Supportive Housing for Teen Families: Investigating the Impacts of the Successful Families Program.

Final Report

A Research Project by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: In Edmonton, housing shortages and a lack of affordable housing have added to the challenges faced by teen parents. Teen families have long faced disadvantages that can result in poor social, economic, and health outcomes for themselves and their children. Teen parents also face stigma and their strengths can go unrecognized. We need to better understand how to support teen families in order for parents and their children to reach their full potential. For example, teen parents can form strong bonds with their children. It is important to build upon these strengths in our efforts to support the unique needs of teen families at risk of homelessness in our city.

To date, we do not have adequately designed supports and services to meet teen families’ unique needs. In North America, programs or services developed to support teen parents tend to only target teen mothers and do not cater to the basic needs of teen families (e.g., affordable, safe, and secure housing). In addition, policy (e.g., program policies, organizational policies) and legislation often assumes teen parents will be supported by their families, but for many teen parents, this is not the case. Existing programs (e.g., housing strategies) also have eligibility requirements that prevent teen families from accessing them (e.g., age restrictions, marital status requirements). These kinds of assumptions and restrictions put teen families at risk of homelessness. When it comes to addressing the housing needs of teen families, new strategies need to offer more long-term housing spaces, accommodate various family arrangements, and provide additional supports (e.g., wraparound supports to meet the unique needs of teen families). Without access to safe and affordable housing, teen families can become trapped in cycles of poverty, which negatively affects their children’s healthy development.

Through the research project described in this report, we (a research group and two community organizations) explored how a supportive housing program, designed to serve teen families in Edmonton (the Successful Families Program), is starting to impact participants, the research field, and organizational/program policy of the partnering community organizations. Teen families are referred to the Successful Families Program and undergo a screening process to determine if they meet eligibility requirements related to income and/or funding and whether their independent living skills are developed enough to be suitable for the program. Teen families accepted into the program are provided with safe and affordable housing (provided and managed by Brentwood Community Development Group). They are also provided strength-based, individualized, and collaborative services (provided and managed by Terra Centre) meant to empower families and support parents to raise their children in the ways they desire. We also reflected on ways our collaborative partnership has contributed to the research and
This research project had two phases. This report describes Phase 2 of the project which builds upon the work that we completed in Phase 1 (where we designed and implemented this supportive housing program with funding from a 2017 Homeward Trust grant; see the Research Report for more information about this work). Phase 2 of the project builds off of this previous work by exploring the ways that this program has begun to impact participating teen families and service providers, and the ways that this knowledge can continue to help us understand teen families and the supports that they need.

Project Objectives: Phase 2 of the research project had two main objectives: (1) to explore initial impacts of the Successful Families Program and (2) to build the research and evaluation capacity of program staff. Initially, we set out to measure changes in parent and child outcomes over a year of program involvement as a way to investigate impacts of the program, but this was not feasible with this unique group of participants (this is discussed in more detail in the report). As a result, we describe the impacts of the program using cross-sectional data that we were able to gather from program participants. Therefore, we did not complete a formal program evaluation in Phase 2 of the project, but have gathered preliminary project learnings and impacts that could inform future evaluation of the Successful Families Program.

Project Participants: Teen parents (n = 19) and children (n = 18) participated in Phase 2 of the research project. Program staff were also involved in all Phase 2 research activities (e.g., supported participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, dissemination).

Data Collection Methods: We used multiple methods in Phase 2 to capture information about the strengths of teen families, children’s development, and information about the program. The research project was cross-sectional and data collection occurred between July 2016 and June 2018. On average, participants were part of the Successful Families Program for 9 months when they provided data (e.g., completed a survey), with a range of 1 to 37 months of program participation.

- **Self-report questionnaires** were completed by parents to collect information about their self-esteem, resiliency, parenting attitudes, and parent-child relationship quality. We also asked parents to complete a survey about their experiences with the program.
- **Child assessments** were completed to gather information about children’s development and to better understand the developmental strengths and weaknesses of children who have teen parents.
- **Photovoice** was also used as a method to gather teen parents’ insights on how they experienced the supportive housing supports and services in the program. Through this process, staff from one of the partner agencies (Terra Centre) learned how to plan and implement this data collection method so they could use it for future program evaluation activities. Parents were asked to take photos in response to specific
questions, and participants then came together to discuss their photos and share their experiences of being teen parents in group interviews.

- Meeting notes and observations were also used to inform Phase 2 project findings.

Data Analysis: Qualitative data (photovoice, meeting notes, and observations) were analyzed using thematic analysis and quantitative data (parent questionnaires and child assessments) were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., average scores calculated).

Key Findings: Initial impacts of the Successful Families Program were found in three areas: (1) impacts on teen families, (2) impacts on service delivery, and (3) impacts on research.

(1) Impacts on Teen Families
- Overall, most participants strongly agreed or agreed that, as a result of being part of the program they felt less stress about being a parent, could better afford their monthly rent, felt they lived in a safe place, felt more confident as a parent, and felt their basic needs (e.g., clothing, food) were being met.

(2) Impacts on Service Delivery
- Using the research project findings (e.g., findings from group interviews with teen parents), the Successful Families Program was able to learn what teen families in their program valued and needed to support the healthy development of their children.
- The program was able to incorporate learnings about desired approaches to service delivery (e.g., trauma-informed), types of support needed (e.g., accessible safe and secure housing), and other factors (e.g., community characteristics) to ensure that program service delivery could be as responsive as possible to the needs of the participating teen families.
- Program policies were also changed based on project findings. For example, program policy on the Successful Families Program structure was adapted based on a finding that participants’ expectations were not clear enough. As a result, a clear program structure and participant guidelines were developed and implemented.
- The community partners’ organizational policy was also altered based on project findings. One organizational policy change involved clarifying program staff roles (e.g., Brentwood housing staff vs. Terra support staff) so they could more effectively deliver services to teen families. Organizational policy was also changed to develop a more adequate staffing structure that ensured program participants were receiving the best service/support possible and to support the growth of the partnership and collaboration between the two service providers (Terra and Brentwood).
Impacts on Research

- Findings from this project begin to address a gap in the research literature about specific characteristics of teen parents and their children’s development. For example, little is known about strengths of teen parents (e.g., self-esteem, resiliency) and the developmental profiles of children of teen parents (e.g., compared to other groups children).

- Although these findings are limited because they are based on small sample sizes of teen parents and their children, they nonetheless begin to demonstrate how assumptions we tend to have about the strengths of teen parents and their children’s development may not be as accurate as previously thought. For example, children of teen parents in this project were developing at a rate comparable to other children, contrary to the assertion (promoted in the existing research literature) that children of teen parents are developmentally lagging behind their peers.

Implications: Findings from Phase 2 of the research project have a number of implications for research, practice and organizational/program policy.

- Research: Findings begin to address existing gaps in our knowledge about teen families and their strengths. We also demonstrate variability that exists among teen families and this highlights why service delivery models that provide individualized supports may be most effective for this group. Children’s performance on developmental assessments also begin to demonstrate that children of teen parents may not be at a disadvantage developmentally, contrary to previous beliefs, which may indicate the value of providing holistic, individualized supports and services for these particular families. Overall, further research is needed to uncover teen families’ strengths and further understand this group and the best ways to support them in different contexts.

