

Executive Summary- UnitingCare Tasmania Family Futures Program

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In 2010, UnitingCare Tasmania commissioned an eighteen month evaluation of its Newpin Outreach Program and the Pregnant and Young Parent Support Service (referred to as PYPS in this report).

The Newpin Outreach Program is a home visiting early intervention program for families with child protection issues. Workers and members focus on an individual's strengths to find the best solution for dealing with challenging child protection situations. It is a therapeutic program that enhances attachment and emotional connection within the family and increases a parent's knowledge about their child's needs.

Newpin aims to:

- Prevent child abuse with particular focus on emotional abuse and neglect
- Reduce the impact of family violence
- Encourage self-help and lasting change
- Inspire good parenting and encourage the valuing of positive parent/child relationships
- Raise the self-esteem of every individual
- Break the cyclical effect of destructive and negative family patterns.

PYPS is an information and support programs for young parents and young pregnant women under the age of 25. PYPS is a resource that assists young parents in preparing for the birth of their child and meeting the new demands of being a new parent.

The PYPS Program aims to:

- Support young mothers through pregnancy
- Reduce the impact of family violence
- Reduce the isolation of young parents
- Support young parents to be the best parent they can
- Inspire good parenting and encourage the valuing of positive parent/child relationships
- Raise the self-esteem of every individual.

The PYPS and Newpin Outreach Programs work hard to transform the parenting experience of their families. This transformation involves influencing the parent's ideas, impacting on the meaning they attach to being a parent, increasing the positive feelings associated with parenting and practicing actions that care and nurture their children.

The SE or SW Gateway Services are the referral pathway for PYPS and Newpin Outreach Programs and act as the hub to allocate family services to vulnerable children, young people and their families to protect and promote their healthy development. Families requiring these services often have complex needs which can adversely impact on a child's development if appropriate supports and interventions are not provided in a timely manner.

Over the past decade, Newpin has been developed in Australia as a new transformative child protection program that maximises service user participation and ownership of the change process within a strong child attachment focus. The development of the Newpin Program as an outreach approach is cutting edge practice and a world first trial. The development of these programs has occurred at the same time as the trialing of a new child protection system in Tasmania and implementation of the Gateway allocation model.

Due to all these changes occurring, the evaluation of the Family Futures Programs meant that it took considerable time for other professionals to be acquainted and familiar with the Newpin Outreach and PYPS Program models. It also meant a slow uptake of service users into the system and the challenge of training new staff in unfamiliar models as well as embracing broader sector changes.

Fifty seven families were referred to either the Newpin Outreach or PYPS Programs between November 2010 and January 2012 with 21 people consenting to be part of the evaluation (37%). A variety of quantitative and qualitative measures were used to assess changes within service users and the impact of the program. The best research analysis tools were used to gather the most informed results using SPSS and NVivo computer software packages. Service users were interviewed every three months and internal and external staff were interviewed every 6-months.

Some of the limitations of this evaluation were:

- Of the 57 families that accessed either program, only 13 Newpin families and 8 PYPS families were actively part of this project.
- Of the families actively involved, the 3-monthly collection of data was only successful 42% of occasions.
- The low amount of collection of data had a negative impact on the use of quantitative measures as there was insufficient amount of data samples.
- Change within children was not measured as it was beyond the scope of this evaluation.
- Most of the families who disengaged early in their involvement with either program were not involved in this evaluation.

The evaluation found the programs met their key performance indicators for:

Program access

- In 2011, the Newpin Outreach Program and PYPS Program achieved its combined Department of Health & Human Services contract goal by working with at least 50 families in a 12-month period across the SW and SE regions of Hobart.
- Service users were linked well to other programs - 76% of Newpin Outreach or PYPS families were referred to three or more other services during their program involvement.
- The families involved with this evaluation had moderate-high levels of satisfaction in either the Newpin Outreach or PYPS Programs.

Program effectiveness in supporting child development

- 64% of the comments made by external staff recognised that the Newpin Outreach Program and PYPS Program as being positive or excellent.
- 46% of parents involved in the PYPS Program recognised that their understanding of their children's needs somewhat improved.

Program effectiveness in family functioning

- A Wilcoxon signed rank test indicated that Newpin clients' Strengths and Protective factors ratings were significantly higher in T4 than T1, $T=15.00$, $z=.043$. These results suggest that the PYPs and Newpin Outreach Programs increase the Strengths and Protective factors rating of clients when they participate in the program for at least 12 months.
- Even though the measurement of this strengths assessment is using the staff's perspective it does provide a strong indicator that there has been a significant improvement in family functioning.
- Seventy three percent of Newpin Outreach Program service users identified that involvement in the program was very valuable for increasing their parenting skills.
- Eighty seven percent of parents identified that involvement in the program significantly helped them to better support their child.

Summary for program functioning during 2011

- The Newpin Outreach Program is a transformative program that enables parents to make significant changes that affect the way they view themselves, their children, support services and how they deal with the challenges they face.
- The PYPs Program is recognised by service users, internal and external staff as providing a unique and important service for young parents. This results in the program being good at engagement, responsive, individually tailored, able to manage crises (such as lack of accommodation and domestic violence issues) and communicate effectively with young people using the latest technology.
- The evaluation has identified that the poor feedback of the Newpin Outreach Program in the SW region was due to management issues and poor communication with the Gateway Service and other key stakeholders.
- Newpin's contribution as a transformative program in the children protection system is vital and effective when managed well.
- Both The Newpin Outreach and PYPs Programs have improved in their integration with other services. Both programs complement other approaches to providing family support and child protection services and it is vital that both programs remain as options at the SE and SW Gateway Services and their allocation tables.

The significant issue that arose in this evaluation was the difference in experiences between the two Gateway Services and how they viewed the Newpin Outreach Program. This evaluation concludes that the concern about the program is largely based on misunderstandings as program staff attempted to implement a new program in a new context within Australia. The confused messages the Gateway received meant that they were cautious to refer families and had significant questions about the usefulness of a therapeutic program at the allocation table. The management changes in December 2011 have largely addressed many of these concerns, however it will take a longer period to rebuild trust and confidence between the organisations.

Both the Newpin Outreach and PYPS Programs are unique programs that creatively respond to the needs of different vulnerable families. The Newpin Outreach program works best when service users identify the program as an opportunity to grow, develop and improve their parenting relationship.

Key Recommendations

1. The Newpin Outreach Program is refunded as it is receiving very positive feedback from most of its service users in this evaluation and it is still trialing and developing its unique and transformative way of working with vulnerable communities.
2. The PYPS Program is refunded as it is still trialing and developing its unique and important way of engaging young parents.
3. Both the PYPS and Newpin programs remain in the Gateway Services network as the best integrated way to ensure that vulnerable children, young people and their families are effectively linked into relevant services. This appears to be the best way to remain funded as an early intervention child protection service in Tasmania.
4. The other operational and management policies as outlined in this evaluation report are implemented.