



**Media Release  
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## **EDUCATION AND SKILLS OFFER TEENAGE MUMS AND THEIR CHILDREN A BRIGHTER FUTURE**

UnitingCare Australia supports the Federal Government's goal, announced today, to roll out a series of initiatives in targeted areas aimed at skilling up teenage parents on welfare and ultimately preparing them for jobs.

But National Director, Lin Hatfield Dodds said the compliance measures that accompany the initiative are disappointing.

"While we strongly support the principle of reducing the risk of welfare dependency by encouraging teen parents to pick up where they left off at school, or to take up training that will lead to a real job, we have questions about the proposed compliance arrangements.

"Through our network's experience on the ground with teen parents across Australia we know that a supportive approach is far more effective than a punitive one.

"We know that teen parents are some of the most vulnerable in the country and that they risk being locked into a cycle of intergenerational disadvantage because of missed opportunities.

"Efforts to ensure that this group of young parents finishes school or takes up training will increase their chances of getting and keeping a decent job, and so ensure a better future for themselves and their children.

"A secure job is one of the key elements in lifting people out of poverty permanently. We know that targeting specific initiatives to areas where there are high numbers of people at risk works.

"We also know that the early years are vitally important. If teen parents are required to return to school or engage in training it is essential they get access to affordable, high quality childcare that will also ensure that their children are developmentally and socially ready for school.

"We are pleased to see an increase in Government funding in targeted areas to Communities for Children programs and to childcare.

"UnitingCare in Western Sydney is currently involved in the Happy Young Parents program being run under the Communities for Children banner. It provides information, support, recreation, social interaction and educational opportunities to young parents. Courses are provided free of charge with child minding available, transport provided and morning tea and lunch for young parents and children.

"We will be looking carefully at the detail of the initiatives announced today and will be looking for flexible arrangements that take into account the complex circumstances of each young parent.

The UnitingCare network provides social services to over 2 million people each year in remote, rural and metropolitan Australia. UnitingCare employs 35,000 staff and engages 24,000 volunteers.

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