>29</sup> Evans, J et al (2009).

<sup>30</sup> All the parenting courses mentioned above are accredited at level 1 which is equivalent to a Grade D-G GCSE.

<sup>31</sup> DCSF (2007).





### Outcomes for teenage parents and their babies

Barnardo's services work with young mothers towards a range of educational outcomes, including:

- young parents' confidence, skills and aspirations to access employment, education and training are enhanced
- young parents successfully access and sustain involvement in employment, education and training opportunities
- young parents achieve clear work related goals and access education, training or employment
- young parents who are not in employment engage in volunteering opportunities
- young parents have positive support from their parents and family to enable them to engage and sustain access to education, employment and training.

One of the outcomes that Barnardo's Paisley Threads project works towards is to 'increase the employability of young and prospective parents'. In 2007-08, 113 young people registered with the service. Out of these young people, 35 have been supported to enter employment, with 22 of these sustaining that position to date; 26 were supported to enter further education; eight participated in college based access to childcare courses; four participated in voluntary activity; and four have been supported to return to school. Sixty per cent of service users were being supported with housing issues.

Rowan PRU is 'encouraging young people to achieve GCSE and other external accreditation'. In 2007-08, 100 per cent of young mothers entered for GCSEs achieved at least one A-G grade, 50 per cent achieved at least five A-G grades. Twenty-four young parents completed the Parents with Prospects course and more than half of them have since gained employment or started college courses.

### A case study – Clare

Clare loved her primary school, but felt miserable when she transferred to secondary school 'because you lose the friends you've already got and get split up into tutor groups'. She was bored by the repetitive nature of lessons she had grasped already. By Year 9 she had 'just stopped going'. This was not picked up by the authorities because she would go to registration and then skip lessons. She started off by just sitting in the park, but soon started meeting up with a group of young people who were drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis.

Just as she started to return to school in Year 10, she became pregnant. The school told her it would be 'too dangerous' to stay there, so she was referred to the Rowan PRU to continue with a limited range of GCSEs. She felt confident to leave her baby in the nursery there and comfortable with the other girls.

However, a serious complication of late pregnancy left her too ill to continue her studies. When she eventually went back to sit her exams, her concentration was affected by the suicide of her boyfriend and a custody battle for her child with her mother. She had no support except from the workers at Rowan PRU, who kept in touch with her throughout. With their help, she regained custody of her child.

She progressed to the Parents with Prospects course, which showed her the benefits of a healthy lifestyle for parents and children. She had already given up alcohol and cannabis from early pregnancy and was keen to give her son a healthy, varied diet.

She gained the confidence to become a 'peer befriender' to other teenage mothers and is now at college studying childcare. Clare would have liked to go to college sooner, but could not as the nursery there only takes babies from two years old.

### Social barriers and stigma

#### 'Young mums get too much criticism.'

Fatima, age 17

37. As has been noted, many young mothers had poor experiences of school prior to pregnancy, which were reinforced by being stigmatised once they became pregnant. Lack of confidence and the feeling that they were being criticised made them reluctant to access mainstream services.

38. Although single parenthood is no longer as stigmatised as it once was, as the average age of becoming a parent increases and the numbers of teenage mothers slowly decrease,<sup>32</sup> very young mothers do experience negative attitudes in the community. Teenage parenthood is strongly associated with deprivation,<sup>33</sup> and young mothers' poor education and lack of qualifications worsen their financial situation. This leads many to become dependent on state benefits

<sup>32</sup> ONS (2009) *Who is having babies?* (PDF) Office of National Statistics, Newport. Available at: [www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/births1209.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/births1209.pdf) (Accessed 11 February 2010). In 1981 around 35,000 babies were born to married teenagers and a further 30,000 to unmarried teenagers. Botting, Rosato and Wood (1998).

<sup>33</sup> Botting, Rosato and Wood (1998).

to raise their babies, which attracts negative comment. However, Wilson and Huntington<sup>34</sup> conclude that although they may be discriminated against by society and often financially poor, there are no intrinsic reasons why teenagers should not be good parents. Consistent with Barnardo's research findings, these authors point out that in many cases having a baby increased their aspirations and made them independent rather than dependent.

39. Teenage-friendly provision is important because of the community stigma and harassment that is associated with teenage motherhood. Girls do not access antenatal classes, which are typically aimed at older mothers and their partners and so miss out on the vital information they need on healthy lifestyles and baby care. Paisley Threads project resolved this issue by running a prenatal group and a new baby group for young mothers. The project provided social support and friendship, health advice, pain relief information, labour ward tours, breastfeeding counselling and visits to potential nurseries. Through attendance at these groups young women could access one-to-one support from an allocated worker who could help them with a range of issues, including employment, childcare, housing, benefits, relationships and obtaining counselling.

40. Sure Start children's centres provided learning and development opportunities to many of the young people who took part in the research in England. Workers used children's centres because they provided a

non-stigmatising setting and were not associated in young people's minds with school or other institutions where they had felt like failures. Specialist teenage midwives are an asset to supporting teenage mothers, making referrals and working in partnership with services and Connexions reintegration workers. Early evidence from the evaluation of the Family Nurse Partnership Programme indicates that family nurses will also provide valuable support for this group.<sup>35</sup>

41. As in *Second Chances*,<sup>36</sup> this research found that forming consistent, reliable relationships with young parents was an important part of working to successfully re-engage them with education. Some of these relationships were for the long term. For example, the aftercare worker at Parent and Child Together (PACT) in Northern Ireland had worked for many years with a young mother whose learning difficulties meant that although she carefully learnt each step of baby care, she had trouble adapting as her child grew up and their needs changed. At each stage, she could be helped to adjust, although her learning difficulties meant that she would always need support.