- Practice: Findings demonstrated how a model of supportive housing based on a collaborative partnership can begin to meet the needs of teen families in Edmonton. This model could be used to influence and inform other models of service delivery or programs designed to support teen families in Edmonton and the rest of Canada. Specific to practice of program practitioners, Phase 2 also intentionally built the evaluation capacity of program staff so they can continue to collect information about the program in order to ensure it continues meeting the needs of participants over time.

- Organizational/Program Policy: The nature of the partnership between the community organizations and the researchers involved in this project provided ongoing opportunities for collaboration and reflection throughout Phase 1 and 2 of the projects, which had implications for organizational and program policy. These learnings and changes made to enhance the collaborative service provision provided to teen families have implications for other organizations and programs that support teen families.
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“I find even during these weeks where life is more difficult to navigate I'm still able to learn how to be a better mom.” -Participant
BACKGROUND

CHALLENGES FACED BY TEEN FAMILIES

As a society, we have long focused on the health and wellness of children and families. Parents largely influence the health and wellness of their children and like any parent, teen parents play an instrumental role in their children’s development (Reisch, Anderson, Pridham, Lutz, & Becker, 2010). Research has demonstrated that teen parents face substantial challenges and disadvantages that can result in poor social, economic, and health outcomes for themselves and their children (e.g., Mollborn & Dennis, 2012; Slomski Long, 2009; Smith, Gilmer, Salge, Dickerson, & Wilson, 2013). Also, examinations of public discourse (e.g., information shared by the media) demonstrate that teen pregnancy is often identified as a cause of negative outcomes (i.e., poverty) when the evidence informing this conclusion is not sufficient to determine a causal link between these two things (Bales & O’Neil, 2008). In addition, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests poverty might be contributing to increased rates of teen parenthood, and not the reverse (Furstenberg, 2016). Negative and inaccurate discourse about teen parenting that continues to persist can contribute to decreased empathy for teen parents and does not leave space for public perceptions of teen parents as valuable members of society (Bales & O’Neil, 2008).

There is also a lack of research that examines the strengths of teen families such as the positive parent-child relationships that many teen parents have with their children, and teen parents’ potential to show high levels of resilience (Reisch et al., 2010). For example, with the presence of protective factors, a significant proportion of teen parents are managing to successfully meet the developmental needs of their children (Lee et al., 2016; Lewin, Mitchell, Beers, Feinberg, & Minkovitz, 2012). These successes warrant recognition and represent the possibility for all teen families to build on their strengths and live their lives in ways that feel meaningful. To increase the likelihood of this happening, there is a need to clarify and better understand how to support teen families in effective and responsive ways.

THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS FOR TEEN FAMILIES

Partly due to housing shortages across Edmonton (Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness, 2016; End Poverty Edmonton, 2019; Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014), teen families are especially vulnerable to experiencing homelessness in our city (Dworsky, Morton, & Samuels, 2018). Specifically, teen parents who are most at risk for experiencing homelessness are young, single mothers living in poverty (Bassuk, 2010; Gulliver-Garcia, 2016). Although the federal government has distinct programs (Government of Canada, 2017) to address the need for affordable housing, the dissolution of Canada’s federal social housing program in 1993 resulted in large reductions in the availability of affordable housing (Canadian Observatory on
Homelessness, 2017a). Fortunately, there has been an increased commitment from the federal government to provide affordable housing for vulnerable families. For example, on March 8, 2019 a 10-year agreement between the government of Canada and the Government of Alberta was signed (i.e., The National Housing Strategy Bilateral Agreement), a $678 million investment to protect, renew, and expand social and community housing in Alberta. This strategy is meant to prioritize people most in need (e.g., Seniors, Albertans with low incomes). This is promising, given that policies developed from this work may improve housing stability for teen families (Carrion et al., 2014). However, this could be little help if eligibility requirements (e.g., restrictions based on age, marital status, etc.) continue to exclude teen parents from housing services, along with social assistance and benefits (Andrews & Moore, 2011; United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). For these new strategies to help teen parents, more long-term housing spaces must be created that accept teen parents, accommodate various family arrangements, and provide additional supports (Smid et al., 2010).

In general, teen parents’ pathways into homelessness indicate a high degree of vulnerability, which may include experiences of chronic poverty, violence, abuse, and exiting the foster care system (Cooke & Owen, 2007; Narendorf, Jennings, & Santa Maria, 2016). An additional challenge is that policy and legislation often assume teen parents will be supported by their own parents, ignoring the complex circumstances that many teen parents face. Teenage parents may not be able to, or may prefer not to, live with their own parents for a variety of reasons including financial difficulties, crowding, abuse, or parental rejection (Andrews & Moor, 2011; Dworsky et al., 2018; United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). In one study involving teen parents living in Michigan (Sarri & Phillips, 2004), nearly a quarter of teen parents surveyed were living in out-of-home placements (including shelters, group homes, and transition programs). Another 15% were living with friends, partners, or independently. This demonstrates the many different living situations teen parents can find themselves in, that do not involve living with or receiving support from their own parents or family.

Even when teen families seek out stable housing and supports, there are few options depending on the types of housing and supports available. For example, shelters and transitional homes rarely accept minors and many do not accept young children (Andrews & Moore, 2011). When housing services do accept teen mothers and their children, they often prohibit their male partners from sharing their accommodations and place restrictions on the amount of time that children’s fathers can visit (Smid, Bourgois, & Auerswald, 2010; Smith & Roberts, 2011). This restriction can put teen families at risk of homelessness as mothers may be unwilling to leave their partners to obtain housing (Smid et al., 2010). Furthermore, few housing services are equipped to support single fathers accompanied by children (Narendorf et al., 2016). Without subsidized and supportive housing, many pregnant and parenting teens are unable to find secure, appropriate housing and provide a stable environment for their children (Smid et al., 2010).
Teen parents frequently identify housing as a source of stress (Sarri & Phillips, 2004). The stigma surrounding teen families further exacerbates the struggle to secure stable housing (Graham & McDermott, 2006). Many landlords can be reluctant to accept teen families as tenants because they are seen as financial risks and, with few alternatives, many teen families are forced to raise their children in precarious living situations (Karabanow & Hughes, 2013).

Without access to safe and affordable housing, teen families can become trapped in cycles of poverty, which can have negative implications for parents and their children (Blair & Raver, 2012). For example, teen families living in precarious situations can experience violence, addiction, and crime on a daily basis, which drastically affects their capacity to parent (Cooke, 2013). In addition, teen parents and their children may find themselves isolated from critical social support networks (McDonald et al., 2009).

