



# Stories from the Teen Parents Support Programme

Celebrating 25 Years





*This beautiful little booklet is a shout-out to all the amazing parents who participated in the Teen Parents Support Programme over the past 25 years! A big high-five to the staff who stood by these young parents and their children, along with all the integral individuals who helped shape the development of the TPSP.*

*Inside, you'll find heartwarming case studies and testimonials straight from the project staff and young parents. Don't worry, everyone's identities are safely tucked away to keep things under wraps!*

*We hope you enjoy reading,*

*Our heartfelt thanks to the funders and public officials who made this vital service possible,*



*Treoir*





## *Janice*

When Janice was eighteen years old and three months pregnant she was referred to the TPSP. She had limited support from her family. At the time, Janice had secured a third level college place on a business degree, but she feared dropping out of college. She received vital supports through her TPSP, including:

- provision of adequate clothing, shoes and schoolbooks and childcare through a collaboration with the Department of Education and Science and the School Completion Programme
- support to apply for a financial contribution from the Student Access Fund
- advocacy to ensure that Janice could take part in the upcoming exams despite them coinciding with her due date
- engagement with the Local Housing and Community Welfare Officers to secure appropriate housing for Janice and her baby

Janice's engagement with the TPSP ensured that she was able to continue in college and she received a 1st class honours degree in business. She is now motivated to complete a masters degree. Janice attributes her success to her own resilience and confidence and to the one-to-one emotional and practical supports that she received from her dedicated TPSP Project Worker.

## **Gillian**

***Gillian, a Leaving Certificate student and mother of a six-month-old, struggled to balance school and motherhood, which made her consider dropping out. Referred to the TPSP, she underwent a needs assessment which identified her requirements for childcare, financial support, career guidance, and emotional assistance. A collaboration facilitated by the TPSP brought together multiple services, leading to:***

- ***weekly meetings with the Project Leader***
- ***home tuition and study group access***
- ***regular psychologist appointments***
- ***secured social welfare entitlements***
- ***childcare at a local crèche***
- ***completion of her Leaving Certificate***
- ***enrolment in a third-level course***

***With the right support, Gillian overcame her challenges, built a strong relationship with the TPSP, and continued to seek assistance as needed.***



## ***Aíne***

**Aíne, a mother of a sixteen-year-old boy who was about to become a young dad, engaged with the TPSP for support.**

**Following an assessment of need, it was agreed that Aíne needed one-to-one emotional and practical support to enable her to express her shock, anger and fears.**

**Addressing these issues would ensure that Aíne could be available to support her son and his girlfriend. A plan was put in place which included:**

- one-to-one weekly meetings with Aíne**
- utilising strategies to encourage full acceptance and involvement from other family members**
- assisting the young parents to remain in education**
- engage with both sets of grandparents and the young parents.**

**Following Aíne's engagement with the TPSP project worker, her husband, the maternal grandparents, and the young parents, also engaged with the programme for support. Due to the full involvement of the family within the TPSP project, both young parents remained in full-time education with the support from their family network and their TPSP project.**

## ***Abiola***

Abiola was eighteen years old and fifteen weeks pregnant when she was referred to the TPSP by her local maternity hospital. Abiola came to Ireland as an unaccompanied minor and lived in a Direct Provision Accommodation Centre. She presented with poor physical and mental health issues related to trauma she experienced prior to becoming pregnant which complicated her pregnancy. She had numerous admissions to the hospital throughout her pregnancy.

During her initial appointment with her TPSP, the project worker identified that Abiola seemed apprehensive about giving birth, and rearing a child alone. She also learned that Abiola was isolated with no family support, had little formal education, and lacked confidence in dealing with health and social services. Abiola had also been refused refugee status. The following supports were put in place:

- weekly appointments were arranged with a counsellor in the Rape Crisis Centre
- daily emotional and practical support was given by the TPSP
- information provision and support given to apply for social welfare entitlements
- accompaniment to GP and maternity hospital appointments
- referral to TPSP antenatal classes

Abiola received intensive support from the TPSP during her pregnancy. This support continued after the baby was born.



## *Sabrina*

Sabrina was a twenty year old mother of two children: a 2-year-old and a 13-month-old infant. She was referred to the TPSP during her first pregnancy.

Having spent her teenage years in residential care, Sabrina moved into independent living after her first child's birth, but her new home was damp and substandard. She lacked support from her family, and her relationship with her children's father deteriorated shortly after the birth of their second child.

