

March 2014

THRIVE TEEN PARENT
SUPPORT TRUST

THRIVE ANTENATAL CLASSES IMPACT PROFILES

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THRIVE ANTENATAL CLASSES IMPACT PROFILES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In New Zealand, there are between 4000-5000 babies born to young mothers under 20 years of age each year. The birth rate for young mothers (aged <20) has stayed relatively stable since the mid 1990's, although in 2012 there was a drop in birth rates *across all ages*, including young mothers (aged <20) which dropped slightly. There is much evidence to suggest that the factors associated with young parenthood (e.g. unplanned pregnancy, low income and inadequate support) can lead to lifelong negative impacts (Ministry of Social Development, 2008).

In New Zealand, there are currently a number of government and community initiatives aimed at increasing support for young parents and their children. One of these is the Thrive Teen Parent Support Trust (Thrive), which is a non-profit organisation that supports young people to thrive and be confident as parents in order to create positive outcomes for themselves, their children and their wider whānau.

This research, which has been commissioned by Thrive as part of their on-going commitment to developing whānau-centred support services and initiatives, aims to articulate the impact of the Thrive antenatal classes on young parents and their family and whānau.

Data was collected via a series of one-on-one interviews, either in person or by telephone.

The interviews are presented in the document as impact profiles.

Eight impact profiles were constructed for this report, and were used to distil critical factors for success. Several factors were identified. These are:

- Making pregnancy and parenthood a positive experience for young parents.
- Giving balanced information which helped participants make informed choices and feel empowered around decisions about their labour and birth.
- Tutors who are caring, compassionate and respectful, and who are informative and accessible.
- Offering additional support, such as baby clothes or other baby needs.
- Adopting a learning style tailored to young adults.
- Providing transport to and from class.

Acknowledgements

We wish to sincerely thank all of the young parents who contributed to this research.

Special thanks to Thrive for their assistance with this project.

Disclaimer

All findings and conclusions are those of the author and are not to be attributed to Thrive.

INTRODUCTION

Thrive Teen Parent Support Trust ('Thrive') is a non-profit organisation which supports young people to thrive and be confident as parents. The Trust was set up in 2010 in response to an 18 month-long collaborative community research project which called for a dedicated young parent service in Auckland. Thrive uses a youth developmental approach to attain its vision that young parents are able to reach their full potential by being connected and secure within their families and communities.

The purpose of Thrive is to support young parents to create positive outcomes for themselves, their children and wider whānau by:

- Working with young parents, their families and whānau to provide accessible services, resources and opportunities that promote positive outcomes and well-being;
- Providing leadership opportunities for young mothers, young fathers and wider family members;
- Facilitating connectedness by creating youth friendly, supportive environments;
- Developing initiatives for the children of young parents to promote healthy child development and positive parent-child relationships;
- Providing forums and network opportunities to promote collaboration, sector leadership, training and advocacy;
- Undertaking research and evaluation to ensure that Thrive's initiatives are effective, of high quality, and add to the body of New Zealand literature.

The Thrive antenatal programme is designed specifically for young-parents-to-be. Facilitated by a qualified Child Birth Educator, the classes provide information on pregnancy, labour and post-birth. Classes are for young expectant parents under the age of 20 years participants are welcome to bring a support person.

Antenatal programmes are intended to provide expectant parents with information on labour and birth, as well as covering some aspects of infant care and parenting. Research has found that when antenatal education programs are based on adult education principles and employ innovative strategies, women

experience increased satisfaction with their birth and new parenting experiences.¹

This research is aimed at understanding the quality of the Thrive antenatal programme, in particular the impact it has had on young parents in terms of their preparation for labour and birth, their parenting skills and their perceptions of themselves as an individual and a parent.

Method

Impact profile interviews

Young parents who have participated in the Thrive antenatal programme were interviewed for this report. Their interviews were crafted into “impact profiles”, which are interview-based stories designed to highlight the impact of participation or intervention on individual and/or their family and whānau and/or their community, and how that process has contributed to positive change.

In total, ten young parents were interviewed.

