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# Young Parent Programs in BC: Results from the 2013-2014 Annual Survey

Each year the BC Council for Families and the Alliance of Professionals Serving Young Families administers a province-wide survey of Young Parent Programs (YPPs). In the 2013/14 survey twenty-nine communities from across BC are represented<sup>1</sup>. This report draws on the results of that survey as well as the minutes of quarterly meetings and conference calls between program managers. It covers just some of important and valuable work being done in YPPs; it also highlights the immediate need for increased funding in order for these programs to continue providing high-quality child care and family support to some of our province's most vulnerable families.

## About Young Parent Programs

Young Parent Programs combine educational programs for pregnant and parenting youth with high-quality early childhood care and learning, allowing young parents to continue with school while their children attend child care on-site or nearby. They most often are affiliated with a local school district, but the education options offered differ community to community. In some, young parents attend class in a designated classroom that may be located in a portable on school grounds or housed in a non-profit agency; they may be affiliated with one secondary school or parents may attend schools all over the district. They may also be linked only to an alternate school or with the adult education department of a school district, college or university. Some school districts provide the parenting student the option of a flexible course schedule.

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<sup>1</sup> Abbotsford, Agassiz, Burnaby, Brentwood Bay, Campbell River, Chilliwack, Duncan, Fort St. John, Kamloops, Kelowna, Maple Ridge, Nanaimo, Nelson, New Westminster, Parksville, Penticton, Port Alberni, Powell River, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Richmond, Saanichton, Salmon Arm, Surrey, Terrace, Vancouver, Victoria, Vernon, Williams Lake.



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During the 2013/2014 school year:

- Over 321 pregnant and parenting youth were enrolled in BC Young Parent Programs
- Over 330 children of young parents had access to high-quality early childhood care and learning through a YPP centre
- Over 109 young parents graduated from high school with the support and encouragement of YPPs

Just over half of the YPP child care programs operate as infant/toddler centres, offering care to children under the age of three, while the remainder also provide care for children aged three to five. Daycares are often located right on or close to school campuses, allowing parents to visit frequently. Through the time spent in the child care centres, parents receive support from staff, learn important parenting skills, share meals and play with their children, and build important parent-child attachments. The close proximity also gives parents peace of mind that their (often very young) babies are close by and well-cared-for, allowing them to focus on their studies. Some programs serve only young parents and their families; however, most (70%) have a certain number of spaces prioritized for young parents and offer the remainder to other families in the community.

### Providing key supports and programming to young parents

Above and beyond the provision of educational opportunities for young parents and high-quality early childhood care and learning for their children, YPPs are expected to and do provide a multitude of additional supports which augment healthy adolescent development, enhance Infant/Toddler development, build parenting capacity and support learning and education. Most programs offer regular life skills and parenting classes and programs, and many provide parents with essential supplies such as diapers, bus tickets, hot meal programs, grocery gift cards, in-program food banks, and access to donated clothing and household

#### Just a few of the programs offered by YPPs across BC:

- Ready to Rent
- Nobody's Perfect Parenting Program
- Parent-Child Mother Goose® Program
- Moe the Mouse®
- Reaching IN, Reaching OUT
- First Aid
- Serving it Right
- Food Safe
- Seeking Safety
- Comfort, Play and Teach
- gardening
- cooking and food skills
- financial management and budgeting
- yoga
- infant massage



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goods. YPP staff regularly advocate for and assist young parents in dealing with other community agencies, government ministries, health care professionals, and mental health services. They liaise with social workers, child development consultants, counselors, police services, victim service workers, and foster families. They provide outreach and education during the prenatal period and support young parents in their transition back to school. They host visits from public health nurses and dental hygienists. They help with form completion, coordinate and host Integrated Case Management (ICM) meetings, drive young parents to medical appointments and court appearances, assist in housing searches, and provide character references for employment and housing applications. They also hold celebrations to mark events such as holidays and graduation, and they often become a place of security and stability for the families they serve. While some programs are able to hire part-time support staff or draw upon programs and staff from their umbrella agencies, many rely entirely on their staff of Early Childhood Educators (ECE) to deliver these additional programs and services.

“During the recent teacher strike I had so many young parents in crisis at that time. They needed school – they needed HCC – they needed routine – they needed structure and safety for their children and themselves. I had one young lady in particular spend every day here with us at the centre, morning until closing.”

