

# Pregnant & Parenting Students Program

by Tracey Gude & Corinne Harper



Tracey Gude

Pregnant and parenting students have a need for security, consistency, inclusion, social recognition and a sense of belonging. **Tracey Gude** and **Corinne Harper** – Youth Workers with the *Pregnant & Parenting Program* – lead the way with schools to model appropriate behaviour that promotes social cohesion, an environment free from all forms of discrimination and harassment, and a sense of community. This allows pregnant and parenting students to feel accepted, respected and proud of their right to their education.



Corinne Harper

Tracey's background in nursing and Corinne's background in working for Education in Victoria provides the knowledge needed to support students who are pregnant or parenting.

The *Pregnant & Parenting Program* in Moreton Region was established in 2004 as an initiative of the Learning or Earning Reforms. It promotes educational settings that welcome and support pregnant and parenting students, and establishes a district support system to address the needs of these students. The program encourages and supports students to remain in the educational setting of their choice. Initiatives such as the *Pregnant & Parenting Program* will ensure support mechanisms are in place that will allow all young people to participate in education and training regardless of their circumstances.

## Education Queensland Moreton Region

In 2003 Redbank Plains State High School responded to the needs of parents and students and created an innovative program to assist pregnant students and young parents to complete their education and support their individual needs as parents.

**“Completing secondary education is a challenge. Achieving this milestone whilst also pregnant or parenting a child presents a raft of challenges.”**

Mark Breckenridge – Principal, Redbank Plains SHS

The program has supported 21 schools with over 185 students fostering and developing relationships **with schools to model appropriate behaviour and promote an environment that is free from all forms of unlawful discrimination and harassment which allows these students to feel accepted, respected and proud of their right to their education.** (Inclusive Education Statement – 2005.)



## Increase participation rate of pregnant and parenting students in education, training or work

District Officers Tracey Gude and Corinne Harper work closely with local agencies that work with young people. It is essential to gain referrals from the wider community who has a common goal of getting our young pregnant or parenting students to return to education, training or work.

## Support pregnant and parenting students to complete education to senior level/Certificate 2 or successful transition to work, university or TAFE

Each school provides a range of flexible pathways and alternatives for learning designed to support the individual needs and achievements of students. A student's timetable may range from attending school for six hours a week studying Literacy and Numeracy or full-time, depending on the needs and circumstances of the student.

Tracey and Corinne lead case management meetings with staff, Student Support Services and other interested parties in developing a study program that is manageable for the student.

They continue supporting this student to obtain their goals by weekly/fortnightly visits to the school. Building strong, trusting relationships with students is vital in assisting students in times of stress and difficult situations. Tracey and Corinne make themselves available for one-on-one sessions to assess and assist with weekly difficulties, including school timetable, bullying, doctor/hospital appointments and encouragement. This helps keeps them focused on their educational goals and not be distracted by their personal issues, thus leaving school before they complete their QCE in Year 12.

Pregnant and parenting students in Special Education Units that participate in organised workshops or activities can benefit by having their participation documented in their work programs, allowing for positive outcomes in their achievements. Referrals from the *Pregnant & Parenting Program* link students to other government and community organisations to assist them in overcoming the many barriers pregnant and parenting students face, such as homelessness. This co-ordinated approach prevents students at risk slipping between the responsibilities of different departments. As a result of this support, students are more equipped to complete their education and remain in contact with essential support services.



“Without this support the female students would mostly simply not be able to maintain or complete their schooling. The *Pregnant & Parenting Program* is undoubtedly promoting an educational setting that welcomes and supports pregnant and parenting students.”

Frances Orford – Head of Special Education Services  
(English as a Second Language), Yeronga State High School

### Establish whole-of-district support systems to address the needs of students who are pregnant or parenting

Tracey and Corinne regularly attend inter-agency networks, allowing staff to remain up-to-date with current local action to ensure appropriate and trusted referral for students.

Community collaboration has benefited the program on many occasions and led to the development of the *Pregnant & Parenting Students Volunteer Program*. This strong school-community partnership relies on the ongoing support of Springfield Oasis Community and Yeronga Baptist Church.

These local church communities have established a *Pregnant & Parenting Students Donation Scheme* whereby its members are able to supply necessary baby items on a regular basis. The volunteers deliver these items to the students on the scheduled social gatherings such as afternoon teas, pamper days, craft/referral days and end-of-year celebrations hosted by the District Officers. These friendly volunteers continue supporting and mentoring the pregnant and parenting students once the student has completed their education.

“I would like to give my unequivocal support for the continuation of your program, as pregnant and parenting young people in Ipswich/Moreton Region

have limited opportunities to access supports and services that are targeted at their specific needs.”

Leanne Richardson – Manager, Department of Child Safety

### Improve service delivery and support for pregnant and parenting students

The many gatherings led by the *Pregnant & Parenting Program* District Officers provide referral opportunities and are an ideal way of encouraging and reinforcing student organisational skills and networking opportunities with ease, pride, trust and enjoyment. Another major benefit is the rewarding experience students have when listening to guest speakers such as Mayoress Lisa Newman, Councillor Les Bryant, Mayor Paul Pisasale and Child Protection Senior Detective Charyse Pond speaking respectfully and encouragingly to both young women and men.

Donations from the local community assist students with the associated costs of being a student, such as uniforms, books, travel cards and school fees. When financial hardship is the reason, these funds contribute to the costs of re-engaging/remaining in school. Financial support has come from Inala Youth and Family Support Service, Yeronga Baptist, Goodna RSL, Ipswich City Council, Richlands Ward Office, Mayoress Lisa Campbell and Ipswich SHS P&C, Redbank Plaza.