Name ²	Age ³	Gender	Ethnicity	Child ⁴
Nicki	15	F	NZ European	Daniel, born 2013
Meg	19	F	NZ European	Lily, 2013
Sasha & Dallas	17	F	NZ European	Dani, born 2014
Samuel & Asha	19	M	Maori	Cooper, born 2013
Gemma	18	F	Samoan / Maori	Jaden, born 2013
Aimee	21	F	Maori	Baby due 2014
Ally	17	F	NZ European	Mia, born 2013

¹ See Schmied, V., Myers, K., Wills, J. & Cooke, M. (2002) *Preparing Expectant Couples for New-Parent Experiences: A Comparison of Two Models of Antenatal Education*. Journal of Perinatal Education 11(3)

² All names have been changed. The names in the table refer to the names used in the profiles.

³ Refers to the age of the parent when they attended the antenatal class

⁴ Some names have been changed

Introduction

Lani	19	F	Māori/Cook Island	Son, born 2011
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IMPACT PROFILES⁵

Interviews were conducted with young parents over a three-week period in March 2014. The results of the interviews have been written into ‘impact profiles’, which detail the impact of participation on the young parents and/or their families and whānau. The data in these profiles has been used to understand some of the critical factors of success for the Thrive antenatal programme, which are detailed on page 17.

Sasha and Dallas

Sasha, Dallas and twelve-week old Dani live with Dallas’ parents in West Auckland. They first heard about Thrive antenatal classes through Sasha’s friend, who was also going to the classes.

“I learnt heaps going there,” says Sasha, “I really enjoyed it.”

The pick-up and drop-off service offered by Thrive was invaluable for Sasha, who doesn’t drive. She attended the antenatal classes from her 15th week of pregnancy until her 35th week, and feels that the classes prepared her well for labour and birth

“I don't think you can ever be really prepared, but (the classes) did prepare me a lot – I knew what to expect.”

This preparation was vital for Sasha, who went into labour on New Year’s Eve. Her midwife was on holiday, and Sasha was placed with a midwife with whom she was unfamiliar.

“We went to the hospital and Sasha was one centimetre dilated, so she told us to go home” explains Dallas.

“She was like, “Yeah, we'll probably see you 5pm tomorrow night, so just go home and chill out” says Sasha. “I was like, “No, I *need* to be here!” I knew I wanted to be in the hospital – I felt like it was going to happen really soon.”

The information she learned in the antenatal classes, combined with her intuition about her body meant that Sasha was confident she knew what was going on with her labour and refused to go home.

Two hours later she was six centimetres dilated and baby Dani was born soon after.

“Knowing all the information from the classes helped me to be confident, for the birth and labour and stuff” says Sasha.

⁵ Please note that all names have been changed.

For Dallas, the class he attended also helped him prepare for impending fatherhood.

“It was like the first time I felt like a Dad”, he says. “I mean I knew I was going to have a kid, but all these other dudes there were in the same position and it felt kind of buzzy, you know?”

Dallas and Sasha are calm, confident parents. “We are quite buzzed-out how calm Dani is,” says Dallas. He is pleased that he and Sasha chose to go to the Thrive antenatal classes “At the end of the day you don’t get this information unless you go somewhere like this and do things like this – it was good.”

Nicki

Nicki was fifteen years old when she found out she was pregnant with Daniel, and sixteen when he was born. She found out about the Thrive antenatal programme from her midwife early in pregnancy. Thrive gave her a call and she started the programme when she was around four months pregnant.

“Since Daniel was my first, I wanted to know what it was like and how to cope with [the birth].”

Even though she lived reasonably close to where the programme was held, it would have been quite hard for her to get there. She was able to attend each week as she was provided with transport. Neither she nor her family had a car at the time. Although the course was quite long the transport service meant she was able to attend each week.

“I went the whole time. Sometimes I didn’t go if I was sick, but most times I did. Thrive do taxis – they pay for it. So I went free in the taxis there and back and they paid for it.”

Nicki felt that the antenatal programme helped prepare her for the birth. In particular she felt it gave her confidence.

“It did give me confidence – that’s why when I gave birth I didn’t freak out or anything, I just basically went with it, yeah.”

She understood and recognised what was happening in her body.