42. Some of the young women interviewed for this research had been in local authority care. Up-to-date information on the numbers of care leavers having babies is hard to find, but care leavers are more likely to fall into the high-risk categories for becoming a teenage mother due to such factors as coming from a deprived

area, disrupted educational experience and lack of qualifications. Some of the young women interviewed in this research had experienced a chaotic and neglectful upbringing, and had not benefited from the day-to-day support that most parents give. Difficult childhood experiences continued to have an effect on some, to the extent that they struggled to take control of their lives and settle to anything. For example, Danni had been in and out of care and attended 12 different schools. The main priority for the

PACT assigned to work with Danni was to assess and support her parenting skills to enable her to keep her baby. Following this, PACT's aftercare team would be ready to assist Danni in looking for qualifications when urgent needs like housing and the baby's safety had been resolved.

43. However, some young women, like Karen (see case study overleaf) had turned their lives around since becoming pregnant, moving beyond their own difficult childhood experiences.



<sup>34</sup> Wilson, H and Huntington, A (2005) *Deviant (M)others: The construction of teenage motherhood in contemporary discourse*. In: *Journal of Social Policy*, 35 (1) pp.59-76. University Press, Cambridge.

<sup>35</sup> Barnes, J et al (2008) *Nurse family partnership programme: First pilot site implementation in England - Pregnancy and the post-partum period*. DCSF, London.

<sup>36</sup> Evans, J et al (2009).

### A case study – Karen

#### Overcoming a difficult childhood to do better for her own children

Eighteen-year-old Karen suffered serious abuse as a child and spent much of her childhood in care. She lives with her supportive boyfriend Dave, who is the father of her two children, both under three. She has been independently housed as a former child in care by the local authority. She and her boyfriend had decorated their home and were landscaping the small garden to make a play area for the children.

Karen and Dave had set up good routines for their children, who slept well and ate healthily. Their little boy was friendly and curious and greeted the manager of Rowan PRU as an old friend.

While in care, Karen had received some tuition in the residential home, but her education up until becoming pregnant at 15 was minimal. Once she was pregnant, she was sent to Rowan PRU to study for GCSEs and actually received a better education after becoming pregnant than previously. Although her first attempt at GCSEs didn't result in the grades she needed, she 'pestered' Rowan until they agreed to take her back. She went on to obtain enough GCSEs to take a Level 2 course in Childcare, which she was planning to start when we met her. She had wanted to attend college before, but the college nursery only takes babies from six months so she had had to wait until her daughter was old enough. Care to Learn was being arranged and she felt this really helped. What also helped was that her son had really liked the nursery on a recent visit. He had already been in the nursery at Rowan, so Karen was confident he would settle well.

And, although the case was closed, the Rowan staff kept in touch on an informal basis.

#### Fathers

44. This report focuses primarily on girls and their babies. Researchers were keen to hear about the experiences of fathers, but in the event only met one young father (see Dave in the Karen case study above). Policy and practice to support teenage mothers and their babies focus almost exclusively on girls, neglecting young fathers.<sup>37</sup> The presence of a father in a child's life is almost always beneficial<sup>38</sup>

and mothers appreciate the care and support partners can offer in bringing up children. This issue merits further research and policy attention. Two challenges highlighted by this research were:

- the need for support services to acknowledge and involve young fathers wherever appropriate, treating young parents as a family unit and encouraging the father's continued involvement in his child's upbringing.

- The benefits system 'couple penalty', which can arise for young parents who choose to live together, rather than the young mother and her baby living on their own.

#### Practical barriers

45. Young mothers frequently experienced practical barriers to re-engaging with education and training. The most important of these was childcare. This research, and that of others, demonstrates the value of the right childcare provision for supporting young mothers back into education and training. Contrary to popular perceptions, young mothers and their small babies are at risk of homelessness and often being housed in poor and stressful conditions. Housing difficulties are a significant barrier, especially for the many who had poor or non-existent support from their families and local communities. Resolving this is vital for the wellbeing of both mother and child and can be a first step in helping a young parent back into education or training. Inadequate public transport also impacts on the mothers' ability to attend courses.

The three practical barriers are:

- childcare
- housing
- transport.

#### Childcare

46. Childcare was considered by managers, project workers and the teenage mothers we spoke to, to be one of the most important factors in motivating and supporting young mothers back into education. As a Connexions worker explained:

**'When discussing college or work, one of the important things that the girls need to take into consideration is childcare provision... and in a way, that comes first for them, and then looking at the college.'**

47. Young mothers' willingness to use childcare was strongly influenced by its location. A nursery on the learning site, or close by, was the most convenient and they appreciated being able to visit their babies between classes. Although a few young women showed great motivation in leaving the house early each day to drop their baby in a nursery before travelling to another part of town for college, this is not ideal.

48. Many of the young women interviewed were wary of leaving their babies with strangers. Workers found this particularly with more vulnerable young women, such as those who had been in care. To ease such concerns, Wakefield Young Families introduced parents to the local children's centre, while at Paisley Threads and Rowan PRU, workers accustomed young women to using a nursery. At Paisley Threads, workers visited different nurseries with young mothers and supported them to make the choice that was right for them and their baby. At Rowan, the manager said **'they are very vulnerable young people who don't trust adults very easily. It takes a long time to build up a relationship'**, so **'teaching them how to use a nursery is a big thing; a big step to moving on to further education'**. At Rowan, using a nursery was part of the Parents with Prospects course for 16 to 18-year-olds.

49. Specialist units for teenage mothers providing both education and on-site childcare offer a practical solution to this dilemma. Girls can return to

<sup>37</sup> Beale, R is a rare example of good research into local practice with fathers. Beale, R (2009) *Young fathers in Cornwall: Best practice for services in St Blazey*. Cornwall Council, Truro.

<sup>38</sup> The Fatherhood Institute (2007) *The difference a dad makes* (PDF) Fatherhood Institute, Abergavenny. Available at: [www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/download.php?pid=6078.8](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/download.php?pid=6078.8) (Accessed 11 February 2010).

education or training without leaving their babies all day. At Rowan, young women placed their babies in the on-site nursery when they were just three weeks old to continue with their GCSE studies. Project workers felt that they were ready at this stage and that they might otherwise become bored and depressed at home; they were also concerned that the girls had already fallen behind in studying.

