

Case Study – Emma

New Years Day is often a defining moment in the lives of many, but particularly for Emma... on January 1 2000 at age 16, she discovered she was pregnant.

Emma left school at a young age and was in and out of housing from the age of 13. She considered herself a 'dork' in her primary school years, but things changed in high school when problems began at home and her attitudes changed.



'I started doing silly things like running around, running away, and smoking, and so much that my mum couldn't handle it. So I went in and out of refuges and foster homes, and then my mum had enough so I moved to Melbourne and lived with my dad, but problems continued there.'

'I was in and out of places to live in Melbourne until I met my eldest's son's dad, at the age of 15. I was in and out of jobs and he was studying and then on, New Years Day 2000, I found out I was pregnant!'

Emma kept her pregnancy a secret and travelled around until her aunty took her in at her Bayswater home. She continued to search for housing and became involved in a Starting Out antenatal class in the meantime. Soon after, she had to leave that group and take up a rental house she had found in Geelong. Emma joined a local mums group, where she struggled to find the support and acceptance she needed.

'When I got there I was young, I was struggling... they just looked down on me - I felt a lot of judgement in the room. They were in there talking about their husbands, their cars and the mortgage and how the rates had gone up. I was just at 17 years of age, and you kind of

go, "What's a mortgage?" So I tried going again, but I couldn't be in that room feeling like that, where I felt all around me I was being judged.'

After a while, Emma moved back to Ringwood and called Starting Out to see what support was available for her and her child and she became involved in the young mums group.

'There wasn't any judgement. It was so relaxed, it was so laid back - you were so welcomed. I met this girl who was a month behind me in her pregnancy and now we're so close, our boys have grown up together, I'm the godmother of her second child, and if it wasn't for that, I don't think I would have gone back.'

'I felt like me and I felt like I didn't have to impress anybody or try and act older or anything like that – being in that Starting Out group was just amazing.'

As a young mum, Emma was grateful to be able to talk to people in her situation, people who understand the challenges and difficulties young mums face and to share the ups and downs and issues with other people her own age. Through Starting Out,

Case Study – Emma (cont'd)

Emma was also able to access housing support, counselling for substance abuse and depression and other advice and support to work through her issues.

'I had so much support through the Connections Starting Out program and through my friends from playgroup, I felt I was cured, it was great, and then I was able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. So many young mums are out there, they might be on alcohol and on drugs and don't know what their body's going through. They just need that little push to go "Hey you need to try counselling. Counselling's not a bad thing, actually it can help".'

Emma, now aged 26, has been involved with Starting Out for a decade with her three young children and now lives happily with her partner. Emma has a good relationship with her family and things with her mum have never been better. Recently, Emma was trained and employed by Connections as a Peer Support Worker.

Emma credits her involvement in Starting Out for the person that she is today, and encourages all young mums to seek help so they too can turn their lives around.

'The thing is being through Starting Out for ten years, if it wasn't for them I wouldn't know where I would be.'

'If it wasn't for Connections, I wouldn't be the person who I am now, and I say that so often and this big gush of feelings comes up every time I say it... I could still be on drugs and I could be still pegging down that long road, but they made me turn a corner. I don't have depression, I'm not on drugs and I'm just so happy and life's good.'

What is Connections UnitingCare Starting Out?

Starting Out is a community based support program for young, pregnant and parenting women up to the age of 25 years, their children and partners.

This innovative, unique program is there for young pregnant or parenting women with pre and post-natal support and information. Starting Out enhances the physical and mental health of the young women and their babies as well as providing them with the tools and confidence to make the most of motherhood.

What is Peer Support Training?

Starting Out offers a training course for young parents who would like to develop their knowledge and skills further, in order to support other young parents in their community. This training can also be a step towards future education or employment. Peer Support Training is offered every second year.

We offer a range of services across a continuum of care from preschool and childcare through to counselling and in-home support. We provide innovative and early intervention programs that support children, young people and their families giving them a better chance in life now and in the future.

Connections UnitingCare is a community organisation with a long and proud history of supporting marginalised and disadvantaged people.

For more information visit www.connections.org.au

Connections UnitingCare is a community organisation with a long and proud history of supporting marginalised and disadvantaged people.

We offer a range of services across a continuum of care from preschool and childcare through to counselling and in-home support. We provide innovative and early intervention programs that support children, young people and their families giving them a better chance in life now and in the future.

For more information visit www.connections.org.au