“When I was in labour I knew that it was down in my cervix and when I was in hospital I was like two centimetres dilated so I knew I had to come back home, but after half an hour or an hour I was four centimetres dilated.”

The programme also allowed her to practice what to do in labour and helped her try different techniques to relieve the pain.

“I tried the tub and tried some things that they suggested that might help.”

Nicki would have liked to have had more information about parenting in those early days, in particular how to settle crying babies.

“When he was born and I came home, sometimes he would cry really loud... I tried everything they said to, to calm him down but it didn’t seem to work for some reason. It works now – it just didn’t work when he was born. I was trying to figure out what was wrong.”

She has, however, come up with a range of strategies to settle him herself.

“Some of the parenting skills I basically learnt on my own... Like I put him on my chest and he listens to my heartbeat, and after five minutes he’ll fall asleep.”

She has subsequently done a Youth Horizons course for young parents.

Nicki said she would recommend the antenatal programme to other young mums or dads.

“Yeah it was a pretty good place to go to learn. I would describe the course as great, to be honest. It did actually help me, but some things they just missed out (parenting and dealing with inconsolable crying).”

Her main support is from her family, in particular her mum, step dad, dad and fiancée. She lives with her dad who now has a new job and her mum and step-dad have moved closer to be able to give Nicki hands-on and emotional support.

“Daniel gets support from them as well. If I need a break or something, my mum or Aunt will take him. Yeah, like a lot of people love him eh.”

Aimee

Mum-to-be Aimee started attending the Thrive antenatal programme when she was 30 weeks pregnant. Aged just over 20, Aimee saw herself as a younger mum, rather than a teen mum and was slightly hesitant about attending a class for teen parents.

“My midwife told me about the class. I thought oh, I’m not a teenager, but she said it’s alright because it’s your first baby and you’re still a bit younger.”

She soon, settled in, however, helped by the caring staff and tutors.

“They ask if I’m OK and if I want anything, if I’m not feeling comfortable. They’re really lovely.”

Aimee wasn’t planning on having a baby at this time in her life, and feels that coming to the antenatal classes have not only contributed to her feeling prepared and ready for her baby, but also feeling more positive and affirmed about her impending parenthood.

“I wasn’t planning on having any kids now. I was actually on contraception, so it was a bit of a surprise. So many people were saying my life is going to change in a bad way.”

The tutors helped Aimee understand that life as she knows it would change, but that the changes would not necessarily be negative.

“They made sure that I know that it’s not going to ruin my life. Having a baby is not a bad thing; it changes your life for the better. They really helped me think I would be OK.”

Aimee appreciates that one of the tutors is a hospital midwife, and feels she is well prepared for the birth.

“(Our tutor) tells us everything the hospital does, so I feel really prepared. She’s really informative.”

Attending the antenatal classes has focussed Aimee on having as natural a birth as possible, and has helped her feel more informed with her choices around pain relief.

“There’s a lot on the pros and cons of pain relief and all that. I wasn’t too sure about that. It’s made me really want to have a natural birth.”

If Aimee needs to know anything not covered in the classes, she just has to ask.

“I usually ask questions if I want to know something. And (the tutor) will tell me straightaway, or she’ll go and do research and come back and tell me.”

Although Aimee already has good whanau support around her, she appreciates the extra support which has been offered by Thrive.

“The Thrive ladies gave me their number if I ever want to talk to them about anything. I’ve already text questions to them. Even if we need anything for baby, baby clothes and stuff, they said to just call them.”

Aimee’s partner attended one of the classes, and has now signed up for the Thrive young dad’s group. Both parents are very excited about the birth of their little girl.

“I’m just so excited for her to come. I can’t wait to meet my baby. It’s really special.”

Meg

Meg was a full-time university student when she discovered she was pregnant with baby Lily. Meg and Lily live at home with her parents who, after getting over their initial surprise, have been very supportive.

“The most important support I have is my mum,” says Meg. “When I need to work she looks after Lily. When I need to study she takes her out for a walk so I can have a little study time. If I’m really tired she takes her away for a walk in the pram so I can have a little nap. Without her it would be so much harder.”

It was important for Meg to find somewhere to go to meet other young parents, where she felt safe and wouldn’t be judged. The Thrive antenatal classes ticked all these boxes.