50. But even with the offer of free, on-site childcare, some young women, like Bridget in Paisley, had reservations about leaving their child with a stranger. There are widely differing views about when mothers should return to work or learning, following the birth of their child. This was reflected in interviews with the girls in this research and has been noted by other researchers. Some young women are clear that they do not want to leave their child with anyone until they are old enough to start school or until they feel their child is ready.<sup>39</sup> As Dench has observed: 'The right to spend time being a full-time mother was important to many young mothers. They do not want to leave their child, particularly while he/she is very young.'<sup>40</sup>

51. These are difficult decisions for any new mother, which attract much debate.<sup>41</sup> Academic evidence does not offer a clear answer to the question of when is the right time for a child to be put in childcare, perhaps full-time, so that their mother can return to education or employment. Research from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) found that the quality of childcare matters, relative to the quality of parental care. Children are most likely to benefit from childcare if their parent is struggling to cope and dealing with multiple challenges, such as living in poverty.<sup>42</sup> Some young mothers, like Bridget (see box out), may feel ready to go back to education when their babies are older, but rules around eligibility for benefits, such as Care to Learn and the Adult Learning Grant (discussed later in this report), can make this difficult.



<sup>39</sup> Alexander, C, Duncan, S and Edwards, R (2007) *Listening to young mothers and fathers: Research findings on the experiences of teenage mothers and fathers in Bradford*. University of Bradford, Bradford.

<sup>40</sup> Dench, Bellis and Tuohy (2007).

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Biddulph, S (2006) *Raising Babies: Should under-3s go to nursery?* Harper Thorsons, London.

<sup>42</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2009) *Doing better for children*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

## A case study – Bridget

### Wanting to take time out to be a mother

Bridget had gained a good secondary education, including excellent results in her Highers (level 3 qualifications in Scotland). She was musically talented and had thought about doing a music degree and training as a teacher. However, Bridget got engaged and then became pregnant with Zoë and simply didn't take any of her aspirations forward. She was happy living with her boyfriend and planning to get married soon; she had her parents' support and was caring well for three-month old Zoë, including breastfeeding her.

Her friend Hannah at Paisley Threads had placed her baby in nursery from three weeks old and was actively pursuing further qualifications in community work. But Bridget was not happy to leave Zoë in a nursery; she felt she was too young to leave, even with her supportive family.

Bridget welcomed the support and advice she received about benefits from Paisley Threads and gained a lot socially from attending first the prenatal group and then the new baby group. Her immediate plan was to get a cleaning job for a few hours a week to supplement her income and gain an entitlement to Working Tax Credits.

Bridget gave the impression that she felt content with things just the way they were, enjoying her baby's company. Branching out in search of educational opportunities or employment just seemed too demanding for her and Zoë right now.

It was clear that she would need time and dedicated support to enable her to move on to the next stage of her life and do justice to the success she had previously had at school.

### Housing and homelessness

52. Some of the young mothers interviewed in our research were lucky enough to have supportive families, so were able to continue living at home or with their boyfriend's family. However, after the baby was born, they often wanted some independence and to set themselves up as their own family unit. This could lead to tensions between the girls and their parents. For example, in a prenatal group discussion, one girl was heard to advise another that if she wanted to be housed independently, her father would have to write a letter to the council, saying he

had kicked her out of home. He refused to do this, as he wished to support his 17-year-old daughter.

53. For young mothers who were living independently, housing could be a major challenge. The issues were often complex and required much support. Until they were resolved, education remained a lower priority. Other research has also highlighted the prevalence of housing difficulties among teenage mothers. For example, in Dench's research, many of the young parents had housing problems or were homeless and struggled with a lack of affordable, suitable housing options.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Dench, Bellis and Tuohy (2007).

54. Housing advice and support was provided to young women at Wakefield Young Families, Paisley Threads, PACT and Marlborough Road Family Service in Wales. This is important given the severe difficulties that poor housing and homelessness could create in the lives of young mothers and their babies. Once housing issues have been resolved, mothers can begin to focus on education and training.

### Homelessness

55. The reasons for becoming homeless were complex and varied. Some girls reported that they had been 'kicked out of home', some for falling pregnant. Numerous young women in this research had a long history of being looked after (in care).<sup>44</sup> These young mothers and their babies were particularly vulnerable and, lacking support from their own family, were reliant on the corporate parent<sup>45</sup> to house them.

56. At the PACT project, several young women spoke of abusive partners who had posed a risk to themselves and their babies. Others had followed the father of their baby to a distant part of the country, only to split up, leaving them isolated and without accommodation. Danni had travelled from Fife in Scotland to her ex-boyfriend's home in Colerain, Northern Ireland, and Natasha, who spoke very little English, followed her ex-boyfriend from Latvia when he came to seek work in the UK. Both girls were now alone with their newborn babies in Belfast.

These girls and their babies were particularly vulnerable and needed intensive support and advice before a return to education or training could be considered.

### Living independently

57. There are popular stereotypes about young women becoming pregnant to get a council house, contributing to the stigma that some of the young mothers we interviewed experienced in the community. Where a house or flat was available, the reality of living independently was much harder to manage than they had envisaged. One girl told us: **'I have my own flat. I live on my own. It's very hard and I'm not managing with food and stuff. I get £37 per week and I have to pay the electric and bills from that.'**

58. The girls needed support to make an empty flat into a home suitable for a newborn baby. Flats are let in a completely empty condition, so steps have to be taken to connect the gas and electricity and fund and obtain flooring, kitchen equipment, bedding etc. Workers in several Barnardo's services helped with such tasks, as well as, where needed, assisting with grant applications to pay for equipment.