Partly due to negative perceptions about teen families that persist in our society, we do not have a complete understanding of how teen families function, or the most effective supports they need to thrive and be successful. This lack of understanding stems from little research and policy attention being paid to strategies for helping teen families achieve healthy outcomes (Corlyn & Stock, 2011). It is critical that researchers and policymakers focus on understanding and addressing the persistent social disadvantage experienced by many teen families (Mollborn & Denis, 2012; Mollborn et al., 2014; Sabates & Dex, 2015). In turn, there is a pressing need to explore best practices for serving teen parents and their children. Teen families need financial, social, and material support throughout and beyond the teen years (Khatun et al., 2017; Lipman, 2011). This could include income supplements, low-cost childcare, support for education and employment, and affordable housing (Mollborn & Dennis, 2012). To date, there are some programs and interventions developed in Canada to address the unique challenges and strengths of teen parents. For example, the Teenage Parents Program in Guelph, Ontario offers support, information, and resources to teen mothers (www.guelphy.org); the Family Ties Teen and Young Parent Program in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan offers group support to parents under the age of 30 (www.cfssaskatoon.sk.ca); and the Cridge Young Parent Outreach Program in Victoria, British Columbia offers support, mentoring, and advocacy to pregnant and parenting teens (www.cridge.org). However, many of these programs only target teen mothers, with an absence of programs specifically catering to teen families, and do not include housing supports. In Alberta, the Highbanks Society in Calgary (www.highbankssociety.ca) and Terra Centre for Teen Parents (www.terracentre.ca) offer a range of supports to both teen mothers and fathers, including housing supports. Both agencies recognize that services provided to teen parents and their children must be sensitive to their unique needs, circumstances and assets, based on a holistic understanding of families, strength-based, and incorporate collaboration with other community services (Price-Robertson, 2010).
RESPONDING TO THE ISSUE

In the last decade, wraparound approaches have been identified as an effective way to provide family-centered, comprehensive supports for families with complex needs (Bruns et al., 2010; Painter, 2012; VanDenBerg, Bruns, & Burchard, 2008). If these types of wraparound supports can also be offered in combination with safe and secure housing, a complementary supportive housing approach for teen families can be created. Unfortunately, many approaches used to address teen homelessness have been emergency responses (e.g., shelters, meal programs, outreach services), rather than preventative (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). These types of emergency services then end up becoming institutionalized, and generally do a poor job of providing long-term solutions to address the causes and consequences of homelessness. Alternatively, a preventative approach focused on the coordination of services and investment in supports has the potential to reduce the likelihood that young people and their children will become homeless in the first place (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). These types of approaches can result in better long-term outcomes, but prevention programs cannot work in isolation. Isolated prevention programs cannot address the multiple structural, systems-level, and individual factors that contribute to homelessness (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). Responding to the complex nature of teen family homelessness will require efforts that are aligned, collaborative, and integrated across the private sector, community housing providers, and all levels of government (including intersectoral collaboration among government departments; Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, 2007; Gaetz & Dej, 2017). Prevention approaches can include implementing poverty reduction strategies, building and maintaining affordable housing, providing early childhood supports, supporting education, helping people retain housing (e.g., rent banks), or rapidly obtain stable, safe, affordable, and appropriate housing (Gaetz & Dej, 2017).

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING MODELS FOR TEEN FAMILIES

Supportive housing initiatives can provide long-term, affordable, independent housing in combination with flexible, individualized, accessible supports to people experiencing vulnerable circumstances (Rog et al., 2014). To cater specifically to pregnant and parenting teens, Desiderio and colleagues (2010) identified five core components or critical elements of supportive housing programs: 1) self-sufficiency; 2) housing stability; 3) financial stability; 4) successful and engaged parenting and attachment; and 5) healthy relationships. A supportive
Supportive housing programs are associated with reduced homelessness and greater housing stability (Rog et al., 2014). However, we need more research and evaluation to determine if similar outcomes are found for different subpopulations (i.e., teen families). Supportive housing programs specifically tailored to the needs of teen parents lack rigorous evaluation (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). Fortunately, there is some emerging evidence that teen families with stable access to housing and comprehensive supports can result in a range of positive impacts for parents and children (Lenz-Rashid, 2013). For example, evaluations of a supportive housing program for teen mothers found that the program helped teen mothers continue their education, improve relationships with families and fathers, avoid additional teen pregnancies, and practice positive parenting and life skills (Hudgins, Erickson, & Walker, 2014). Evaluation findings also indicated that remaining in the program for a longer period of time was associated with better outcomes, especially pertaining to education, employment, and residential stability (Hudgins et al., 2014). Our understanding of how to support families affected by homelessness is expanding, but there is still a lack of evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of initiatives or models of support for teen families (Karabanow & Hughes, 2013). We need to continue to expand our understanding of the forms of support, alongside housing, that should be provided for teen families (Kirsh, Gerwurtz, & Blakewell, 2011). In line with this need, our project team was able to develop a supportive housing program for teen families in Phase 1 of the research project and in Phase 2 we could begin to investigate the initial impacts of this program.

“I want my child to have what’s best for him. And if that means me going through years of school and working my ass off until I’m however years old, I’ll do it just to make sure my child has the best life he can.” -Participant

THE SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES PROGRAM

The project team was responsible for developing a supportive housing program model for teen families in Edmonton, the Successful Families Program.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS. This program was developed and implemented through a partnership between the Terra Centre (Terra), Brentwood Community Development Group (Brentwood), and researchers from the Community-University Partnership for the Study of
Children, Youth, and Families (CUP) at the University of Alberta. Terra is a non-profit organization that has supported teen parents in Edmonton for more than 40 years, with a mission of empowering teen parents to succeed (e.g., help pregnant and parenting teens develop self-reliance skills and reach their full potential as parents). Brentwood was formed in 1977 with the aim of building supportive communities that enable every child living in them to reach their full potential. They accomplish this by providing safe, secure, and affordable housing to individuals and families. CUP is a research centre based at the University of Alberta that focuses on the development of children, youth, families and communities by creating and mobilizing evidence-based knowledge that impacts programs and policies.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP. Terra and Brentwood first partnered in 2014 to offer safe, secure, and affordable housing to teen parents and their children in combination with wraparound supports. Shortly after forming their partnership, Executive Directors from the two agencies approached the researchers from the University of Alberta to develop and study a supportive housing program model for teen families. Working together, the three partners have spent the past four years building knowledge to support the development of the supportive housing program.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM. The long-term vision of the Successful Families Program was for the children of teen parents to achieve their potential and become valued adults who contribute to society. Informed by wraparound and supportive housing models, teen families in this program are provided numerous levels of structural and relational supports. Specifically, through group activities, in-home visitations and community activities, Terra staff provide collaborative, individualized, strength-based services to empower teen parent participants to maintain their housing, reduce social isolation, engage with their community, and successfully raise their children in alignment with their goals. Three full-time housing staff and a full-time housing manager are employed by Terra and support this program. Terra also facilitates community connections that link teen families to additional resources and other families in the neighbourhood.

Brentwood provides affordable, safe, and secure housing for the teen families participating. The supportive housing program takes place in a 207-unit townhouse site owned and managed by Brentwood in a neighbourhood in Edmonton, Alberta. Within the program, Brentwood acts as the landlord, providing subsidies as well as a house located across the street from participants’ homes that has been converted to an office with programming space. Participants are required to have the financial resources and capacity to live independently, and therefore undergo a screening process before being accepted into the program (see Figure 1 for more details about program eligibility and the screening process used).
Research and evaluation are also prioritized to support a culture of learning across the program. This aspect of the program is guided by CUP with active involvement from Terra and Brentwood.