~ Nicki Bezansen, Hummingbird Child Care Centre, Port Alberni

The families who access Young Parent Programs often face multiple barriers, and include parents and children with complex needs requiring additional supports. Of the 29 programs who responded to the survey:

- 90 per cent served children with special needs, working closely with parents, therapists, Infant Development Consultants and Supported Development programs to ensure inclusive programming that meets and supports the needs of all children.
- 90 per cent provided food and nutritional support, including cooking and food skills programs, budgeting advice, nutritional education, and transportation to or on-site food banks; almost all of these programs provide breakfast, lunch and/or snacks to both parents and children.
- 57 per cent offered support for parents exposed to family violence, including: “Soups and Stories (for young mothers grieving the loss of relationships, many due to violence), Project Respect, and personal, relationship and couples counselling.
- 53 per cent provided housing support to young parents and their families, offering information and referral on subsidized housing options, “Ready to Rent” programs, form completion assistance, transportation, references, support with household items and child safety devices, and even moving.



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- 5 per cent offered specific Aboriginal programming, including language immersion, partnerships with local First Nations councils and agencies, drumming, Aboriginal liaison and support workers, weekly visits by elders, Aboriginal circles, Moe the Mouse programs, etc.
- Providing these extra supports means significant additional costs for YPPs; however, only 37 per cent of the programs surveyed receive additional funding over the enhanced Child Care Subsidy detailed below.

### Supporting family (re)unification and keeping children safe

In keeping with the Province's Child, Family and Community Service Act,<sup>2</sup> YPPs play an essential role in family support, prevention, and child protection; YPPs help keep children in their family homes. Over 95 per cent of the families that access Young Parent Programs have some level of involvement with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Liaising with MCFD social workers and working with ICM teams is a huge part of what YPPs do to support young-parent-led families and keep children safe, healthy and happy. Some of the supports offered to MCFD-involved families include:

- attending and/or coordinating meetings with Ministry social workers
- conducting home visits to ensure children are receiving adequate care
- accompaniment to court proceedings and family justice meetings
- providing supervised access for parents with children in care
- and, support to extended family caregivers and foster families.

Last year alone, at least 28 young parents attended a YPP program as part of a MCFD mandated condition of keeping or returning children to their care. When it does become necessary to remove children from the home, YPP child care centres help minimize the disruption to the family by offering continuity of care and a safe and familiar space for the child(ren), as well as support for extended family caregivers and foster parents, and supervised visits between young parents and their children.

"We have been successful in working with the Ministry to keep children that are removed from their moms to be connected with the program and their parent. They are beginning to see the value of having the dyad remain as connected as possible and this may include the child continuing to attend daycare while the mom visits and attends school."

~ Shannon Smith, Elizabeth Fry Society Young Parent Program, Prince George

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/00\\_96046\\_01](http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/00_96046_01)



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Through the provision of essential items such as diapers, meals, food, and transportation, as well as through services such as counseling, home visits, housing assistance, family violence safety planning, parenting education, mediation, court accompaniment, supervised visits, addiction support, advocacy, etc., YPPs offset the burden on other agencies that would otherwise be called upon to provide these kinds of supports. Looking at the twenty eight families described above, based on current Foster Family Care Rates set by MCFD, had these children been taken into or kept in care, the minimum cost to taxpayers would have been \$270,000 annually. Longer term, by supporting young parents to complete their high-school education, set personal, educational and employment goals, and develop healthy relationship and parenting skills, YPPs are also supporting them on the road to self-sufficiency and independence, reducing the likelihood that will require government intervention and assistance as they enter into adulthood.

"We had a young mom that came to us 3 years ago pregnant and angry. She created many disturbances at the school and they were very frustrated with her ... We treated her with respect and caring. She became a great advocate with the other Moms as she had super computer skills and could find a used "anything" on line to meet her needs; she shared this skill when other parents asked for her help. She moved onto Adult Ed and attended school every day; she had our best attendance. When we heard she was pregnant again, we feared she may crash. She surprised us all, graduated with a baby in her arms and has now moved [another province] with the father of her two children. They have found a home, dad has a great job ... our Mom is opening a family childcare."