59. Some young women were housed in unsuitable hostel accommodation, with adults who had substance misuse habits. As previously noted, one young mother told researchers: **'The room was OK, but there were crack heads**

**on the landing.'** Another said: **'It was horrible. There was shit going up the bathroom walls.'**

60. For young mothers with difficult family backgrounds, supported housing like Barnardo's Cwrt y Farchnad (The Market Court) in Cardiff provided a helpful start to life as a parent and an independent family unit. PACT in Belfast housed very vulnerable young women who needed intensive monitoring to learn how to care for their babies safely. In both settings an on-site social worker offers advice and guidance to the girls, helping them to move into independent housing when they are ready. Wakefield Young Families and Paisley Threads offer a floating support model for girls in their own tenancies.

61. Young women who had previously lived in supported housing like PACT or Cwrt y Farchnad could find it hard to manage in the evenings and at weekends, when they were left on their own. Both these services provided 'aftercare' which helped to ease the transition to independent living. At Cwrt y Farchnad, this included practical help with furnishings and settling in. Young women were often able to move into a part of Cardiff they were familiar with, near to family and friends (important support networks for those that could call on them). In Wakefield, teenage parents were also often housed near their own communities. In Belfast, where the young women came

from all over Northern Ireland and suitable housing was in short supply, aftercare workers sometimes needed to be involved on a longer term basis.

62. In his speech to the 2009 Labour Party conference, Prime Minister Gordon Brown pledged that *'From now on, all 16 and 17-year-old parents who get support from the taxpayer will be placed in a network of supervised homes.'*<sup>46</sup> Seven local authorities have already been participating in a Teenage Parent Supported Housing Pilot since November 2008, which will be evaluated in 2011. Properly managed supported housing benefits the most vulnerable, homeless young women with life and parenting skills, as well as sign-posting them towards education when they are ready.

However, others do well with the support and guidance of their own caring families. Floating support offered to young parents in their own tenancies gave more stable young women a degree of independence and privacy that they appreciated. Young women needing the most intensive levels of support require help to move on from the relative security of a closely supervised setting to more independent living.

63. The evaluation of the Teenage Parent Supported Housing Pilot will provide valuable information on the range of supported housing that helps young parents re-engage with education and build a better life for their babies.

<sup>44</sup> This information was not always divulged to researchers by the girls themselves.

<sup>45</sup> Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 states that the local authority has an obligation to safeguard and promote the child's welfare... by providing him (sic) with or maintaining him in suitable accommodation. Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (Chapter 35). The Stationery Office, London.

<sup>46</sup> Brown, G (2009) Gordon Brown's speech to Labour conference (Website: updated 10 February 2010) Available at: [www.labour.org.uk/gordon-brown-speech-conference](http://www.labour.org.uk/gordon-brown-speech-conference) (Accessed 10 February 2010).

## A case study – Lydia

### Difficult family relationships and a lack of support

When researchers met Lydia at a specialist prenatal group, she was 18 years old and seven months pregnant. Lydia had lots of family arguments and hated school like most of the other girls in the group. She had a bad reputation at school because, she claimed, the school had ‘tarred her with the same brush’ as her older, badly behaved sister. She argued with the school over this and her attendance was poor.

An older half-sister had recently had a baby and was being supported by her mother. When Lydia became pregnant the stress on the family was too much and her parents were angry. She waited ‘until dad was in the bookies’ before telling him what had happened because she was scared there would be a scene.

Workers at Paisley Threads explained that financial worries about a new baby often affected family relationships, but with the right advice about benefits this anxiety could be helped. Because her parents would not accommodate her, Lydia needed help with housing.

Lydia was planning to return to college to take hairdressing qualifications. Family members were not prepared to help with childcare, but workers at Paisley Threads helped her to find a nursery that she liked, as well as finding suitable housing for her and her baby.

### Transport

**‘Transport and nursery [are] the two main factors to help engagement.’**

Manager, local authority PRU in the West Midlands

64. Teenage mothers often complained that public transport was expensive and the local infrastructure inadequate. Bus drivers usually need to limit the numbers of buggies allowed on the bus and this causes problems when travelling to and from nursery, for example.<sup>47</sup> Most Barnardo’s services helped with providing or funding transport for the young women and their babies, recognising that otherwise it would likely result in non-attendance. For example, girls in Rowan PRU were

able to take a taxi to the unit from when they were eight months pregnant. This was felt to be worth the expense because workers knew from experience that **‘poor attenders will not come on buses’.**

### Financial barriers

#### Benefits to meet living costs

65. All of the young mothers interviewed for this research were on benefits, such as Job Seekers’ Allowance or Income Support, to support them and their babies. There was evidence that some were struggling to make ends meet and most of the young women felt that the benefits they received were not enough to live on.

<sup>47</sup> One bus company provides a two-page leaflet on the do’s and don’ts of bringing a buggy on the bus, including prohibiting larger types of buggy such as three-wheelers, in-line twin buggies and lie-flat buggies. Other companies are more accommodating and say: ‘You will only be refused admittance when it is absolutely necessary.’

## Living in poverty

A 16-year-old with one child will get £141.06 in benefits. Someone aged 18 to 24 with one child will get £151.41. The poverty line is £177 (60 per cent of median income) for one adult with one child under 14. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has calculated a minimum but acceptable income for a lone parent with one child is £221 per week. (All figures per week after housing costs.)<sup>48</sup>

66. Consistent with other research and contrary to received opinion, most of the young women we interviewed knew little about the benefits they were entitled to, not claiming as much as they could and often unable to complete the paperwork without adult assistance.<sup>49</sup> A girl at Paisley Threads said: **‘Nobody tells you about it; if they hadn’t done it here, I would have missed out.’** A worker at the same service said: **‘Many don’t know they can get Healthy Start Vouchers.’** A Connexions worker in the Midlands confirmed: **‘They are often not receiving the correct benefits.’**

67. Benefits advice was provided by a range of workers, including Barnardo’s project staff, midwives, health visitors, Sure Start workers, Job Centre Plus and Connexions workers. Some workers saw the young women’s need to find out about benefits as a way of establishing a good working relationship, **‘a good conversational opener’** and **‘a hook’** to get the girls interested in other aspects of provision, such as training opportunities and parenting courses.