**ABOUT THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS.** Between 2015 and 2018, the Successful Families Program served 63 teen families. Of these families, 24 had an intimate partner living with them for a portion of time. As of August 2018, there were 23 parents and 27 children actively involved in the program. At the time, participants ranged in age from 18 – 24 years (average parent age is 20.8 years) and their children ranged in age from 0 – 7 years (average child age is 2.4 years). Of those families, 68% identified as Indigenous, 24% as Caucasian, 4% as African, and 2% as Spanish. Some of the participants also attended an educational program (e.g., high school, post-secondary; 15 participants) or had paid employment (full-time or part-time; 4 participants). One participant was on maternity leave and three participants were not involved in a day program due to mental health challenges. Participants’ income sources varied: Earned income (4 participants), Learners Benefits (9 participants), Alberta Supports (5 participants), Child and Family Services (4 participants), and student loans (2 participants). In addition, two participants were in the process of seeking supports for financial independence.

Over the course of the Successful Families research project, we also learned about how to successfully engage this unique group of participants in research. For example, it was originally our intention to have a more structured project design (e.g., participants complete project measures at set time points, track change over time in set outcomes); however, we quickly learned that to engage this group of participants we would need to adapt our standard
research practices to be more accommodating to our project participants. Through this project we were able to better understand what practices are most promising when it comes to research with teen families and their children. Briefly, we learned that it was essential to build trusting relationships with participants (important for participant recruitment and data collection) and that we had to be flexible and accessible (e.g., collecting data in spaces where participants are comfortable, be willing to learn from program staff about the ways they effectively engage the teen parents). We also saw that we had to be willing to adapt our original plans for the project (e.g., letting participants participate in data collection when it worked best for them, accepting that participants were more comfortable with some methods of data collection over others). We were more concerned with gaining a complete understanding of the participants’ experience and saw that we could not rely on a single data collection method or rigid study design to do this. For more details about our learnings around engaging vulnerable youth in Community-Based Participatory Research, please see a paper we published in the Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education (Tremblay, Kingsley, Gokiert, & Benthem, 2018).

“It takes a lot of courage to be a young, single mom. Some moms are able to plan for their child, but for teen moms, you kind of have to cram years of planning and preparing by doing things like getting a stable job and house into nine months after you find out you’re pregnant.”
— Participant

PROGRAM LEARNINGS. Throughout the development of the Successful Families Program, research and evaluation related to programming were always a focus of the partnership. Partners wanted the ability to make informed decisions about the program as changes were made to ensure teen families were receiving the most effective support possible. Based on evaluation of the program since its implementation, we have learned that in order to work with and support teen families, the program needed to be relationship-based, flexible, use strength-based approaches and employ non-judgmental staff. We also learned that while there was a need for responsive and individualized supports, the program also required built-in structures, accountability, boundaries, and a focus on prevention, empowerment, and capacity-building. More specifically, information and learnings generated through evaluation helped give structure to the program. The program structure has taken a phased approach (e.g., participants work through three phases of the program, with clear expectations that must be
met before participants can progress to subsequent phases). Taking this phased approach has helped make expectations of participants clear and helps participants remain in the program and progress through the phases.

We also learned how important it was for staff (housing support, educational support, and outreach) to have clear understandings of their roles, the roles of other staff, and program goals. This clarity and understanding helps provide more effective supports for families. The presence of a full-time housing manager on-site also helped establish and maintain clarity and understanding of roles and program goals. Role clarity and distinction between staff (e.g., Terra support staff and Brentwood landlords) was especially important. Another critical aspect of the program was the quality and function of the partnership between Terra and Brentwood. This partnership was identified as a significant contributor to effective programming. Trust, common values, a shared vision, information sharing, transparent communication, and a willingness to work through challenges were identified as characteristics of the partnership that staff members saw as contributing to the success of the program.

We also learned from teen parents about the importance of affordable housing that they accessed being located in an area that was safe and family-friendly. This was identified as an essential aspect of the program because affordability often comes at the cost of raising children in safe environments. Participants also developed a sense of connection and belonging to their community during the course of their participation in the program.

Few programs are currently available that exclusively focus on supporting teen families by providing supportive housing and preventing teen homelessness. The Successful Families Program offers an innovative approach to address the needs of participants by providing them with safe, secure and affordable housing as well as wraparound supports. In addition to direct benefits to participants, this program also has the potential to inform a much-needed model for serving teen families. Establishing this type of model is critical as it could be used by non-profit agencies and other human services systems that are responsible for supporting this vulnerable group. Continued evaluation of the program will inform the development and enhancement of appropriate services and supports by providing new insights into ways that interventions and services can address the unique needs of teen families in Edmonton.
“This is my bedroom at Brentwood. My son also has his own room. Seeing my room empty like this is a huge reminder for me as to where I would be without all the supports I have available.” - Participant
SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES RESEARCH PROJECT: PHASE 2

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

With participants actively involved in the Successful Families Program, the partnership wanted to start exploring how the program is impacting the lives of participants, and how to build the capacity of the partnership to continue supporting research and evaluation of the program. That being said, we did not set out to conduct a full program evaluation for Phase 2 of the project. Although a comprehensive program evaluation would have been ideal, the nature of the data we were able to collect (e.g., cross-sectional, small sample) would not have accurately represented the outcomes of the program. However, the information we were able to collect describes the initial impacts of the program and ways in which the research and evaluation capacity of the program partners was built over the course of the project. Therefore, Phase 2 of the research project had two main objectives: (1) Research initial impacts of the Successful Families Program; and (2) Build the research and evaluation capacity of the Successful Families Program staff.

INTEGRATED APPROACH: COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The Successful Families Program was developed through collaboration among program partners, and this was mirrored in the research approach. A community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was adopted, which equitably engages community partners throughout all phases of the research process (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). This approach is also used with the intention of generating critical understandings of issues that are meaningful to community stakeholders, by applying local knowledge and experience. Community participation is integral to CBPR and for this reason partners work to build on existing community strengths to address issues that are community priorities. There is growing consensus that CBPR is the most suitable approach for research that has an aim of contributing to a more just and equitable society (Mayan & Daum, 2016). CBPR additionally involves long-term commitment in acknowledgement of the complex nature of community change. In the spirit of CBPR, the Successful Families research project was an equitable partnership among multiple stakeholders who worked together to complete all research project activities across the two phases of the project. The researchers and partners from Terra and Brentwood jointly defined the focus of the project as well as the research questions, collaboratively made decisions regarding methods, and worked together to recruit participants, collect and analyze data, and mobilize knowledge.
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Multiple methods were used to recruit participants, and relationships between the researchers and housing staff allowed for a multi-pronged approach. To recruit participants, the researchers attended community events such as a community barbeque and summer events at the park, and held a research information evening which participants could attend to sign up for the research project. In addition, staff recruited participants directly, and facilitated contact and appointment bookings between the researchers and participants. Given that participants joined the program on an ongoing basis, recruitment was carried out throughout the life of the project, with the intention of recruiting new participants as soon as possible after they joined the program. Overall, 19 teen parents and 18 children were recruited to participate in Phase 2 of the Successful Families research project.

“My son is learning so much living with me. He’s potty trained day and night, can brush his teeth and is learning how to fold his own laundry. This is our home as a family where he is learning and growing everyday with less stress than if we didn’t have all of these supports” – Participant

METHODS

Multiple methods (quantitative and qualitative) and data collection tools were used to address Phase 2 project objectives:

SELF-REPORT QUESTIONNAIRES FOR PARENTS. Parents completed five self-report questionnaires to understand their experiences with the program and its impact on their self-esteem, resilience, parenting attitudes, and parent-child relationship. One of the researchers collected data from participants in person. Participants were informed that their responses to questionnaires were anonymous and that their responses would not affect the services provided to them.