Following engagement with the TPSP Project Worker, the following actions were completed:

- liaised closely with After Care Services and encouraged Sabrina to stay in touch with her Social Worker
- assistance was provided to help Sabrina find better-quality housing
- encouragement to attend family health clinic appointments, including taking her children for developmental check-ups
- regular one to one meetings to provide emotional support; the Project Worker established a trusting relationship with Sabrina, allowing her to openly share her feelings and worries
- assistance to resolve issues regarding shared parenting and maintenance with Sabina's former partner.

Thanks to these interventions, Sabrina secured suitable accommodation, improved her health, and fostered a positive relationship with the father of her children. Sabrina remained in contact with her TPSP and other local services where needed.

# Natasha

Natasha was sixteen years old and a fifth year student when she became pregnant. She concealed the pregnancy until 30 weeks and then confided in her parents. They then brought Natasha to her GP and then attended their local Maternity Department. There, a Maternity Social Worker assessed her situation and subsequently referred her to the TPSP.

The TPSP Project Worker identified several key supports for Natasha:

- antenatal assistance, including preparation for childbirth
- Information and advocacy regarding social welfare payments, maintaining her education and health-related matters such as birth control
- after giving birth, the TPSP Project Worker arranged for home tuition through her secondary school and the Department of Education and Science, enabling Natasha to continue her studies
- financial support for childcare and grinds

With the help of her parents and the TPSP, Natasha successfully completed her Leaving Certificate. She then pursued an access course in university, filled with high hopes for her future.



# Carol

At seventeen years old, Carol became pregnant after having separated from the baby's father. Additionally, her relationship with her parents had deteriorated when she was just fifteen years old. Since the age of fifteen, Carol had moved between several living situations. While pregnant, she stayed in temporary housing with some assistance from her maternal grandmother. Carol discovered the TPSP through a friend and made a self-referral to the project.

During her initial meeting with TPSP staff, it became clear that Carol's primary concern was finding suitable accommodation, as she would need to leave her temporary living situation after the baby was born. She was hesitant to engage with support services.

The main aim of the TPSP in this situation was to help Carol secure permanent housing. The project worker developed a plan that included the following steps:

- assisting her in completing a housing application to her local housing authority
- contacting the local Community Welfare Officer to obtain help for a rental deposit
- assisting Carol's search for private rental accommodation
- referring Carol to Focus Ireland to explore supported accommodation options.

Following the birth of her baby boy, Carol sought assistance from the Homeless Persons Unit when her son was just five weeks old, as she lacked suitable accommodation. She was offered a hotel room that met good standards but did not provide essential baby facilities, such as a cot, steriliser, or baby bath etc. initially, Carol declined the offer due to her worries about potential exposure to residents struggling with substance abuse. However, facing a crisis, she reconsidered and accepted the offer. Carol and her baby stayed in the hotel for two months until she transitioned to supported accommodation with Focus Ireland, where she joined a housing project. With the help of the Public Health Nurse (PHN), her son continued to thrive. Carol and her baby regularly participated in the TPSP for one-on-one and group support. The TPSP staff recognised the need for a parenting program, leading Carol to attend Barnardos' Partnership with Parents Programme. Additionally, she formed positive relationships with her son's grandparents.



# Janet

Janet became a mother at the age of nineteen. After the birth of her child and her discussions with the Public Health Nurse (PHN), she was introduced to the TPSP. Due to a traumatic experience in her childhood, Janet struggled to communicate with others, which significantly impacted her life. Her mental health suffered, characterised by high anxiety levels and low self-esteem. As a new parent, Janet found life overwhelming and often refused to leave her home. Seven months after giving birth, the PHN encouraged her to engage with the TPSP. The TPSP project worker organised a home visit with Janet, and she agreed to seek support due to her significant distress. Utilising Foróige's 'Be Healthy Be Happy' and 'REAL U' Programs, along with the TPSP Toolkit, the project worker helped create a support plan consisting of the following elements:

- establishing a strong, trusting relationship with Janet
- exploring and participating in activities to encourage her to leave the house
- providing programmes aimed at addressing her anxiety and mental health issues
- exploring education, training, CV preparation, and career opportunities
- setting both short-term and long-term goals.

These identified supports greatly enhanced Janet's quality of life, reduced her anxiety, and enabled her to enrol in college and find employment. Her confidence improved, both personally, and as a parent. Inspired by her positive experience with TPSP, Janet expressed a desire to mentor other young parents and became more determined to pursue her goals.

# Helen

At the age of nineteen, Helen welcomed her son into the world. Upon discovering her pregnancy, she experienced feelings of anxiety, fear, and embarrassment, worrying that her dreams and aspirations would be out of reach. Although she had support from her family, she chose to keep her pregnancy a secret. Both she and her partner felt immense pressure, which made it challenging for them to maintain a joyful relationship.

