



# The Young Parents Project

A Partnership among  
Florida State University's Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy  
The Children's Trust • Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice  
Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration

The Florida State University Center for Prevention & Early Intervention's *Young Parents Project* is an intensive home visiting program that provides outreach and care coordination to address the overall physical and mental health needs of teen mothers involved in the delinquency system. The project's skilled professional staff works to engage these young families by providing the support and intervention necessary to change the trajectory of their lives and the lives of future generations.

The *Young Parents Project* has served teen mothers in the court-involved young families since 2007 with funding from The Children's Trust. The promising results in decreased arrests led the Secretary of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) in 2012 to provide funding for the FSU Center to expand the existing project in Miami and establish a new site in Tallahassee. Recently, the project has received additional support from The Miami Foundation and The Women's Fund in Miami to purchase educational materials and health supplies to assist with the young families' needs. Currently, the YPP serves 51 court-involved youth in both locations.

## Working with Court-Involved Young Families

The commitment of the court has proven invaluable to the success of the *Young Parents Project*. Referrals for the teens are initiated through juvenile court judges, community service providers and Juvenile Probation Officers. The criteria for project participation include youth who:

- *have entered the juvenile justice system and are minimal risk or youth on probation, conditional release and post-commitment probation*
- *are pregnant and/or parenting (ages 13-18 at the time of intake)*
- *have custody or visitation privileges with their child*

Young mothers involved in the juvenile court system have multiple risk factors that impact the possibility of re-offending and affect their ability to provide a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment for their child. Many of these adolescents were born when their mothers were teens themselves and face severe challenges that affect their ability to parent. Histories of poverty, lack of family support, violence/abuse/neglect, and trauma are deep-seated and multigenerational. These vulnerable teen mothers who "*have so little and need so much*" are often invisible to the courts and the communities in which they live.

***The Young Parents Project initiates positive life changes to alter the multi-generational cycle of trauma, early parenting and court involvement.***

The *Young Parents Project* uses an interdisciplinary team of highly skilled professionals from different academic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to address the complex needs of teen mothers in the delinquency system. Staff are willing to do home visits/outreach in all areas of the community. The Social Worker addresses the family's concrete needs and provides court-related advocacy; the Nurse Educator addresses health, family planning and the development of both the teen and baby; and the Master's level counselor promotes the mom/baby relationship with a trauma-focused lens. Members of the team attend staffings with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and the Site Coordinators attend quarterly meetings with the Chief and Assistant Chief Probation Officers for Circuits 2 and 11.

The Young Parents Project's team focuses on engaging the families through:

- **Use of the Yale University's Minding the Baby model-** A home visiting model specifically designed to address needs of young urban mothers, living in poverty, who have not been able to take advantage of other parent support programs.
- **Understanding of trauma-informed care and dual development of the teen and baby-** Using a trauma lens to understand the experiences of the DJJ youth and to consider next steps, with shared attention to the needs of both the parent and child.
- **Persistence-** The lives of teen parents are often disorganized and chaotic. For this reason, YPP staff are relentless in their endeavors to locate the participants, encourage participation, and partner with Juvenile Probation Officers when a young family moves.
- **Respectful approach-** Staff stand by the teen through their pregnancy and parenting efforts and support them during the judicial process with careful consideration of their role as a parenting youth.
- **Considering the needs of others-** Using the PACT and YES Plan provided by the JPO, the YPP staff consider risks and support the teen's ability to "hold others in mind," thereby reducing recidivism.



### Promising Outcomes

In-depth Intake Assessment forms were completed with the 50 youth that participated in the *Young Parents Project* as part of the Tallahassee and Miami DJJ contracts from September 1, 2012- December 31, 2013. For the combined group, an analysis was completed on: demographic characteristics, DJJ status, pregnancy/parenthood information, living situation, the medical home, and education. Some significant outcomes are listed below:

#### ★ **Outcome: Reduced recidivism**

YEAR 1 DATA (n=50): Of the 50 participants, there were two arrests during the past year (one in Tallahassee and one in Miami). The charges for one of the arrests were later dropped. Efforts to reduce recidivism require attention to the specific and changing circumstances of delinquent teens and accessibility services that can address those needs.

#### ★ **Outcome: Reduced number of subsequent births**

YEAR 1 (n=50) DATA: Of the 50 participants, there were zero subsequent pregnancies or births during the past year. National data indicates that 25% of teen parents will have an additional birth within 24 months of the first. While follow-up data was not obtained for all participants at the 24-month data point, the trend for court-involved teen mothers involved with the *Young Parents Project* is encouraging in delaying subsequent pregnancies.



#### ★ **Outcome: Increased health care utilization**

YEAR 1 (n=50) DATA: Of the 50 participants, 83% of the teens said they had a health care provider and 92% of the teens said they had health insurance. However, after program enrollment, it was often found that their Medicaid plan had changed or was no longer active. Over the course of the year, the Nurse Educators were successful in assisting all teens enrolled in the project to find a medical home that accepts their health insurance so that they can receive ongoing care.

Young Parents Project staff recognize the trauma and subsequent challenges of these high-risk families and is persistent in their efforts to build trust and provide the support and intervention vital to the teens' progress. Through the parallel process of positive relationships, the intergenerational trajectory of court involvement and early parenting begins to change.