To measure self-esteem, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989) was used. This questionnaire has 10 items that are rated on a five-point Likert scale. This questionnaire is one of the most widely used measures of self-esteem in North America (Sinclair et al., 2010). The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003) is a 25-item questionnaire and was used to measure parents’ resilience. Each item is rated on a five-point scale, with higher scores reflecting greater resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Davidson &
Connor, 2016). The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory – Second Edition (AAPI – 2; Bavolek & Keene, 2010) assesses the parenting and child rearing attitudes of adult and adolescent parent and pre-parent populations. This inventory consists of 40 items and is rated on a five-point Likert scale. This questionnaire provides an index of risk on five specific parenting and child rearing behaviours (Bavolek & Keene, 2016). The Behaviour Assessment Scale for Children – Third Edition Parenting Relationship Questionnaire (BASC – 3 PRQ; Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2015) captures parent’s perspectives on the parent-child relationship for parents of children age 2 – 18 years. There are seven sub-scales and each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale (Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2015). Finally, a participant survey was administered to collect feedback on the program. It was also designed to identify areas where participants perceived that they were experiencing growth. We developed this questionnaire (all partners were involved; CUP, Terra, Brentwood) and it consisted of 21 items rated on a five-point Likert scale.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENTS. The children in the Successful Families Program were also invited to participate in standardized assessments of their development. The Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development – Third Edition (Bayley-III; Bayley, 2006) was used to assess the developmental functioning for children between 1 and 42 months of age. This assessment is used to elevate understanding of a child’s strengths and challenges in five developmental domains (Piñon, 2010). Given the limited age range of the Bayley, the NEPSY-II (Korkman, Kirk, & Kemp, 2007) was used to assess the developmental functioning of older children in the program as it can be used with children between 4 and 18 years of age. Children participated in assessments from July 2016 to April 2018.

PHOTOVOICE WITH TEEN PARENTS. The photovoice method was used to gain insight from teen parents about their experiences receiving supportive housing. With this method, community members take photos in response to an issue of importance to the community (Wang & Burris, 1997). Two rounds of photovoice were conducted with two different groups of parents (these were the same parents who were invited to complete the self-report questionnaires), each round spanning approximately six months (Round 1 = December 2016 to May 2017, n = 14; Round 2 = December 2017 to June 2018, n = 12). The second round of photovoice was focused on building the capacity of the Terra team to learn the photovoice method and integrate it into their practice. We met with parents on a bi-weekly basis and each session, which took the form of a group interview, lasted approximately two hours. For each session, between four to six participants were present. Attendance at photovoice groups was left open (i.e., participants could choose to attend as many groups as they wished to). All participants who contributed photos attended groups for the duration of each round of photovoice (i.e., there was no attrition of parents who contributed photos). Parents were asked to take photos in response to specific questions (e.g., what do you need as a teen parent to help your children grow and develop in healthy ways?) and sent their photos to a researcher to print before the next session. During each group interview, participants
discussed the photos and shared their perspective on the program, and their experiences as
teen parents more generally. All group interviews were audio recorded with participants’
permission and transcribed verbatim.

MEETING NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS. CUP researchers attended program
meetings (bi-weekly housing meetings and monthly program team meetings) and other events
(such as summer barbeques and holiday celebrations) to build relationships and gain a deeper
contextual understanding of the program. The reflections and learnings from different meetings
and events attended were documented as meeting minutes and field notes.

DATA COLLECTION
Data collection took place in person. Participants had the option to complete the self-report
questionnaires and child development assessments at the Terra house (situated directly across
from the families’ homes and in which the Terra housing staff are based) or at their own homes.
An informal event was also held where participants baked Christmas cookies with staff
members while their children completed assessments. Participants received gift cards for their
participation and were provided with brief feedback reports from the child development
assessments.

DATA ANALYSIS
Qualitative data (photovoice, meeting notes and observations) were analyzed using thematic
analysis, and quantitative data (self-report questionnaires and child assessments) were
analyzed using descriptive statistics.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS. This type of analysis is a flexible and practical method for
identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes within a data set (Braun &
Clarke, 2006). Two researchers reviewed all of the qualitative data (e.g., group interview
transcripts, meeting notes) and, using an iterative process, collectively chose a way to present
the data so that it tells a comprehensive story about the program. The data was then woven
together and is presented in this report in an integrated way rather than presented as discrete
sections by method. No statistical programs designed for use with qualitative data were used
for data analysis (e.g., Nvivo). Data was coded manually with a team approach.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS. We used Microsoft Excel to store the raw data from
the child development assessments and parent self-report questionnaires. Excel was used to
calculate standard scores using the published norms available for each child development
assessment too as well as two of the parent self-report questionnaires (BASC-3-PRQ and AAPI-2).
For the other parent self-report questionnaires (i.e., participant survey, CD-RISC, and
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), descriptive statistics were calculated (e.g., average scores, range
of scores) using raw scores because norms and standard score conversions have not been
developed for these questionnaires.

“Without supports, you feel isolated because all you can think about is how am I gonna take care of this child when I have to go to school, keep food in the fridge and pay my bills?” -Participant
PHASE 2 PROJECT FINDINGS

OBJECTIVE 1: INITIAL IMPACTS OF THE SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES PROGRAM

Project findings about the initial impact of the Successful Families program are presented in three sections: Impacts on teen families, impacts on service delivery, impacts on research. Findings discussing the research and evaluation capacity of the Successful Families program are presented in section “Building Research and Evaluation Capacity”.

IMPACTS ON TEEN FAMILIES

To assess the perceived impact of the Successful Families program on participating teen families, a survey was completed by teen parent participants. Nineteen parents reported the following as a result of accessing the Successful Families Program:

Figure 2. Parent Survey Responses

Overall, most participants strongly agreed or agreed that, as a result of being part of the Successful Families Program, they:
• Felt less stress about being a parent (79% Agreed/Strongly Agreed)
• Knew how to access community resources and programs (74% Agreed/Strongly Agreed)
• Could better afford their monthly rent (84% Agreed/Strongly Agreed)
• Knew how to be a good tenant (89% Agreed/Strongly Agreed)
• Felt they lived in a safe place (79% Agreed/Strongly Agreed)
• Felt more confident as a parent (89% Agreed/Strongly Agreed)
• Felt their basic needs for clothing (89% Agreed/Strongly Agreed), food (84% Agreed/Strongly Agreed), shelter (95% Agreed/Strongly Agreed) were being met

Relatively, fewer parents strongly agreed or agreed that they knew how to manage their budget, but many did indicate that they had a budget. The survey item that was endorsed the least by parents was “I have relationships with other young parents in the program”. Many participants responded to this survey early on in their involvement with the program and it is possible that they were not yet able to form these relationships with other young parents in the program when they were completing the survey. This assumption is supported by the photovoice data in which many parents spoke about the relationships they had developed with other parents in the program. In addition, many of the parents surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that they had lasting (more than a year) social relationships in their life.