“I felt like I wasn’t judged for being young, for being pregnant, for being single, for not having a career. I felt really comfortable.”

Being around other young, expectant mums helped Meg feel less alone.

“It was really good just being in a complete zone where you don’t feel like anyone’s looking down on you because of your age. Before I was pregnant I didn’t know anyone else my age who was pregnant. It’s really good to feel like there are other people out there. It made me feel less alone.”

Meg did her best to attend all her antenatal classes. She feels as though the classes gave her confidence and affirmed that she could make the decisions around labour and birth that she wanted to without being influenced by others.

“It just made me realise that in that moment of time it’s all about me and my baby. It’s not about Dad, not about my mum, not about my friends. I felt like it was definitely one hundred per cent my decisions, and I think it just gave me that confidence knowing that when you’re in labour it’s really all about you.”

Meg believes the information that was covered in the classes helped her make informed decisions on what kinds of pain relief she wanted, and the confidence to back herself with these decisions.

“I knew all my pain relief options and asked for an early epidural because I knew that later on it would be too close. I think that knowing that all the differences between people’s labours and all the different options meant that nobody could really judge me for choosing an epidural if I felt like it.”

The classes also gave her confidence to be the best parent she can be.

“I am a young mum, but that still doesn’t mean I can’t be the best mum I can be for my daughter. Just because you’re young doesn’t mean that you love your baby any less.”

Once Lily was born, Meg would have liked the opportunity to get some more information around parenting. Although the antenatal classes covered some parenting information, Meg feels as though it didn’t make sense until she had Lily.

“Once you have your baby that’s when you have your real thoughts about parenting. I think I didn’t truly grasp the concept of parenting until I had her. We did talk about what kind of parent you want to be – but I feel like you don’t really know what kind of parent you are until you have the baby.”

Now that Lily is nearly five months old, Meg has returned to university to complete her Bachelor of Science and fulfil her dream of become a high school mathematics teacher.

“It’s a nice stable life and I can provide for my daughter. I want to do the best for her.”

Asha and Samuel

Before they had their son Cooper, new parents Asha and Samuel were adamant they were going to enjoy pregnancy and parenting, no matter what other people told them.

“Some of my Mum’s friends said to her ‘It’s not a good idea, the baby’s not going to have a good life, it’s just the wrong thing to do, she doesn’t know what she’s doing’, blah blah blah” says Asha.

The young couple knew they would be fine.

“No one really has faith in teen parents, but you know, we can do it,” says Asha.

Feeling as though they were being judged by other, older parents meant that Asha and Samuel wanted to attend an antenatal class specifically designed for young parents. They found the Thrive classes through friends who had also attended. The couple started attending the classes when Asha was six months pregnant.

“It was quite fun,” says Samuel. “They made you feel at home. The people there were nice, they gave us something to eat. We did a few activities and enjoyed ourselves.”

A wide support network of family and friends, combined with their internet research meant that Asha and Samuel felt they were already well prepared for the labour and birth.

“We have family as well as friends in the same situation,” explains Samuel, “so we’d talked about a lot of that stuff with them.”

Whilst the antenatal classes helped to augment the information they already knew, Asha and Samuel didn’t feel as though they learnt anything new about labour and birth. They both agree, however, that the classes are a good idea for people who don’t have the kind of support that they do.

“Life is rugged for a lot of families out there” says Samuel “they really need this kind of support.”

Information that Asha and Samuel would have liked to have covered, but that they missed, included sleeping strategies, routines, breastfeeding advice, and techniques for dealing with crying. Once Cooper was born, they found it difficult to know what was normal, and what constituted crisis.

“The first month was so intense,” says Asha. “It would have really helped knowing what was wrong if he was crying even once he was fed and stuff. Maybe there's something that you need to actually ring somebody for, or maybe he's just whingeing.”

One of the things the couple appreciated most was meeting other young parents who were just as positive about their impending parenthood as Asha and Samuel were.

“I find that there's a lot of criticism against teen dads,” says Asha. “They are always pictured as not caring, and not even staying around. But everyone that was there, especially the guys, all seemed really happy and supportive for each other.”