After giving birth, Helen's anxiety peaked, prompting her to visit the Public Health Nurse (PHN), who introduced her to the TPSP. Initially hesitant to participate, she quickly felt comfortable with the project worker, leading to a strong bond. The TPSP project worker provided Helen with essential support in various ways:

- weekly one-on-one support meetings
- assistance with her driving test application
- participation in programmes aimed at boosting her confidence and self-esteem
- identification of further education courses
- access to funding for educational pursuits
- career guidance

Thanks to this support, Helen successfully applied for and passed her driving test. Through a referral to career guidance, she secured part-time employment and identified a course in special needs assistance. Once she gained admission to the course, the TPSP project worker assisted her with financial support from the access to education ESB Fund. Additionally, help was provided for schoolbooks and course fees through the School Completion Programme, and a local childcare placement was arranged.

With the backing of the TPSP, Helen experienced significant improvements in her confidence and self-esteem. She graduated with a Level 7 award in Special Needs and obtained a permanent position at a school. Helen also got engaged and moved into a home with her partner and son, paving the way for a bright future ahead.



# Clare

Clare was just fifteen years old when she was referred to the TPSP. Her relationships with her parents and siblings were strained, and there was a history of domestic violence in the household. The family resided in an area of high-deprivation and education was not considered a priority in her family.

The main focus of the TPSP Project Worker was to mend family relationships, particularly between Clare and her mother. Support systems needed to be established to help Clare stay in school during her pregnancy and complete her Junior Certificate. The TPSP project worker:

- held weekly meetings with Clare and her mother
- coordinated with the school through the School Completion Programme to cover education-related expenses and alleviate the family's financial burden
- assisted Clare in returning to secondary school by securing a childcare allowance via the School Completion Programme
- arranged a childcare placement at a local creche operated by Doras Buí and the CETS scheme from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- involved Clare in various group activities organised by the TPSP focused on personal development, parenting, education, and peer support.

These interventions fostered a healthier relationship between Clare and her mother. The advocacy and resources provided enabled Clare to continue her education. Through her involvement in the TPSP, Clare gained the confidence necessary to raise her child with love and confidence. As a result, there was a notable enhancement in her personal and emotional growth. Clare thrived in school and ultimately graduated from college with a degree.

## ***Marianna***

**Marianna, as a teenager, came to Ireland seeking refuge. The TPSP received a referral for Marianna who was pregnant as the result of sexual assault prior to her arrival in Ireland. Marianna was extremely traumatised and found it difficult to communicate her fears and needs. She questioned if she would bond with the baby and whether she wanted to keep the baby post birth. Marianna's mother was supportive of her and the upcoming birth. Following an initial meeting with the TPSP project worker it was agreed that a number of supports needed to be put in place. These included:**

- **the building of a trusting and supportive relationship between the TPSP project worker, Marianna, and her mother**
- **setting up an inter-agency collaboration meeting with professionals - Home School Liaison Officer, Antenatal Education Co-ordinator, SATU (Sexual Assault Treatment Unit) Clinic, HSE Hospital Social Worker, Tusla Adoption Services, the manager of the maternity ward and a midwife from the hospital.**
- **identifying supports needed for Marianna to stay in school to complete her leaving certificate**
- **the development of a pre-birth plan**
- **the organisation of an information session with Tusla Adoption Services**
- **support in securing relevant Social Welfare Entitlements.**



**Marianna gave birth to a healthy baby at the start of the Covid-19 restrictions. The midwife informed the TPSP project worker of the birth, and that Marianna had bonded with the baby. Following the birth Marianna made the decision to keep her baby. The TPSP project worker focused her sessions with Marianna on bonding, attachment and play.**

**Social Welfare payments were secured. Marianna continued in school successfully completing her Leaving Certificate. A Solicitor was engaged to support Marianna in her application for refugee status. Marianna participated in a peer support group ensuring social engagement. She was enrolled in Secondary School and supported to complete her Leaving Certificate.**

# John

At eighteen years old, John, a father to a ten month old daughter, reached out to the TPSP after his relationship with the child's mother ended. His access to his daughter was governed by a Court Order. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all visits between John and his daughter occurred outdoors.

John expressed that he found the access arrangements to be quite stressful. He mentioned that visits typically happened once a week at a local indoor play centre (when possible) and once a week at the baby's mother's home. In the latter situation, he noted that the baby was aware of her mother being in the next room, making it challenging for him to settle her as she frequently cried and tried to go to her mother. After meeting with the TPSP project worker, the focus of their work included:

- assisting John in bonding, developing attachment, and being present with his daughter
- strengthening the relationship between John and his daughter
- supporting John in enhancing his parenting skills
- aiding John in co-parenting with the mother of his daughter
- reviewing the access agreements

The TPSP project worker implemented various parenting programs to assist John. As a result, John's parenting skills improved, and he created a solid shared parenting plan with his daughter's mother. With a successful modification of the Court Order, John's access was adjusted to allow visits at his own family home.