68. Girls who received benefits advice and help with budgeting were generally managing better financially and had heard about the other opportunities available to them such as children’s centres and training courses.

69. Natasha in Belfast and Bridget in Paisley learnt that Working Tax Credit was an additional benefit they could claim if they worked 16 hours a week, which motivated them to look for jobs with cleaning agencies. Ella and Chloe in Wakefield were positive about the advice they had received from a specialist Job Centre Plus worker, who showed them how they would be better off going to work and studying rather than, as Chloe put it, **‘sat at home doing nowt’.** They had made the most of every opportunity for work and study, with Ella balancing degree-level study in social work with working as a hospital care assistant.

70. However, benefits eligibility could pose an obstacle to returning to education or taking a job. One of the young women the researchers met in Wales said: **‘You are not better off when you are working. You have to pay rent if you’re working.’** Some needed encouragement from project workers to understand that although income from employment could initially be lower than benefits, in the long term it would be worth getting a foot on the employment ladder. There were issues about living with partners and continuing to claim benefits. There was some evidence that this situation discouraged couples from living together.

<sup>48</sup> Hirsch, D, Davis, A and Smith N, (2009) *A minimum income standard for Britain in 2009*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

<sup>49</sup> Higginbottom, GMA et al (2006) Young people of minority ethnic origin in England and early parenthood: Views from young parents and service providers. In: *Social Science and Medicine*, 63 (4) pp.858-870. Elsevier, Oxford; Dench, Bellis and Tuohy (2007).

### Education Maintenance Allowance

71. Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is available in all four nations of the UK on a means-tested basis. It provides up to £30 per week for young people aged 16 to 18, intended as an incentive to continue in education or training. The EMA was valued by young mothers but a number of difficulties were highlighted by them and Barnardo's project workers.

72. One day's absence from a course in a week results in the loss of the whole week's allowance. Young mothers are more likely to take time off because of baby illnesses, frequent health care appointments and difficulties in finding emergency childcare. Services catering for teenage mothers worked flexibly to ensure the young mothers were not disadvantaged in this way. At Rowan PRU, nursery workers would care for an ill baby separately from the others, and certificates were given for good attendance. At Batmans Hill PRU in the West Midlands, a health visitor attended the service for immunisations and baby check-ups, thereby reducing the need for the girls to go elsewhere for health appointments.

73. Young people need to provide full details of household income and have a bank account for the EMA to be paid into, in order to be eligible for EMA. This causes problems for some. Banks vary in what they are prepared to offer disadvantaged young people, often requiring detailed evidence of identity and address before they will open an account. This can prove an obstacle for young people with chaotic lifestyles, particularly if their housing situation is insecure.

74. The upper age limit of 18 years for accessing EMA excludes teenage mothers who take some time off after the birth of their baby, before returning to education or training, as many do. This means that EMA support may not continue for the full duration of their course.

75. A similar issue was noted with the Adult Learning Grant (ALG) in England, available to support learners over the age of 19 who are studying for more than 12 hours per week for a level 2 or level 3 qualification.<sup>50</sup> Older teenage mothers interviewed in this research had fallen behind in their studies so were not yet able to progress to a level 2 or 3 qualification, even though they wanted to return to college, aged 19. ALG is not available to young people on Job Seekers' Allowance or Income Support.

### Childcare benefits

#### England

76. Care to Learn is a benefit available for young parents returning to education or training up to the age of 20, and paid directly to registered childcare providers. Childcare can be funded for up to £175 per week in London and £160 elsewhere. It is a flexible benefit which can be used for any registered course, including tasters and parenting classes. Young mothers usually needed help in making the application and if they were taking a few short courses, the process had to be repeated. But some had found it very helpful in getting back to education or training, perhaps in small steps.

77. The national evaluation of Care to Learn found it was a significant

enabler for re-engagement. Funding for childcare allowed young mothers to complete courses, attend long-term courses and gain qualifications. Seventy-five per cent of young parents surveyed in the evaluation felt that they could not have enrolled in a course without Care to Learn paying for childcare.<sup>51</sup> However, many young women had not heard of Care to Learn and some young parents were put off by the application process.<sup>52</sup>

78. Concerns were also raised about the eligibility cut-off age for Care to Learn being 20 years old, which can often be the point when young mothers feel ready to go back to education.<sup>53</sup> Barnardo's project workers in Blackpool were worried that if young people didn't go back to college at that point, it was unlikely they ever would.

#### Scotland

79. Barnardo's Scotland staff successfully applied to Paisley Partnership Regeneration Company for funding from the Fairer Scotland Fund (FSF) to support young mothers to return to education and training. It provided flexible support which could be used to help with childcare.

#### Wales

80. There appeared to be no funding available to pay for childcare costs to help teenage mothers in Wales return to education or training. Without this support, young mothers in Wales who took part in this research appeared to

be a more vulnerable group and were less motivated to return to education or training than those in England and Scotland. Researchers sensed that some girls had resigned themselves to a life on benefits even though they clearly found these difficult to manage on. A manager told us:

**'It's difficult with childcare. This is sometimes funded through the local authority or Barnardo's. Some places will have crèches, but there is no system where childcare is automatically funded for young people to return to education, which is a major barrier.'**

### Northern Ireland

81. Northern Ireland had a well-managed system for supporting school-aged mothers in education through the use of funded childcare: the School Aged Mothers' (SAMs) programme. Each pregnant teenager was treated as a child in need by the local authority.<sup>54</sup> Childcare with a registered provider was then funded by the Department of Education.

82. One difficulty observed at SAMs occurred when young women moved on to further education or university, as several did. Although young mothers enrolled in higher education courses can claim the student support grant for childcare (Childcare Grant), there is no support between finishing school in June and starting college in October. This means that trusted childminders and familiar nursery places may be lost as they cannot be paid for during the summer break.

<sup>50</sup> A level 2 qualification is equivalent to a GCSE at grade A\* to C. The young parents interviewed for this research often needed to take a level 1 course first, such as Entry to Employment (E2E), a parenting course or NVQ Level 1.