Now that Cooper is older, Asha and Samuel think they would benefit from “post natal” classes.

“It would be cool if they did classes on different stages of how they grow up,” says Asha, “cause I'm not quite sure what to expect as he gets older.”

Samuel agrees. “Even if it was just for the little kids and parents – like a teddy bears' picnic. Something for people to meet up, a social thing to share stories and stuff.”

Both Samuel and Asha are relishing their new roles. Asha has returned to full time work, and Sam is currently a stay-at-home Dad. They are both enjoying parenthood as much as they predicted they would. “Coop just makes it so easy, you know? It's a piece of pie, really. He's always smiling. It's just an awesome experience,” Samuel says.

Gemma

For Gemma, attending the Thrive antenatal classes not only helped her understand what would happen during her pregnancy and labour, it gave her an opportunity to put together a birth plan which made her feel empowered and in control. As a result, Gemma had a very calm labour with baby Jaden, which went just the way she planned it.

“I'll be honest, if I didn't go to any of those classes, I think I would have screamed the whole hospital down”, she says. “But I was actually quite calm in my labour. I kept thinking about everything we learned on the course. I learnt so much about all the different kinds of energies that are going to be released in your body, and all the pain things that were going to be released. But all I could think about was the way that they told me to breathe and relax and push. That was really helpful.”

As a result of the information given during the classes, Gemma chose to give birth without pain relief.

“In the classes we got a good view of everything that could possibly happen. It didn't feel like we had to do this, we had to do that – it was just like they would tell us what we could get out of it and the bad things about it and the good things about it.”

She made sure that everyone attending her was informed about her birth plan.

“I'd told them what I wanted before I went in so if they did something I didn't want then my wishes would have been violated.”

Everyone stuck to the plan, just like Gemma wanted them to.

“I was like, “Ah! I want an epidural!” And they were like, “You told us no!” And I was like, “Ah, okay!””

Both Gemma and Jaden's Dad enjoyed the classes and liked that they were targeted especially at young people.

“At first we were a bit freaked out. We were kind of like, “Oh gosh, we're going to go and everyone's going to be like, 'Look at these young people having a baby!' But when we turned up we were like, oh, there's a big group of people who are pretty much in the exact same situation as us! And so that actually really helped, and everyone felt real comfortable.”

They liked that the classes were tailored to the way that young people learn.

“They explained stuff in a way that our age would understand”, says Gemma.

The activities and the way the course was taught helped break down the barriers among the participants.

“They got us to partner up with people and get into groups and do things with others – so it was real good. Towards the end of it all of us really knew each other – we got along quite well.”

After Jaden's birth Gemma experienced a mild bout of post-natal depression. Looking back, Gemma thinks it might have helped if more information on post-natal depression was covered in the course.

“I think they said a little bit, but you know like our group is so young we probably didn't realise how much it was going to affect us.”

Gemma would thoroughly recommend the course to other young parents.

“I'd tell them it'll really help you with your birth planning and finding out what it's going to be like, and it really helps prepare you mentally.”

And, just like her birth, Gemma is now putting plans in place for life.

“I'm going back to Uni next year, and everything's still going to be the same, I just have extra responsibility. It's good for me.”

Lani

When she first found out she was pregnant, Lani had no one she could turn to for help.

“When I was first pregnant I was confused, didn't have much support, I shut my family out because I thought I made a mistake,” she says.

Her family didn't approve of her partner, who was violent towards her.

“When I found out I was pregnant my father didn't talk to me, and at the time my family kept shutting their door on me.”

Lani left her violent partner and continued with the pregnancy on her own. Her midwife suggested that Lani attend the Thrive antenatal classes in order to just focus on herself and her pregnancy, rather than the chaos that was going on around her.

“It was good,” she says. “I got to meet new people. It helped me understand what every mother is supposed to do for their child. It was good, because I was so scared of having the baby alone, especially giving birth. I had no support. It actually helped.”

Lani's mother wasn't around, and Lani felt she had no one to ask about labour and birth.

“At first I felt like I didn't need it,” says Lani, “because I think I can do it alone. But when I took the classes it was like everything I learned was supposed to be my mum's job. I was really thankful.”