These survey responses demonstrate the positive impact that the Successful Families Program had on participating teen families, as perceived by teen parents. Responses also highlight areas where teen families in the program may require more support (e.g., learning how to manage a budget, nurturing a sense of community, developing relationships with other program participants).

We were also able to observe that the program helped participating teen families develop natural supports (e.g., positive relations with family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, and meaningful adults that can help young people throughout their lives; Gaetz, O’Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016). Natural supports gave participants an extended support network outside of the program, which is important in preventing challenging circumstances from escalating into crises, particularly outside of the ‘9-to-5’ support provided through the program. Establishing natural supports for teen families while they are participating in the program is intended to benefit participants after their involvement in the program ends (e.g., when they age out, complete all phases of the program). Examples of the natural supports developed by program participants were parents babysitting for one another, developing social relationships that offer respite, and developing relationships with neighbours.

**IMPACTS ON SERVICE DELIVERY**

As discussed previously, there are few service delivery models in existence that adequately support teen families to find and secure safe and affordable housing, particularly alongside accessing other supports to address their complex needs. The Successful Families Program was
developed to address this gap in service and support for teen families. A primary way the Successful Families research project has impacted service delivery is by asking service recipients (i.e., teen parents) what they need from models of service delivery in order to have their needs met and for programs to be effective. In Phase 1 of the project, also funded by Homeward Trust, the project team supported the development of the Successful Families Program partnership and began to explore how staff and participating teen families felt about the model of support developed. One round of group interviews was conducted with teen families to begin to understand their needs when with respect to support and services. In Phase 2, a second round of group interviews were conducted with participating teen families to explore whether similar characteristics of adequate support and services would be identified, and deepen understanding of teen parents’ needs. Based on these group interviews, teen parents shared what they need in order to help their children grow and develop in healthy ways. Using thematic analysis, three main themes about teen families needs emerged. Specifically, teen families need (1) supports and services, (2) safe, secure and affordable housing, and (3) community. This mapped onto the findings from Phase 1 of the research project. We will briefly describe these themes and identify the sub-themes that were found, but a more detailed description of the group interview findings can be found in the Phase 1 Research Report.

SUPPORTS AND SERVICES. With regard to the supports and services that teen families require to facilitate the healthy growth and development of their children, teen parents identified the importance of supports/services that take a trauma-informed, relationship-based approach, are individualized, and are balanced to provide structure and independence.

“A big part of what keeps me stable mentally is knowing I’m always gonna have a safe place for my child to be. We’re always gonna have a place to call home. And Brentwood is a big part of that and the subsidy program and Terra.”
— Participant

A specific example of how the Successful Families Program provides these types of supports/services to participating teen families is their ability to connect teen families to other community agencies (e.g., local food bank, library, pre-school programs). As a result of this work, the Successful Families Program has established partnerships with community agencies such as Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Centre, Edmonton Public Library, Health for two, and Woodcroft Community League. Through these partnerships with external agencies,
staff link participants with community agencies and build participants’ capacity to continue accessing community resources independently.

Program and institutional policy changes as a result of project finding were another way service delivery was impacted. For example, program policy on the Successful Families Program structure was changed based on a finding that participants’ expectations were not clear enough. As a result, a clear program structure and participant guidelines were developed and implemented. Specifically, the Successful Families Program adopted a phased approach and was developed and refined based on evaluative feedback provided to partners. The program now has 3 phases that participants work through and each is outlined with clear requirements and expectations for participants. The partners’ organizational policy was also altered in a few ways based on project findings. One organizational policy change involved clarifying program staff roles (e.g., Brentwood housing staff vs. Terra support staff) so they could more effectively deliver services to teen families. For example, maintaining a separation between the roles of the landlord and support staff was necessary for the successful work of the program and allows each program partners’ work to complement the other (avoids duplication and interference). Organizational policy was also changed to develop a more adequate staffing structure that ensured program participants were receiving the best service/support possible and to support the growth of the partnership and collaboration between the two service providers (Terra and Brentwood). An example of this is the organizations changing their policy on the number and type of staff who are responsible for running this program. A full-time housing manager that works on-site was added into the staffing structure to support the program staff working with the teen families and to ensure program staff roles and objectives remain clear.

AFFORDABLE, SAFE, AND SECURE HOUSING. Participants shared that being able to access affordable, safe, and secure housing was important because it gave them a space to call their own and allowed them to parent autonomously. A supportive landlord was also valued. Additionally, parents talked about the ways that stable housing reduced their stress levels and supported their mental health.

“Having your own space makes you feel safe in the sense that you don’t have to be around unsafe situations. You can control what happens in your own space.” -Participant

COMMUNITY. A safe, family-friendly neighbourhood, as well as experiences of community integration and acceptance were essential aspects of the community that teen parents discussed needing in order to successfully raise their children.
“the most important part of this program for me is stabilization and integration in the community...finding and networking other resources which could include other moms in the complex.” -Participant

IMPACTS ON RESEARCH

A final area of impact for the Successful Families research project is in the area of research. Specifically, there is a lack of research that examines the strengths of teen families, including the development of quality teen parent-child relationships, as well as the resilience of teen families (Reisch et al., 2010). This is critical given the potential influence of these areas on successful parenting, and ultimately, healthy child development outcomes. Phase 2 project findings began to address this gap in the research literature by investigating where teen families fall as compared to other groups on constructs relevant to their wellbeing and child development. Teen parents completed a set of self-report measures, and their children completed assessments of their development.

PARENTS’ SELF-ESTEEM. Researchers have not widely explored the concept of self-esteem in teen parents (Berry, Shillington, Peak, & Hohman, 2000). Teen parent participants (n = 19) completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and their average score was 20.8 out of a possible 40 (Range of scores was 15 – 28). Using another study of 18 to 19 year old female Canadian high school students as a reference point, participants scored below what was considered average self-esteem on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Bagley, Bolitho, & Bertrand, 1997). Specifically, female teens in the study conducted by Bagley and colleagues had an average self-esteem scale score of 29.04 and a score below 21 was deemed “very low self-esteem” In Phase 2, 8 out of the 19 participants scored below 21. For our participants, self-esteem seems to be an area of difficulty and is an important area to focus on for future Successful Families programming and support.

PARENTS’ RESILIENCE. Using the CD-RISC to measure parents’ resilience, participants’ average score on this scale was 62.23 (n = 19), with scores ranging between 30 and 90. Based on the original validation study for this tool, the mean score for the general US population was 80.7 (Connor & Davidson, 2003). In comparison, our participants reported lower average scores of resilience, also signalling this as an additional, potentially important area for the Successful Program to target.

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS. The BASC-3 PRQ was used to assess
participants’ perspectives on their relationships with their children (n = 12). Scores can be classified into three ranges: average (signifying a typical parent-child relationship), below average (indicating the presence of potential or developing relationship problems that should be monitored), and lower extreme (denoting significant relationship problems for which intervention may be warranted). Figure 3 below shows how many participants scored in each classification range.

The majority of teen parents who completed this the BASC-3 PRQ demonstrated typical attachment, discipline practices, involvement, parenting confidence, and relational frustration. An area of particular strength was participants’ perceptions of involvement with their children. Two areas that could be marked for improvement and as a future programming focus are parenting confidence and relational frustration. Overall, teen-parent child relationships were typical, with evident areas of strength.