<sup>51</sup> Franceschelli, M, Sims, L and Singler, R (2008) *Impact of Care to Learn: Tracking the destinations of young parents funded in 2006-07*. Centre for Economics and Social Inclusion, London.

<sup>52</sup> Dench, S (2007) *Learning provision for young parents: A survey of learning providers*. Report 440, Institute of employment studies, University of Sussex, Brighton.

<sup>53</sup> Dench, Bellis and Tuohy (2007).

<sup>54</sup> Department of Health, DCSF and Home Office (2000) *Framework for the assessment of children in need and their families*. The Stationery Office, London.

## Section three: Conclusions and recommendations

### End of the story – or a turning point for the better?

‘For many young mothers, having a child can be a chance to turn their lives around (increase aspirations and independence, rather than dependence).’<sup>55</sup>

83. While many of the young women we met in this research were struggling and experienced complex challenges, others, with the right support, had overcome the barriers they faced and were keen to do the best for themselves and their babies.

84. Pregnancy can provide a stimulus to get to grips with unhealthy habits<sup>56</sup> and several young mothers told us that since becoming pregnant, they had given up alcohol, cigarettes and cannabis, although some still smoked. Louise was trying to give up cannabis but found it a challenge:

**‘I got to go for drug counselling for weed. I’ve taken it for too long. But there is no excuse for it either. But at the time I started [aged 9] I was just one person.’**

85. Other research has found that pregnancy can lead to increased aspirations, as young women want to provide a better life for their child – increasing the importance they attach to finding a well paid job and to gaining the necessary qualifications to make that possible.<sup>57</sup> Many of the young women interviewed for this research said they wanted a better life for their babies than they had experienced and

recognised their role in making the right choices to sustain this ambition for their babies.

86. However, as we have seen in this report, teenage mothers need a range of support to enable them to return to education. Access to the right benefits and suitable housing for girls who have had to move out of the family home are essential prerequisites. Help with transport is also important, but most of all, young women need to be able to access suitable childcare, which they feel confident about using.

### Recommendations

87. This research identified a number of policy changes which are needed to support and facilitate teenage mothers’ return to education or training. In some cases, they refer only to new legal requirements in England; in others they apply more broadly across the UK, especially where teenage mothers need more support to take part in education and training.

#### Recommendation 1: Assessing needs and targeting support

88. Some teenage mothers are isolated and vulnerable, while others are well supported by their family and local services, but all face extra challenges compared with their peers. In Northern Ireland, the SAMs programme assesses all teenage mothers as ‘children in need’, enabling them to access funded childcare to continue their education and identifying specific support and learning needs.

89. Based on the approach used in Northern Ireland, Barnardo’s recommends carrying out an assessment using the Common Assessment Framework in England and Wales (CAF) or equivalent<sup>58</sup> for all mothers under 18 when they first book-in with a midwife. This should provide for:

- access to a lead professional to coordinate support and review progress
- an opportunity to discuss additional needs in confidence
- a range of support, including childcare, to meet their assessed needs
- a focus on their educational needs, using the new learning and support agreements (LSA)<sup>59</sup> to be introduced in England<sup>60</sup> for vulnerable young people to plan and tailor their transition back into learning and employment.

90. In England, where the new requirement to participate in education until 18 will apply from 2015, Barnardo’s recommends that DCSF guidance to local authorities on re-engaging young people who are not in education or training should incorporate a requirement for a CAF and LSA to support teenage mothers’ re-engagement.

#### Recommendation 2: Suitable childcare

91. Fears about the quality, cost and availability of childcare were major barriers to returning to education or

seeking work for the young women in our study. In Wales, where there is no publicly-funded childcare, young mothers appeared the most resigned to their lack of prospects. Elsewhere in the UK, many young women wanted to go on to college but had to wait until their baby was old enough to be accepted in the college nursery, typically aged two.

92. Suitable childcare was the single most important influence on young mothers’ decision (and ability) to return to education. Teenage mothers need childcare which is:

- publicly funded, e.g. by Care to Learn (England), by the Fairer Scotland Fund through Community Planning Partnerships (Scotland) or the SAMs programme (Northern Ireland)
- available to all teenage mothers as a clear and consistent entitlement, in the same way that university students in all four nations are entitled to support through the Childcare Grant<sup>61</sup>
- on-site or nearby
- welcoming, supportive and non-stigmatising to teenagers
- open to babies and not just two-year olds.

93. In England suitable childcare provision for babies under two must be expanded in time for the implementation of a new requirement to stay on in education or training from 2013-15. This new duty for 16 and 17-year-olds means that a possible extra 40,000<sup>62</sup> children under two will need

<sup>58</sup> The Integrated Assessment Framework in Scotland, and Understanding the needs of children in Northern Ireland (UNOCINI) Assessment Framework, in Northern Ireland.

<sup>59</sup> ‘These can bring together in one place the young person’s learning goals, how these can be met, the contribution of the different agencies involved and the actions the young person will undertake.’ DCSF (2009b) *Raising the participation age: Supporting local areas to deliver*. DCSF Publications, Nottingham.

<sup>60</sup> Through the Education and Skills Act 2008 (Ch 25), OPSI.

<sup>61</sup> Direct.gov (2010) *Childcare Grant and other help for students with children* (Website: updated 10 February 2010) Available at: [www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Extrahelp/DG\\_171503](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Extrahelp/DG_171503) (Accessed 10 February 2010).

<sup>62</sup> Based on a figure of 20,000 births to this age group annually. ONS and Teenage Pregnancy Unit (2009).

<sup>55</sup> Wilson and Huntington (2005).

<sup>56</sup> Morrison (2009).

<sup>57</sup> Dench, Bellis and Tuohy (2007); Hosie (2007).



childcare when their teenage mothers return to education or training. Childcare for infants under two costs more due to higher staffing ratios.<sup>63</sup>

94. Preparations must be made to resource a greater uptake of Care to Learn, which covers up to £160 of weekly childcare costs for young mothers returning to education.