~ Kathy Payne, Growing Together, Duncan

## Funding

Despite the important service they provide, BC's Young Parent Programs are not a distinctly identified or funded program area other than via the administration of an enhanced Child Care Subsidy "top-up". Young parents attending these programs are eligible to receive up to \$1,000 per month in child care subsidy, compared to a maximum rate of \$750 for other parents. In order to be eligible for the enhanced subsidy, a young parent must have become a parent while s/he was under 20 years of age and be currently accessing child care services provided by the Young Parent Program in order to complete her/his high school education. They remain eligible until they graduate from high school or reach the age of 24, whichever comes first.

A recent informal survey of fees for all childcare spaces across the province found that the average fees for licensed infant-toddler care are approximately \$1055 per month in Metro Vancouver and Greater Victoria and between \$860 and \$925 per month in the surrounding areas and rural communities. Often, due to the higher operating costs detailed below, Young Parent Programs must set their monthly fees higher than the community average. Indeed, in the 2013-2014 survey,



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forty-six per cent of public child care programs with designated Young Parent spaces reported that the Young Parent Child Care Subsidy did not cover their set child care fees. Many of the programs that exclusively serve young parents and set their fee by the Young Parent Childcare Subsidy Rate also reported that the actual per child cost of providing care surpassed the revenue brought in via subsidy. Very few programs that end up with a parent-pay portion pass that cost on to young parents, and instead must find other ways to make up the difference.

Some YPPs are affiliated with larger umbrella agencies and are able to draw upon the programs and services these provide in order to reduce program deficits. The remainder work to cover the increasing costs of running a Young Parent Program using a variety of ad-hoc strategies, including, but not limited to, seeking donations and support from other community agencies, school boards and corporate donors, raising community fees, adjusting hours of operation, and/or making staffing changes. As the coordinator of one program notes, having to rely on grants to cover basic program costs can cause fiscal anxiety: “grants are yearly, not ongoing and can never be guaranteed.” The application process is also often lengthy and time-consuming, straining the already limited resources of program coordinators, managers and Board members. Even after successfully seeking out grants and donations from multiple government, community and private funders, the program mentioned above reported a \$25000 annual deficit in 2013-2014, and is projecting a deficit of \$40,000 for 2014-2015.

Due to extra supplies and programming needs, the tendency for spaces to sit unfilled during some parts of the years, and the higher staffing and administrative costs associated with running a program for young, at-risk parents the overall difference between the actual cost of providing care in a YPP and the current Young Parent Child Care Subsidy can top \$8500.00 a year per child.

A review of other research suggests that fiscal instability and lack of appropriate funding has been a problem for Young Parent Programs for well over a decade.<sup>3</sup> In the 2013-2014 survey a number of programs reported having to cut back on staffing, programming, and/or extra supports. As in

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EarlyChildhood/1-young%20parents.pdf>



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past years, programs have had to significantly reduce staffing hours and eliminate support staff and room supervisors. Coordinators and managers are spending increased hours on the floor, doubling up administrative and direct service duties. Programs also reported needing to cut or reduce programs such as hot lunches and community kitchens, and having to limit the number of extra supports, such as bus tickets, emergency groceries, diapers, etc., that they are able to offer. Anecdotally, it is becoming clear that many programs are being forced to consider the option of closing their doors to young parents altogether.

“At one point we had 24 childcare spaces and ended up in a \$30,000.00 deficit so we closed down one of our centers and laid off staff, we presently have 18 spaces. We have also had to resort to not having a separate supervisor in the daycare; presently one of our staff who works fulltime on the floor covers that position. The deficit came from needing to fill spaces with having overage students that didn’t qualify for full subsidy, parents who owed monies for their parent portion who defaulted on their payment, students dropping out and not being able to bring new ones in due to the time of year, and trying to continue to provide meals etc. on a budget that was originally set for 15 children.”

~ Maureen Hegadoren, First Steps, Kamloops

### Staffing challenges

One of the key challenges highlighted by YPP supervisors in both the annual survey and quarterly meeting is the difficulty in recruiting and retaining trained and licensed child care workers who are also equipped to deal with the complex needs of young parents and their children. YPP child care staff must be able to provide quality care for very young children<sup>4</sup> as well as non-judgmental support to young parents. The need for experienced, skilled and educated staff comes at a cost, including a higher pay scale for long-term employees and the need for higher starting wages to attract new employees. The vast majority of YPP child care salaries are paid through the enhanced child care subsidy with some augmented by fee-paying families. The deficits caused by inadequate subsidy levels makes it especially difficult to offer competitive wages and attract new staff. As discussed in more detail below, the lack of job security due to fluctuating enrollment and unfilled spaces can also present a significant barrier to recruiting and retaining qualified child care staff.