Lani used what she learned in the classes to help a young family member.

“After I had my baby a sixteen-year-old family member came to my house and asked for my help because she was pregnant and going through what I went through. She got beaten up by her father when she was pregnant because he didn't want her to have the baby. So I helped her, sorted everything for her. She

was only 15 weeks pregnant when she came to me, and I helped her until one week before she gave birth. I used everything I learned from Thrive to help her.”

Lani’s son is now two years old. Lani has reunited with her family and now lives with her father and her two sisters.

“It’s important for me to have family around me,” she says. “When I was little I always imagined that when I was ready I would have a family of my own. I wanted the fairytale.”

Looking back, Lani is proud of the courage and determination she showed.

“I’m emotional when I think back to those moments when I was so low and I look at what I have now and what I have achieved,” she says. “My son is my future.”

Lani would recommend that other young mums, particularly those in difficult relationships, consider attending an antenatal course.

“I’m pretty sure they think what I think, that they can do it, they don’t need help,” she says.

She is determined that her son will have the fairy tale that she always planned for.

“I want my child to know that violence is no good. I do not want my child to go through what I went through,” she says.

Ally

Becoming a parent was more than just a life-changing event for new mum Ally; it also literally saved her life.

“I was heading down the wrong track,” she says.

Five-month-old Mia and Ally live with Ally’s mum and stepdad in a rural community in West Auckland. Whilst they don’t live together, Ally and Mia’s father share parenting duties. Ally’s other main source of support is her Dad and his partner, who have also recently had a baby.

Ally started attending the Thrive antenatal classes when she was six months pregnant.

“I would say they are really good for other young parents who want to learn more about childbirth and who want to make new friends,” she says. “I would really recommend them to other young parents.”

Being able to bring her best friend as her support person helped Ally feel relaxed and join in the sessions. After the classes Ally would talk with her dad about what she had learnt and this helped build her confidence about giving birth.

Although she was originally motivated to attend by the thought of meeting other young mums, Ally quickly grew to appreciate the information that was provided in the sessions. She particularly enjoyed the session on parenting.

“It made me realise there is no perfect parent, just the best version of yourself,” she says.

Along with the information, Ally also appreciated the fact that the facilitator was a parent of a young child herself, and felt that the facilitator role-modelled how to be a responsive and relaxed parent. The information Ally learned in the antenatal classes helped immensely during her labour, particularly the breathing techniques.

“My best friend and my Mum and Dad were there” she says. “The classes really helped me cope with the labour.”

When Mia was eight-weeks old she stopped breastfeeding. Ally dealt with her guilt and disappointment by remembering the non-judgemental support she was given during the antenatal programme. She used this experience to focus less on being disappointed, and more on how proud she was to have breastfed Mia for eight weeks.

Another challenge for Ally was the onset of “baby blues”, or mild post-natal depression. Whilst this was briefly covered during the classes, Ally would have liked more information about when it can happen, what it feels like and when it should pass. In addition, whilst she enjoyed the parenting session, Ally would have appreciated more practical, hand-on parenting information around caring for babies in the early days, such as settling, caring for a crying baby and establishing routines.

“My mum and dad have really helped with this,” she says, “but I don’t know how other young mums with less support cope with these kinds of things.”

Ally has made three good friends through the antenatal group. They all had their babies within a week of each other and they get together regularly and support each other. Ally is proud of her achievements as a mum, as feels as though having Mia has given her a new sense of confidence and purpose. “No one focusses on just how much joy being a parent can be.”

“Having Mia totally saved my life.”

CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Making pregnancy and parenthood a positive experience for young parents

More than half of the young parents interviewed talked about feeling judged when people around them learned they were pregnant. For most of these, attending the Thrive antenatal classes helped them to appreciate – some for the first time - that their pregnancy and parenthood could be a positive experience.

“They made sure that I know that it’s not going to ruin my life, having a baby.”

Changing their perceptions of pregnancy to a positive one was due to both the tutors and the other participants in the class.

“...being a young mum it’s just completely unexpected – it’s not what I planned at all – but it’s just nice feeling like you’re not alone, like you’re not the only young mum out there.”