**Figure 3. BASC-3 PRQ Questionnaire Scores**

![Bar chart showing BASC-3 PRQ Questionnaire Scores](chart.png)

**PARENTING ATTITUDES.** The AAPI-2 was used to measure the attitudes participants reported toward parenting (n = 19). This measure can be organized into five sub-domains (oppressing power and independence, role reversal, corporal punishment, lack of awareness, inappropriate parental expectations; see Table 1 for a description of each parenting sub-domain) that serve as a basis for assessing attitudes known to contribute to child abuse and neglect.

**Table 1. AAPI-2 sub-domain descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inappropriate Expectations</th>
<th>Inaccurate perceptions of children’s skills and abilities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Empathetic Awareness</td>
<td>The tendency to view children’s needs and desires as irritating and overwhelming. The needs of the child may come into direct conflict with the needs of the parent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scores can inform levels of risk (low, medium, high) for abusive and neglectful parenting practices in each sub-domain. Figure 4 shows the number of participants who scored in each classification range for the five sub-domains of this tool.

Overall, most parents fell into the medium risk range with respect to the parenting attitudes measured. Few parents fell into the high risk range on most sub-domains, suggesting that most participants have the foundation for successful parenting. The sub-domain with the most parents categorized in the high risk range was lack of empathetic awareness. Given that teen parents are navigating their own developmental processes and needs, it is understandable that they may struggle to develop a high level of empathetic awareness for their children’s needs. The findings from this measure highlight where participants may benefit from expanding their knowledge and awareness on different parenting domains.
“We feel safe, happy, and stable in our home. Stability is not having to intrude on someone else’s space. It’s important to be able to set our own boundaries and rules. We’re not going from house to house every week.”

-Participant

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT. Two assessment tools were used to measure children’s development: the Bayley – III and the NEPSY – II. It was necessary to use two different assessment tools because of the age range of child participants. Children between the ages of 1 and 42 months can be assessed with the Bayley – III and children age four and older can be assessed with the NEPSY – II.

Children assessed with the Bayley – III (n = 13), on average, performed at expected levels across the five developmental domains assessed. Table 2 below shows children’s average Bayley – III standard scores across the developmental domains.

**Table 2. Children’s Bayley – III standard scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Domain</th>
<th>Average Standard Score</th>
<th>Classification Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>100 (n = 13)</td>
<td>At Expected Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>92 (n = 11)</td>
<td>At Expected Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor</td>
<td>106 (n = 13)</td>
<td>At Expected Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-Emotional</td>
<td>91 (n = 9)</td>
<td>At Expected Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Skills</td>
<td>100 (n = 9)</td>
<td>At Expected Level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NEPSY – II assesses the neurocognitive functioning of children across four domains (language, memory and learning, sensorimotor, and visuospatial). Within each domain, child participants’ (n = 5) average scores on 11 subtests are depicted in Table 3.

**Table 3. Children’s NEPSY – II scaled scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Domain</th>
<th>Subtest</th>
<th>Average Subtest Scaled Score</th>
<th>Classification Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Body Part Naming</td>
<td>85 (n = 5)</td>
<td>Slightly Below Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehension of Instructions</td>
<td>90 (n = 5)</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phonological Awareness</td>
<td>80 (n = 5)</td>
<td>Slightly Below Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speeded Naming</td>
<td>100 (n = 4)</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Word Generation</td>
<td>95 (n = 4)</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory and Learning</td>
<td>Narrative Memory</td>
<td>80 (n = 5)</td>
<td>Slightly Below Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sentence Repetition</td>
<td>85 (n = 5)</td>
<td>Slightly Below Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensorimotor</td>
<td>Imitating Hand Positions</td>
<td>90 (n = 5)</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visuomotor Precision</td>
<td>90 (n = 5)</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visuospatial</td>
<td>Block Construction</td>
<td>105 (n = 5)</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design Copying</td>
<td>90 (n = 5)</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On 7 of the 11 subtests, participants’ average scores were at expected levels, and on the remaining subtests they were slightly below the expected level. Similar to children’s performance on the Bayley – III assessment, it appears that the children of teen parent participants are generally developing on a fairly typical trajectory, with areas of strength and weakness.

Overall, the profile of participants’ developmental domains appears consistent with that of the general population (i.e., most children are at the expected levels of development in most areas). This is an important finding given the stigma surrounding teen parents and the widespread assumption that children of teen parents may lag behind their peers developmentally. Given the limited information that exists in these areas, these findings can contribute to literature on the wellbeing of teen parents and development of their children in order to inform service delivery and set the stage for future research.

**OBJECTIVE 2: BUILDING PARTNER RESEARCH AND EVALUATION CAPACITY**

Research and evaluation are vital to effective programming given their potential to provide systematic, real-time learning to support decision-making. Unfortunately, many organizations struggle to do research and evaluation and use information gathered through these means (Bakken, Nunez & Couture, 2014). The second main objective of this project was to build the research and evaluation capacity of Successful Families community organizations and program staff. In Phase 2 of this project, the research and evaluation capacity of our partners and program staff was built in the following areas:
Community-Based Participatory Research Approach

- University staff involved in the research project shared their knowledge and expertise related to CBPR with program staff. This learning also occurred simply as a result of being part of the CBPR project. Program staff learned about the extent of potential collaboration in CBPR and the level of involvement of community partners throughout the research process. As one staff member commented, “When we started [the project], I didn’t even know we would be able to have all this say in how the research would go. That’s been really eye-opening for me to learn that this kind of research can happen where we’re helping direct the research decisions in a way.”

“Because I have affordable housing, it's easier for me to access supports and other programs for my son. If you’re proactive and able to get subsidy you can avoid being in an emergency and the stress that comes with that, like having to wait in line for emergency funding and being like, if I don’t get this, me and my child are going to the homeless shelter.”

-Participant

Research and Evaluation Ethics

- Before beginning to recruit participants for research and evaluation, the researchers and front-line Successful Families staff came together for a training session. We discussed ethical concerns related to staff recruiting participants for research involvement. Points of discussion were drawn from the researchers’ experience as well as relevant literature. We also had an in-depth conversation about informed consent as well as the view of informed consent as an ongoing process rather than a discrete event. During the training session, the researchers also walked staff through recruitment procedures and staff had the opportunity to ask questions. We additionally engaged in discussion regarding broader concepts related to research and evaluation ethics such as accountability to the University Research Ethics Board and the notion of “vulnerable” participant populations. With regard to our training session, one staff member provided feedback that, “I used to collect research information when I worked at [other non-profit organization], but I had never actually taken the time to go through the procedures like we did. I felt like I had a better understanding of the whole process after we did that [training session].”
Photovoice

• The capacity of Successful Families staff was built to use photovoice as an ongoing method for inquiry, evaluation, and information gathering. During the first round of photovoice (December 2016 - May 2017), the researchers facilitated groups to capture initial learnings about the program. During the second round of photovoice (December 2017 – June 2018) that took place in Phase 2 of this project, a Successful Families staff member was trained to conduct photovoice and actively participated in the photovoice process. In addition, we held a capacity-building session where we discussed the background and purpose of the photovoice approach, the mechanisms by which photovoice is designed to facilitate social change, questions that can be used to probe discussion during groups, logistical considerations, and brainstormed how to bring our research and service delivery approaches together to effectively use this method. We also considered our learnings from the first round of photovoice. In particular, we collectively reflected on the importance of flexibility during groups such that participants were able to guide the focus of discussions, providing participants with incentives in the form of a weekly draw for those who contributed photos, having the skills to manage group dynamics, creating a safe space for participants to share sensitive information during groups, and inviting back a participant from the first round of photovoice to mentor the second cohort of photovoice participants. By intentionally reflecting on these learnings together, we built the capacity of both partners to effectively engage in photovoice.