Young Parent child care programs also face a need for ongoing professional development above and beyond child development and education. Child care and support staff often require certification to deliver the parenting support programs described above, as well as additional training around issues such as family violence, infant developmental trauma, FASD/NASD, addiction and mental

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<sup>4</sup> Unlike other licensed Infant/Toddler centres that usually accept children from the age of 12 or 18 months onward, YPPs begin offering care to infants as young as 3 weeks old.



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health. The cost is particularly high for programs in remote and rural communities due to the need to bring in trainers and/or send staff to larger communities to attend workshops and trainings. The increased amount of time parents spend in the centre (versus non-YPP centres) leads to a need for further training in communication and parent education.

**In October 2014, over 90 YPP staff and coordinators attended the annual conference of the Alliance of Professionals Serving Young Parents, attending workshops on:**

- infant developmental trauma, adaptation and resilience
- adolescent brain development
- self-management of perinatal and youth anxiety
- communicating effectively with parents and caregivers
- supporting young fathers
- sexual health and body esteem
- understanding compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma
- maternal mental health and more

Additional staffing challenges unique to YPPs include:

- the need to bring in substitutes for appointments where staff are called out to support young parents in the community (e.g. court dates, ICM meetings, housing appointments, etc.); attracting substitutes is difficult due to the inability of many programs to offer competitive wages
- the need for higher staff:child ratios due to the young ages and high percentage of vulnerable and special-needs children.
- and, the need to provide staff with additional support and time for self-care due to the demands of supporting at-risk families and those experiencing trauma (e.g. time off the floor, opportunities to debrief, etc.)

On top of the increased staffing and training costs, YPPs face higher administrative costs due just to the sheer volume of paperwork that comes with supporting young-parent-led families. Coordinators estimate that based on child care subsidy alone, there is approximately 2 to 5 hours of administrative work per child at intake and another half-to full-day's work a month per program.<sup>5</sup> Managers and coordinators also spend extra time on scheduling and staffing because tight budgets and fluctuating attendance means having to schedule weekly or bi-weekly rather than having set shifts. They are continually called upon to complete funding applications and reports for the extra

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<sup>5</sup> Receiving subsidy is often dependent on the completion of other government forms and the acquisition of Care Cards, Permanent Resident Cards, Government-issued ID, etc.





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programs and services they are expected to offer and devote many hours to liaising with other community organizations and family service providers regarding individual families and children. Weekly observations and reports to MCFD for children with Ministry involvement require an additional significant time commitment.

“We’re spending much more time applying for grants and fundraising than we have in past years as many of the other agencies working with young families are also struggling and we’re all “competing” for funds. It shouldn’t have to be this way especially when we are all working together to support young families.”

~ Heather Kay, Artemis Young Parent Program, Victoria

### Fluctuation enrollment and unfilled spaces

One of the other key challenges that has historically faced Young Parent Programs, and that continues to be a challenge today is the financial insecurity that comes along with unfilled child care spaces. Nineteen out of twenty-nine programs (66%) reported having unfilled spaces at some point in the 2013-2014 school year. When programs are unable to fill those spaces, it can have a serious impact. Program budgets are often based on all spaces being full. However, due to the personal, social and financial barriers many young parents face, they often drop out of programs with little to no notice<sup>6</sup>.

“On average, over the 10 month period in 2013/14 we ran the centre with at least 4 unfilled spaces. The vacancies are all due to the spaces saved for young parents but then not used by young parents. Also, young parents quit school with no notice. The fact that it is difficult to fill a space in the spring when we are closed for the break or later in the school year when we are about to close for the 2 summer months. Keeping spaces open for the current pregnant youth is very difficult because we need 4 children to pay for 1 staff based on ratio, but if we go 1 child over the ratio we need the extra staff”

~ Katalin Camara, Burnaby South Childcare, Burnaby

With so many programs already stretched thin, it is impossible to set aside extra funds to cover for unfilled spots. Several programs reported having to lay off staff or reduce hours due to an unexpected drop in numbers. As noted above, the impact on job security means it can be hard to maintain quality staff. Other programs noted that even with unfilled spots and lower enrollment –

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<sup>6</sup> Lack of affordable housing, lack of transportation and/or inaccessibility of public transit, and child apprehension are among the most commonly cited reasons for why young parents left the programs.