Many young parents talked about the dawning realisation that they could, and would, be good parents.

“It made me realise there is no perfect parent, just the best version of yourself.”

Empowerment

For most participants, the information covered in the classes made them feel empowered around decisions about their labour and birth. They felt as though they had the information they needed to make informed choices, and were confident in articulating this to others.

“It made me realise that ... nobody else’s decisions impacted me, like they really had no say whether I should have [pain relief] or not”

Learning about their body and possible reactions helped some of the young mums to not only know what to expect, it also meant they could confidently challenge decisions made by others.

“[The midwife] was like, “Yeah, we’ll probably see you 5pm tomorrow night, so just go home and chill out. I was like, “No, I need to be here!””

Whilst many of the participants made an informed choice not to have pain relief, based on the information they were given, some did choose pain relief, and felt confident and supported in that decision. Most participants who talked about the information around pain relief felt that it was balanced.

“There’s lots on the pros and cons of pain relief and all that.”

Tutors

Participants felt that the tutors were caring, compassionate and respectful. They felt as though the tutors genuinely cared about their wellbeing, and went out of their way to ensure that everyone was comfortable and had everything they needed before and during each class.

All the young parents appreciated that the tutors were experienced in childbirth and/or midwifery, and were able to share their own personal and professional experience.

“One of the ladies is actually a hospital midwife... she tells us everything the hospital does and what they have available for you. She’s really informative.”

Some of the participants spoke about watching one of the tutors interact with her baby, and how this role modelling helped them understand their parenting role.

... the lady who was teaching it actually had her own baby. So we were watching her look after her baby and she would talk to us about how her baby is and what happened...”

Informative and accessible

Participants found the information covered in the sessions extremely informative, and were confident that they could ask questions and have their concerns taken seriously. If tutors didn’t know the answers to questions, they would go away and find out, and get back to the young person straightaway.

“I usually ask them questions if I want to know something. And she’ll tell me straightaway, or she’ll go and do research and come back and tell me. She goes out of her way to find answers.”

Support outside of class

Participants were encouraged to contact Tutors or other Thrive staff members if they needed support outside of class time. Practical support, such as support with baby clothes or other baby needs, was also offered.

Learning tailored to young adults

The Thrive antenatal classes appear to be highly interactive. Participants are encouraged to participate in group games and activities, speak up, find a partner and move around. Rather than finding this disconcerting, most participants appeared to enjoy the games and interaction.

“You have to talk in front of everyone and they make you stand up and play all these silly games – they're pretty fun though.”

*“I must say, it almost makes you feel like, “Sh*t, if I don't do this I'll look like a dick in front of all these people!”*

Participants who talked about the highly interactive nature of the sessions all enjoyed them. Many also felt bolstered by the fact that they could take along a support person. The information was also pitched at the right level for young adults.

“The information is kind of tailored more towards young mums...”

Overcoming transport barriers

Thrive provides transport to and from the antenatal classes. At least half of all the young parents interviewed acknowledged that they wouldn't have been able to attend if transport was not provided.

FEEDBACK ON FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Parenting information and support

Thrive antenatal classes cover parenting basics, particularly practical issues such as bathing, breastfeeding and nappy changing, as well as information around post natal depression, and being the parent you want to be.

There were, however, a number of participants who indicated that they were unprepared for the reality of parenthood, particularly the first six weeks, and who would have liked more information around dealing with many of the challenges they faced in the early days.

It appears there are two issues here. First, some felt that the parenting information they wanted to hear wasn't covered.⁶ This included:

- Sleep routines
- Dealing with inconsolable crying
- What to do when you think your baby is sick
- Understanding what constitutes a 'crisis' for you or your baby i.e. when do you ask for help?
- Mapping community support – what else is out there to help young parents?
- Post natal depression

The second issue, however, is that some felt that some of this information *was* covered, but that the young people themselves were so focussed on their labour and birth, or didn't realise that the information would pertain to them, that they didn't take a lot of the information in:

"I think they said a little bit [about postnatal depression], but you know like our group is so young we probably didn't realise how much it was going to affect us."