### **Recommendation 3: Unofficial exclusions**

95. Longstanding and updated guidance from DCSF and DH<sup>64</sup> states that girls should not be excluded from school on the grounds of pregnancy or for alleged health and safety reasons. However, researchers met numerous young women who had effectively been excluded from school for becoming pregnant. These were not registered as exclusions and a wide range of reasons – often around health and safety and supposed concern for the girl’s welfare – were used as a pretext for suggesting that girls no longer come to school. There are no grounds for this. Certification that a young person is not fit to attend school should come from medical professionals only. The reasons why a young person is not attending school should always be recorded, and if exclusion is thought necessary (normally on grounds of disruptive behaviour) the proper legal processes should be followed.

96. Very few girls under 16 have babies.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, it is understandable

that some schools may consider this an exceptional event which they struggle to deal with. However, schools should be strongly encouraged by local authority inclusion officers to offer pregnant teenagers and young mothers under 16 the education to which they are entitled to by law. If necessary, ‘reasonable adjustments’ should be made, as they are for disabled students; this might include adapting uniform regulations. At a national level, DCSF should fund research to identify models of best practice to share with schools.

97. Barnardo’s is currently undertaking research on school exclusions. Unofficial or ‘grey’ exclusions such as those experienced by teenage mothers will form part of the investigation.

### **Recommendation 4: Financial incentives and support for re-engagement**

#### **EMA**

98. Financial incentives are an effective way of encouraging young people to return to education or training. However, for the most disrupted and chaotic young people, the EMA appears to have a built-in disincentive: if a young person misses one day of education, a whole week’s EMA is deducted. Teenage mothers are especially at risk of this penalty as their health is often poor and babies may have frequent colds. They also need to make regular clinic visits for essential health checks and immunisations.

99. As for all young people at risk of being NEET, Barnardo’s recommends that EMA is paid for each day of attendance at a place of learning and deducted for each day they miss without reasonable excuse.

### **Adult Learning Grant in England**

100. This means-tested grant is currently only available to students over 19 years old starting level 2 or 3 qualifications. Other grants are made available on a discretionary basis only, so may not be available at all. Because of the earlier disruptions to their education, teenage mothers may not be ready for courses higher than level 1, even though they are 19 years or older.

101. Barnardo’s recommends that ALG be available to learners aged 19 or over who want to begin a level 1 qualification. This would allow young people with previously disrupted educations a chance to catch up when they are older.

### **Care to Learn**

102. Evidence from this research and the National Care to Learn Evaluation<sup>66</sup> shows that this is an effective benefit which offers young mothers the chance to continue their education. However, it has also been found that young mothers are rarely ready to continue their education immediately and want to spend time with their babies before re-engaging. By then they may be over 20 years old.

103. Barnardo’s recommends that in England, Care to Learn funding be extended past the age of 20 to help

more young mothers get back into education or training, recognising that they may want to take time out to care for their baby. As noted in Recommendation 2, an increased uptake of Care to Learn must be resourced in time for the new duties for 16 and 17-year-olds to participate in education or training.

104. A benefit in kind similar to Care to Learn should be made available consistently around the UK as is the Childcare Grant for higher education students and EMA for 16 to 18-year-olds.

### **Recommendation 5: Maternity leave**

105. The concept of maternity leave – giving women the right to take time off work to recover from the birth, breastfeed and bond with their baby – does not exist for young women who are 16 to 18 years old.<sup>67</sup> They currently have little choice about when they return to education, if returning is an option at all, given the present variations in support available to re-engage.

106. Under recent legislation,<sup>68</sup> young people in England will be required to stay on in education or training until they are 18. Maternity should not excuse young mothers from participating, but greater clarity is needed regarding how much time young women may take as maternity leave. This should allow for sufficient flexibility to respond to individual needs and circumstances – ideally informed by a CAF, as recommended above.

107. We recommend that DCSF clarifies the expectations about how

<sup>63</sup> Babies under two require a staffing ratio of 1:3 against 1:4 for two-year-olds costing a minimum £5.11 per hour against £4.09 per hour. Daycare Trust (2009) *Quality costs: Paying for high quality early childhood education and care – executive summary* (PDF) Daycare Trust, London. Available at: [www.daycaretrust.org.uk/data/files/Research/quality\\_costs\\_exec\\_summary\\_final2.pdf](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/data/files/Research/quality_costs_exec_summary_final2.pdf) (Accessed 10 February 2010).

<sup>64</sup> DfES (2001); DCSF (2007).

<sup>65</sup> About 1.5 million girls in the UK are aged between 13-16 years; fewer than 12,000 will be mothers; 0.8 per cent of the total cohort. ONS (2008) *Age structure of England and Wales, 2008* (Website: updated 21 October 2009) Available at: [www.statistics.gov.uk/populationestimates/flash\\_pyramid/default.htm](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/populationestimates/flash_pyramid/default.htm) (Accessed 16 February 2010); Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2002).

<sup>66</sup> Franceschelli, Sims and Singler (2008).

<sup>67</sup> School age mothers (under 16) can take 18 weeks under regulation DCSF 2001 06/29. See: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/attendance/pupilregis>

<sup>68</sup> Education and Skills Act 2008 (Ch 25) OPSI.

long 16 and 17-year-old mothers may take as maternity leave from education or training, once the duty to participate comes into effect. This should be informed by research about the options which improve long-term outcomes for babies and their young mothers.

**Recommendation 6: Flexible learning options**

108. As recommended in Barnardo's Second Chances report,<sup>69</sup> flexibly provided courses, with frequent start dates and programmes tailored to learners' needs, help vulnerable young people to settle back into education or training in an unthreatening and timely way. Similarly, for teenage mothers, taster courses, accredited parenting courses<sup>70</sup> and flexible start dates gave previously disengaged young women the confidence and motivation to give education another go.

109. The new Young People's Learning Authority in England and the Skills Funding Agency in Wales, Scotland and NI need to ensure flexibility of funding and appropriate outcomes measures, to allow learning providers to work in ways which encourage disadvantaged learners to participate.

