



Association of Teen Parent Educators of New Zealand

Survey of WINZ-related issues October 2004

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Background

At the annual ATPENZ conference held in August 2004, a number of members indicated concerns relating to their relationship with WINZ and apparent inconsistencies and gaps in the provision of services.

A decision was made to survey all members on the issues raised. This is a summary of the findings of this survey.

Survey numbers

A total of 11 members responded to the survey. All ran Teen Parent Units but had varying arrangements for childcare for the students concerned. Most had dedicated and usually attached early childhood education centres, but some used established community childcare facilities and one was operating a playgroup at present. One respondent had no childcare arrangements yet established.

The respondents reported that they accessed 34 different WINZ offices in all. One respondent accessed services from 11 different offices and 4 respondents related to one office only. On average, each respondent accessed WINZ services from 3 different offices.

WINZ service delivery

There was a general agreement of inconsistent service delivery between WINZ staff within the same office, between WINZ offices in the same district and between districts. Respondents who accessed services from one office only had the best chance of a more consistent service.

The nature of the inconsistencies varied. Respondents speculated that these could be as a result of no clear policy or practice guidelines, use of “discretion” which varied greatly, a lack of understanding of the role and nature of Teen Parent Units and perceived “approval” or not of this kind of educational support.

Examples of inconsistencies included the way applications were processed (eg how “late” forms were handled), decisions on “backpay” for childcare, which students qualify for TIA, which items qualify for TIA and how TIA is paid out.

Although it is appreciated that general entitlements will vary from student to student, most will have a similar arrangement when it comes to TIA and childcare.

The appointment of Childcare Coordinators is generally viewed as a positive development with improvements noted in relationships with the offices where such appointments have been made. Not all respondents have yet been approached by Childcare Coordinators in their regions.

RECOMMENDATION: *Policy and/or practice guidelines be developed by WINZ to ensure that all staff understand the nature of Teen Parent Units and that delivery consistency can be reached across all WINZ staff in all districts. If possible, one case manager per office/region should supervise benefits for students attending TPUs.*

Dealing with Childcare Absences

In terms of the relevant WINZ policies, WINZ will continue to pay childcare providers if a child is absent from the centre. This payment is restricted to 210 hours each year after which time students themselves are liable for their children’s absences.

The above policy is reasonable in general terms and there needs to be care taken to prevent any “abuse” of the system. It is certainly unreasonable to expect WINZ to pay for a childcare space for the child of a TPU student if that student does not use that service for extended periods.

However, application of this policy does lead to difficulties in the ongoing provision of an educational programme to students attending TPUs and an attempt should be made to address this issue.

Some TPUs use community daycare facilities which do not close during school holidays. Students are encouraged to spend time with their children during this time and, as a result, the 210 hours of available cover is used over holiday periods meaning none is available for absences during school time.

Teen Parent Units have been established as “second chance” educational units to provide continuation of schooling or a return to schooling of young parents. Many (but not all!) of these young people have had significant schooling disruption in their pasts and often face significant social and family upheavals in the present. Added to this is the demand of parenting at a very young age.

As a result, disruption to schooling, even in TPUs, is common. Teachers strongly encourage regular attendance but the lives of these young people often dictate that disruption will occur. Teachers are aware that they need to maximise the time that students do attend so that maximum progress can be made.

In light of the above, when the 210 hours has been reached, TPUs and particularly associated childcares, are reluctant to demand payment from students unless there is no other option. As a result, debts occur or are written off in the best interest of the students and children concerned. This is obviously not a viable option in the long term.

This problem can lead to a student dropping out of school due to an inability to pay or to the centre writing off the debt. The benefits of ongoing education and the benefits to the child in their ongoing involvement in a childcare centre are therefore at risk.

RECOMMENDATION: *MSD in consultation with MoE consider a policy of review or appeal when the 210 hours has been reached for students attending a Teen Parent Unit and who are therefore receiving education within a secondary environment.*

Students who do not Qualify for Childcare Subsidies

Respondents indicate that an average of 23% of students attending their Teen Parent Units do not qualify for the full childcare subsidy.

This occurs broadly for two main reasons. Firstly, a student’s partner may be working and they may fall below the threshold for the full subsidy payment. Secondly, the student may be under 16 years old and therefore does not qualify for any subsidy.

Respondents handle this matter in a number of ways. In some cases, students and partners cover excess costs; in others, family members (eg grand-parents) contribute. Certain students may only be able to attend school on limited days due to an inability to pay. Some childcares absorb these cost; in others, shortfalls are covered by a trust. Again, this cannot be maintained in the long term.

The situation of partial subsidy causes direct and indirect stress which impacts both on the student’s ongoing attendance and on their progress while attending.

The second scenario where a student is under the age of 16 and therefore receives no direct subsidy is a significant barrier to learning. These students may not legally leave school but cannot access the full benefit of attending a TPU because their children are not subsidised for childcare costs. In these cases, the students or their families must cover childcare costs or the costs must be written off. This is again an untenable long term position.

In some cases, another family member (eg the parent of the student concerned) may be able to apply for the childcare subsidy as the “principle care-giver”. However, this is generally an unwieldy approach which does not address the main concern.

This situation must concern both MSD and MoE given the legal status of these students. One approach would be to consider changing WINZ regulations to permit under 16 year olds to receive this subsidy. The other would be for MoE (possibly under special education provisions) to provide the equivalent subsidy for childcare costs for students who are legally required to attend school.

RECOMMENDATION: *MSD in consultation with MoE review the policy of the payment of childcare subsidies with respect to students attending Teen Parent Units to ensure full childcare can be provided for their children. This should cover the circumstances of students who receive partial subsidy as well as students under the age of 16 who receive no direct subsidy*

Recommendations

Three recommendations are made:

1. Policy and/or practice guidelines be developed by WINZ to ensure that all staff understand the nature of Teen Parent Units and that delivery consistency can be reached across all WINZ staff in all districts. If possible, one case manager per office/region should supervise benefits for students attending TPUs.
2. MSD in consultation with MoE consider a policy of review or appeal when the 210 hours has been reached for students attending a Teen Parent Unit and who are therefore receiving education within a secondary environment
3. MSD in consultation with MoE review the policy of the payment of childcare subsidies with respect to students attending Teen Parent Units to ensure full childcare can be provided for their children. This should cover the circumstances of students who receive partial subsidy as well as students under the age of 16 who receive no direct subsidy

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