# Lauren

At just sixteen years old, Lauren found out she was pregnant. A family member shared information about the TPSP, prompting Lauren to make a self-referral. This period was incredibly challenging for her, as she was still in school and felt anxious about informing her parents of her pregnancy.

Lauren met with the TPSP project worker several times and created an action plan that included:

- cooking classes for both parents
- peer support groups for both parents
- assistance in continuing her secondary education
- guidance in exploring further education options
- emotional support
- financial aid for childcare.

The plan proved successful, with both parents participating in cooking classes and attending peer support groups. Lauren's mother received support to help her come to terms with the pregnancy. Additionally, the TPSP project worker assisted Lauren in securing a childcare placement funded by the School Completion Programme. Lauren not only completed her Leaving Certificate but also earned a degree in Social Care. Twelve years after her involvement with TPSP, Lauren obtained a position with the TPSP in her community.

## *And now, a few words from our Parents!*

*Hold onto your heartstrings because we're diving into a delightful dose of wisdom from our marvelous young parents in this next chapter of the booklet! We hope their heartfelt thoughts and reflections inspire you and showcase just how much those incredible project workers have brightened their lives.*

*A massive round of applause for all the fantastic parents who bared their souls—you're the beating heart of the TPSP!*





*“Being a young mother I feel like I’m talked down to, people make me feel like I don’t know what I’m doing but I could not thank this service enough for being such amazing understanding people who believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself”.*



*“This service has honestly been a life saver for me as I’m sure many many other girls, from emotional support helping me adjust to being a mom to finally being able to make my dream job a reality!”.*

*“My feedback overall is I couldn't have asked for more, Joanne has gone above and beyond for me. In my opinion the team and Joanne especially should be recognized for all their hard work and rewarded for all they do. I can't thank them all enough”.*



*“They really are so friendly, understanding and helpful with everything and are always there when you need a chat. I would definitely recommend the teen parent support group”.*



*“The service was an amazing support for me being a single parent and fearful of parenthood, they supported me with education, parent groups, making friends with other young mums”.*



*“The girls in TPSP are always very helpful to me. I used to be very anxious coming to the group but now I really enjoy them and have made new friends. I have been supported with my education and I am now doing a a part time course”.*

*“The Teen Parent Programme was great help to both of us, becoming parents so young was hard and it was really nice to have the option to get extra support. I have met a lot of other parents my age and my daughter really benefited as she has done a lot of activities which wouldn’t of been possible without the ladies in the TPSP”.*



*“When I got pregnant I was in first year in college and was so lost. Without the support teen parent has given me I would not of been able to continue college. I am so grateful for everything they have done for me financially and mentally”.*



*“I could say whatever I wanted and I didn’t feel like I was being judged”.*



*“The teen parent programme has been in my life for 5 years since having 2 children at a young age. I will be forever grateful for the help and support they provided to me and my family”.*



*“They have provided invaluable support, and my experience with them has been outstanding. I truly appreciate the amazing work they do in assisting young parents like myself.”*

*“I am looking forward to what the future brings and hope that I can use the skills that I have seen the staff use with me so I can one day return the favour and have an impact on a young parent in the future”.*

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*“The moment that stuck out to me was finding out the project worker was a young mum too”.*

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*“I felt like I had support from TPSP over anyone else that came out, it felt like one of those honest friendships”.*

*“The programme is great to be involved in, the leaders are amazing and will do anything they can to help and support you”.*



*“The project went above and beyond what I expected of it and I can honestly say that it got me through the first few years of parenting”.*




*“I can't even begin to really put into words how much of an impact the staff have. I am so grateful that I was able to receive this support”.*




*“It means a lot to me because when I was just finding my feet I always had somewhere to go and someone to turn to and it helped me in ways that I will always be thankful for”.*



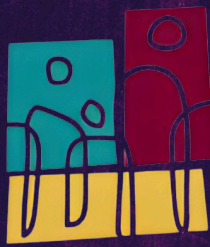
*“The TPSP has become my safe space for me and my children to go to, to meet with my friends who are in the same boat as me.. it takes away the lonely feeling of being a mother”.*



*Treoir, wish to extend a huge thank you to all project workers and the fabulous young parents who helped whip up this booklet! We hope it gives everyone a peek into the incredible work these project staff carry out and the amazing young parents they've met over 25 years of the Teen Parents Support Programme. Bravo to each and every one of you!*







**TUSLA** An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

**HE** our **health** service

**treoir**

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