<sup>69</sup> Evans, J et al (2009).

<sup>70</sup> Like Parents with Prospects, Busy Mummy and Young Mums to Be.



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## Appendix: Services involved in the research

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Service, region	What the service provides	No. and age of service users
Blackpool Project North West	<p>The Blackpool Project works with young parents, providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ parenting advice and skills</li> <li>■ information and support</li> <li>■ Parents with Prospects course.</li> </ul> <p>The Blackpool Project also works with and supports parents of five to 17-year-olds who are involved with Blackpool Youth Offending Teams (YOT).</p> <p>Activities and groups are also provided in communities throughout Blackpool for children and young people aged between five and 17 years. A Family Support Team supports children and parents living in Wyre and support is also provided to adults aged over 16 years living in Blackpool to access education, work and volunteering opportunities.</p>	<p>Young parents aged 19 and under.</p> <p>Over the year 2008-09, the project worked with 275 young parents.</p>
Cwrt y Farchnad Cymru/Wales Marlborough Road Young Families	<p>Marlborough Road Young Families provides housing and support for vulnerable young families where the primary carer is aged 16 to 21 years. A project worker works individually with each young family, supporting them to learn the skills to live more independently (such as shopping, budgeting, etc) and to access community activities. Financial assistance for childcare is provided.</p> <p>Younger parents (aged 13 upwards) can attend a regular toddler group.</p>	<p>Young parents aged 16 to 21.</p> <p>In 2007-08 the service worked with about 42 young parents and families.</p>
PACT (Parent and Child Together) Northern Ireland	<p>PACT provides self-contained accommodation, assessment and support to young mothers aged 16 to 24 years, who have a child aged three or under. The aim of the service is to undertake assessment and support where there are serious concerns around the parent's ability to meet their children's needs.</p> <p>Most of the children are on the Child Protection Register and/or subject to court proceedings. PACT offers parenting education and support and aims to enable young women to be able to transfer these skills outside the residential unit to prepare for the transition of living in the community. An aftercare service offers out of hours support to families in the community and in cases where mothers are separated from their children.</p> <p>Referrals come through social services throughout Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>Young women aged 16 to 24 years, who have a child aged three or under.</p> <p>In the 2007-08 period, PACT worked with 22 families.</p>

Service, region	What the service provides	No. and age of service users
Paisley Threads Renfrewshire, Scotland	<p>Paisley Threads supports young people and young parents. The service offers one-to-one information and advice, group work and drop-in for young pregnant women and young parents. Paisley Threads work alongside other agencies to access services for young people. The service is used by vulnerable parents and/or tenants aged 16 to 21 living in the Renfrewshire area.</p> <p>Paisley Threads aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ assist young people to move into affordable, appropriate accommodation through housing support services</li> <li>■ help young parents to access pre and post-natal care. The service runs prenatal and New Baby groups</li> <li>■ increase the employability of young parents and prospective parents by supporting young people to enter employment or further education.</li> </ul>	<p>Young people are aged 16 to 21 years.</p> <p>During 2007-08 478 young people accessed the service at Paisley Threads.</p>
Rowan PRU Yorkshire	<p>The Rowan Centre is a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) that provides education, advice and support to pregnant schoolgirls and teenage parents. The education programme enables young women to continue their education after reaching the school leaving age. Rowan PRU provides an on-site nursery so that mothers can attend lessons while their baby is cared for.</p> <p>Alongside a range of GCSE subjects, Rowan PRU also offers the following education opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rowan is currently in partnership with GROW (Giving Real Opportunities to Women), offering a training package to young parents which then enables them to become Peer Befrienders</li> <li>■ A Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded course to provide training on Parenting and Key Skills to 16 to 19-year-old parents and prospective parents</li> <li>■ The parents with Prospects course for 16 to 18-year-old young parents. This includes parenting skills, key skills and preparation for further education, employment or training.</li> </ul> <p>Alongside the education programme, Rowan PRU offers a package of support to young mothers. Support workers and nursery staff support and advise young women both during and after their pregnancy, and in their role as young mothers to ensure that difficulties are dealt with and that their education is as uninterrupted as possible. This support continues post-16 through outreach and weekly group sessions.</p>	<p>Most young women using the service are aged 15 and 16.</p> <p>Over a year, Rowan PRU work with approx. 62 young mothers.</p>

Service, region	What the service provides	No. and age of service users
School Age Mothers (SAMs) programme Northern Ireland	<p>SAMs is community based and provides education, personal development and antenatal support in order to help young women continue education during and after pregnancy. It offers practical and specific support, e.g. childcare and tuition.</p>	<p>The project works with 13 to 19-year-olds, however the majority are aged 16 to 17 years old.</p> <p>In 2008-09, the project worked with 294 young women, some long term, some were new that year.</p>
Wakefield Young Families Yorkshire	<p>Wakefield Young Families supports pregnant teenagers and young parents up to 19 years old (or up to 25 in cases of complex need) in their own communities. The service provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ individual family support</li> <li>■ help in accessing relevant services</li> <li>■ information, advice and guidance around education, work and training</li> <li>■ midwifery support</li> <li>■ educational and group opportunities</li> <li>■ specialist support to young dads</li> <li>■ supported housing service.</li> </ul>	<p>Young people under 19 years old, or up to age 25 if there is complex need.</p> <p>In 2008, the service worked with 240 young parents or prospective parents.</p>
Batmans Hill PRU, Sandwell Local Authority West Midlands	<p>Batmans Hill is a Pupil Referral Unit in the borough of Sandwell. It provides education and holistic support for young mothers up to age 20. The unit also provides education for young parents of statutory school age in the borough and short activities for young people from other boroughs such as antenatal classes. There is an on-site nursery at the unit.</p>	<p>Works with young people up to age 20, majority are between 16 and 20 years old.</p>

*Not the end of the story:  
Supporting teenage mothers  
back into education*

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