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meaning less revenue via child care subsidy - they had to maintain their staffing levels due to licensing requirements, significantly increasing their program deficits. As well, the cost of the additional supplies and programming noted above remains consistent despite fluctuating enrollment. For YPPs that fund these additional supports through fees and child care subsidy, the loss of even \$1000.00 a month can be devastating.

One proposed solution to the challenge of unfilled spots is to expand the criteria of “Young Parent”. Many YPPs serve young parents and other vulnerable families that do not fit within the eligibility criteria for the enhanced Young Parent child care subsidy. These programs have expressed support for a revision of the criteria to include any student parent who has not yet graduated, is looking to complete their high school education and would benefit from the extra supports of a YPP.

“Over the past 3 years we have seen an increase in parents who do not fit the profile of “young parents” as currently outlined returning to school. We support them as best we can and often that means covering extra child care costs for them. This adds a huge stress to our program and contributes to deficits. We have also had many parents in this category who simply quit or do not start once they see the parent portion they would have to pay. These parents often do not have the means or capacity to pay for child care and complete school without extra support.”

~ Jane Saxon, Hand in Hand Infant-Toddler Centre, Penticton

“To be able to further support a YP to the completion of their education regardless of their age means to secure their future success instead of leading them to the gates and then just dropping all support when they might need it the most.”

~ Kat Pummell, Woodwinds Community Support Society, Parksville

For early-age parents who have not yet graduated and are not eligible for young parent childcare subsidy, the cost of high-quality childcare can be a significant barrier to returning to school. Many of these young parents are as equally vulnerable as their younger counterparts; they and their children face similar risks and require the same level of extra support as those currently eligible for the higher rate of subsidy. Moreover, many YPP staff find that often the older, more experienced parents in the program act as informal mentors to the younger parents, of huge benefit to both parties in terms of additional support and capacity building. Expanding the criteria for enhanced subsidy will also ensure that YPPs whose numbers of young parents fluctuate can fill their available child care spaces and remain financially sustainable.



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### Conclusion

YPPs provide support, information, outreach, advocacy and more to vulnerable pregnant and parenting youth who are seeking to continue their education, while also ensuring their children are safe, happy and well cared-for. However, with very few exceptions, BC's Young Parent Programs are either running at a substantial deficit, struggling to make ends meet, needing to cut programs, services and/or staff, and/or – tragically – considering ending their services to young parents and their children altogether. The story of the Shuswap Young Parent Program in Salmon Arm exemplifies the challenges faced by YPPs across the province:

“Shuswap Day Care Society has had to make a very difficult decision and will be closing our Young Parent Daycare as of June 30, 2015. We have been struggling financially for the last few years, our enrolment has declined, and we are getting young parents attending college but not receiving the enhanced subsidy. Our Society's other programs have been supplementing the young parent program; however, it is now taking its toll. We are very sad, however we all agree it is time. Being hopeful and waiting for additional dollars and or support has come to an end for us. We also recently lost our Infant/Toddler Educator. Being we are a small town and a small centre it is difficult to attract staff. As well, we are limited in funding so cannot pay as well as we would like or what people may expect. This decision has been on the table for the last few years. This year alone the centre is already running at a \$10,000 loss, too much for our Society to continue to absorb year after year.”

~ Karen Bubola, Shuswap Daycare Society, Salmon Arm

In the 2013/2014 Annual YPP Survey carried out by the BC Council for Families, when asked to list top three barriers facing their program the vast majority reported subsidy issues and financial struggles as their top concern. The cost of providing the additional supports and programs that are required of a Young Parent Program – and that make these programs so valuable – puts added financial strain on programs that are already struggling to stay afloat. YPPs require highly-trained, well-educated and experienced staff; however, the inability of many programs to offer competitive wages and the job insecurity that comes with fluctuating enrollment present a significant barrier to recruiting and retaining qualified candidates. Some potential solutions that require further discussion include: increasing the rate of Young Parent child care subsidy to cover not only basic child care fees but also the cost of the additional programming and supports programs are expected to provide; expanding the criteria of eligibility for the enhanced subsidy rate to all student parents who have not yet graduated and would benefit from the support of a YPP; and/or the establishment of Young Parent Programs as a distinct and holistically funded program area under the Ministry of Children and Families and the Ministry of Education.