"Once you have your baby that's when you have your real thoughts about parenting, because you have the baby, you know what it's like to look after it. I think that it's something that I didn't truly grasp the concept of until I had her. We did talk about it a lot – about what kind of parent you want to be – but

⁶ It is acknowledged that not all the young parents we talked with attended all the classes, therefore some of the information they felt they were missing may have been covered in the classes they missed.

I feel like you don't really know what kind of parent you are until you have the baby."

It may be, therefore, that covering the information that the young parents asked for during the antenatal classes may not be particularly effective. Rather, what the young parents were asking for was **immediate and multiple points of support** once they had their baby and had a better understanding of what information and support they needed.

It appears there is a gap between birth and first Plunket contact where it appears many of the young parents are struggling with feeling equipped for parenting, baby blues/post natal depression and dealing with inconsolable crying. One of the biggest problems many of the young parents faced was understanding what were 'proper' problems, and what were 'normal' problems e.g. "is she too hot", "what should he be wearing to bed in summer", "if her poos are green is she sick or something" and "how much crying is too much crying." Research tells us that the threshold for crisis lines amongst young people can be very high.⁷ Many of the young parents in this project were hesitant to call support lines, such as PlunketLine or Healthline, as they were worried they would be "stuffing them around." This may be due to the perception that these lines are crisis lines, rather than help lines. One of the ways to overcome this may be to invite a representative of PlunketLine or Healthline to one of the classes to let young parents know the sorts of questions they deal with, and to help them 'picture' what the person at the other end of the phone might look like.

Other suggestions for the types of support young parents needed included:

- A **text service**, whereby you could text a question and get an answer straight back. There could be an option for sending pictures, particularly if they have a question around skin issues or baby's stools.
- One-on-one assessment around the young parents need for support when **dealing with agencies** not directly related to pregnancy or parenting, (particularly those related to finances) such as WINZ.
- A **person they could contact any time** with their parenting/baby questions who could offer advice, who could visit, and who could help them on an ongoing basis with sleep routines etc. This could be a community mentor.

Negotiating Relationships and Parenting Roles

⁷ See Woodley, A, Davis, R and Metzger, N (2013) Breaking the Silence: What Young People want from Sexual Abuse Services. HELP Auckland (Auckland Sexual Abuse HELP Foundation).

Of the ten parents interviewed for this project, six were co-parenting and four were parenting alone. Although they were parenting together, three of the six co-parents were not in a relationship with the other co-parent. For these parents, as well as the single parents, the added responsibility of negotiating relationships and parenting roles added another layer of complexity to their parenting. They requested help, support and advice around dealing with and negotiating these relationships.

“I’m not with my baby’s father, and [I need help with] how to include him into her life and things like that, because it’s really hard – nobody can teach you how to do it, how to include somebody into your baby’s life.”

Postnatal support

Four of the participants indicated that they had mild post natal depression, and were unsure how to deal with this. Whilst they acknowledged that this was covered in the classes, two felt that they didn’t pay a lot of attention as they thought it wouldn’t happen to them. They requested more help around how to deal with the baby blues after the baby was born and they had a better understanding of the reality of what they were dealing with.

Working Dads

Three participants who were interviewed requested a class time that was more suited to young dads who were working.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to articulate the impact of the Thrive antenatal classes on young parents and their family and whānau.

It is clear from this report that the Thrive antenatal classes have had a positive impact on all the young parents who took part in this research. The positive impacts are particularly related to making pregnancy and parenthood a positive experience for young parents, giving balanced information which helped participants make informed choices and feel empowered around decisions about their labour and birth, having tutors who are caring, compassionate and respectful, and who are informative and accessible, offering additional support, such as baby clothes or other baby needs, adopting a learning style tailored to young adults and providing transport to and from class.

Feedback from those interviewed suggests that the information covered in the classes in relation to pregnancy labour and birth is perfectly targeted to the audience, as is the means of delivery.

In addition to the prenatal and birth and parenting information which is already covered in the programme, the young parents in this report have requested additional post-natal support, particularly around parenting in the early weeks, negotiating complex parenting relationships and postnatal depression.

Overall, the research has found that the antenatal programme provided by Thrive is a positive and essential service for the young parents in our communities.