By working together within these community partnerships, District Officers are able to address problems and provide assistance in all aspects of personal, health and social well-being needs for the students. By alleviating these concerns the students have an improved concentration and are able to allow school staff to focus on education and vocational outcomes.

### Improve students' parenting skills and their ability to balance family and education or work

Peer mentoring opportunities such as afternoon teas create friendships and informal support networks. These gatherings and conversations lead to improved outcomes for the students.

In collaboration with Queensland Health, Young People's Health, Mission Australia, Child Protection Unit, Child Safety and Family Planning, the very successful program called *Me & My Baby Workshop* was created for the pregnant and parenting students.



The topics covered in this workshop are as follows:

- What to expect when you take your baby home from hospital.
- Crying Baby – how to settle your baby.
- Common Coughs & Colds – when to call a doctor.
- Attachment – mother and baby.
- Safe Relationships – creating a safe environment for your baby.
- Secret Women's Business – what is never discussed after giving birth.

“I was able to play a small part in setting up the original model at Redbank Plains State High School some years ago, but I did not think then that the program would prove so successful in changing the lives and educational outcomes of so many young adults.”

Simon Riley – Principal, Ipswich State High School

### Promote educational settings that welcome and support pregnant and parenting students

The *Pregnant & Parenting Program* District Officers lead the way in ensuring that schools practice and promote Education Queensland Inclusive Policy to retain pregnant and parenting students in education and that all students, staff, parents and caregivers are familiar with this policy. This is done by providing information to students, parents, staff and school communities, informing staff of new policy and good practice by attending school staff meetings and speaking publicly when possible.

The *Pregnant & Parenting Program* is easily transferable over 21 Moreton schools and two Central schools. All these schools have an Equity Strategy for at-risk groups, in which pregnant and parenting students reside. Within this target group 21 students are English as Second Language (ESL) students. These educational settings are flexible and accommodate differences in individual school approaches. The differing purposes, needs and learning cultures of schools are recognised when supporting these students

and schools.

The program is actively promoted via public displays, newsletters and media releases. In addition there are annual mail-outs to principals, School Based Youth Health Nurses (SBYHN), Guidance Officers and related government and community organisations.

This model of support is far more sustainable and cost effective per student than other models promoted in Australia. This is due to many factors including:

- Students are able to attend school of choice, usually closest to home, which includes their already established support networks.
- One-on-one support from the District Officer and immediate referral to support services. Issues are identified earlier and support given before students abandon their education.
- For an annual investment of \$60,000 an overall average of 36 students per year in 21 schools participate or complete their education or training.

*Tracey and Corinne – State winners for Education Queensland Showcase in Leadership*

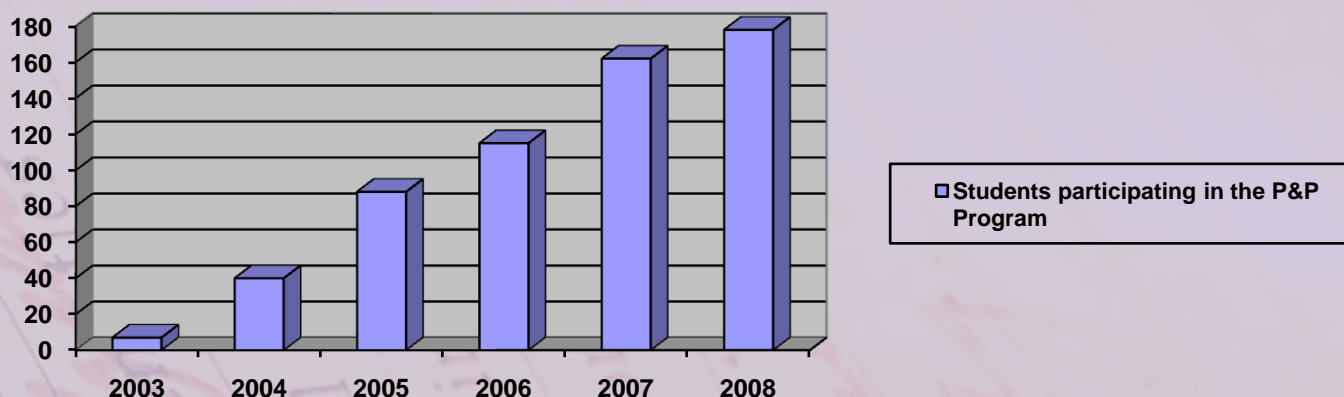


As a result of this cumulative data we are able to determine a retention rate of 73.36%.

Pregnant students and young mothers completing Year 12 have increased over 350% since the commencement of the *Pregnant &*

*Parenting Program* in 2003.

These figures reflect the improvement of service delivery and support for pregnant and parenting students.



“Nearly all of the girls supported at Yeronga State High School are of a refugee background. They have arrived in Australia recently and sometimes have no surviving family to help them. Others culturally are rejected by their families and the wider community because of their pregnancy. Without the support of the *Pregnant & Parenting Program* they would be struggling to cope alone. Many have had little prior education in Africa, are only beginning to learn English and about our cultural norms; they frequently understand little about their bodies, the changes that occur in pregnancy or how to best self-care during this crucial period. Likewise they have no knowledge about birth or child-rearing. It is a most important service that is provided on this level through the *Pregnant & Parenting Program*. Arguably, in fact, the most significant input that this service provides at Yeronga is to improve students' parenting skills and their ability to balance family and education or work.”

Frances Orford – Yeronga State High School  
ESL Head of Department

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