Outcome Mapping

• In working to build research and evaluation capacity, we also undertook Outcome Mapping (Earl, Carden, & Smutylo, 2001). More specifically, one of the researchers facilitated a process through which the researchers, Successful Families staff, and Terra’s Director of Knowledge, Learning and Information came together to generate a map of the program’s stakeholders, intended outcomes, markers of progress, and strategies for achieving outcomes. We concluded this process by creating a framework for outcome journals that staff continued to use as an outcome monitoring tool after our Outcome Mapping process was complete, thus building staff capacity to use this method as a planning, monitoring, and evaluation tool for the Successful Families Program and for other programs at Terra as well.

Quantitative Methods

• Through this project, we also collected quantitative data (i.e., demographic information, child development assessment and self-report questionnaire data). By doing so, staff were able to build an understanding of how the information we were collecting could be compiled to reflect learnings about the program. Staff also gained an appreciation for the amount of time and resources required to collect
research and evaluation data from teen parents. Ultimately, there was recognition that participants were more comfortable participating in qualitative methods such as photovoice, through which they maintained control over the information they provided, than they were participating in quantitative methods such as child development assessments and self-report questionnaires, which could understandably feel risky to participate in since this involved providing information about themselves and their children when many parents had prior negative experiences with service providers. These were valuable learnings that elevated partners’ capacity to undertake future research and evaluation with this population.

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Over the course of Phase 1 and 2 of this project, the researchers regularly met with the community organizations to discuss project findings and engage in constant reflection. These meetings allowed the researchers to bring back qualitative data to organizational partners to refine their initial interpretations of these data. In this way, the community partners had the opportunity to participate in the qualitative data analysis process for this project and to learn how qualitative data analysis is carried out.
- During the second round of photovoice, we carried out a participatory data analysis process where one of the researchers, together with teen parent participants and two Successful Families staff members, began to generate themes for the transcripts from photovoice group interviews. As one of the staff members commented with regard to this process, “I didn’t know research could be this fun!”

“I can provide for my child on my own which makes me so proud” -Participant

Knowledge Mobilization

- To share Phase 1 and 2 project findings with a broader practice, policymaker and research audience, we co-presented at several evaluation, practice, and research-oriented conferences. This provided an opportunity to share findings with diverse audiences and gain additional research and evaluation-related learning through conferences and workshops.
- Program partners learned how to create presentations for different audiences (e.g., research presentations/posters for conferences) and also had several opportunities to co-present with the researchers.
- Building on presentations completed with the researchers, program partners went on to deliver presentations about the Successful Families Program with a teen parent participant. This speaks to their improved knowledge mobilization capacity.
Building an Evaluative Culture

- Given the support and buy-in to research and evaluation from the Brentwood and Terra leadership, conditions were ideal for building an evaluative culture within the Successful Families Program, which was an important aspect of building research and evaluation capacity more broadly. In particular, staff commented how, through working together with the researchers, they had gained an appreciation for the ways that research and evaluation can drive decision-making rather than solely viewing research and evaluation as a burdensome task required for funders. In addition, the researchers witnessed that staff appeared highly motivated to use research and evaluation findings to inform their work.

- As another indicator of building an evaluative culture, Successful Families staff continued to use ongoing methods of inquiry originally developed for research and evaluation purposes. As a specific example, regular meetings were held between Terra, Brentwood, and CUP (called “Capture” meetings). Twelve Capture meetings were held over the course of the grant. Initially, the purpose of meetings was to share administrative and logistical details regarding the research and evaluation. As the project progressed, meetings became a site for the researchers and front-line staff to come together to engage in collaborative reflection and foster evaluative thinking, and meeting agendas were changed to reflect this evolution in purpose. Even after the researchers scaled back their involvement, Successful Families staff members chose to continue holding Capture meetings to facilitate their own evaluative conversations, and this represents a success in sustaining our capacity building efforts.
DISCUSSION

The Successful Families research project took a community-based participatory research approach to develop a supportive housing model for teen families and to begin exploring how this type of model can impact the lives of participating teen families in Edmonton. This report outlines Phase 2 of the project, which had two objectives. Our first objective was to identify initial impacts of the Successful Families Program. Our second objective was to build the research and evaluation capacity of Successful Families staff. We were able to gain valuable knowledge about how to support teen families in the program and to explore how the program is having initial impacts in multiple areas. However, Phase 2 findings are based on a small sample of parent and child participants and this limits the generalizability of findings to wider contexts. We also gathered information from teen parents who qualified for the Successful Families Program. As such, these parents likely differ in important ways from teen parents who are not housed and from teen parents who have sufficient natural supports available to them such that they do not require access to housing and other services. Given the specific context of this research project and the unique subset of teen parents who meet criteria for entry into the Successful Families Program, the sample of teen parents who participated in Phase 2 may not be representative of teen parents in general. That being said, findings from this project can begin to demonstrate how we can learn from teen families about their needs and how to support them and their children. We were also able to collaborate with and support community partners who work with teen families in Edmonton and observe changes to their program and institutional policies as a result of project learnings.

We saw initial impacts of the Successful Families Program in three specific areas: impacts on teen families, impacts on service delivery, and impacts on research. In summary, teen families who participated in the Successful Families Program felt that the program positively impacted their lives in a number of ways (e.g., felt better able to pay rent, felt more confident as a parent). Participating teen parents were also able to provide valuable information about key elements of service delivery that they believe are necessary to meet their unique needs. Phase 2 project findings also begin to address existing gaps in research about characteristics of teen parents and their children. Finally, the research and evaluation capacity of project community partners was built in that program staff developed their skills to continue capturing information about the Successful Families Program for their future research and evaluation needs.

Although we did not aim to produce generalizable results, this research project serves as a point of reference for baseline information on the characteristics of teen families. It is important to have information regarding the contexts in which teen parent characteristics differ. Moreover, Phase 2 of the project makes a contribution to the literature by supporting a shift away from a deficit focus toward a strength-based perspective that takes into account the heterogeneous, complex realities faced by teen parents and their children. In addition, despite
the breadth of extant research documenting the challenges of teen parenting, there is a distinct lack of research that examines the development of quality parent-child relationships between teen parents and their children, as well as the resilience of teen families (Reisch et al., 2010). Therefore, Phase 2 findings serve as a starting point for investigating these areas and provides unique information by describing constructs that we know little about with respect to teen families. We go on to discuss in more detail the different ways Phase 2 of the Successful Families research project contributes to a better understanding of the needs of teen families.

VARIABILITY AMONG TEEN FAMILIES

Phase 2 findings reinforced the heterogeneity of teen families, with participating teen parents and their children showing different areas of strengths and challenges across the domains measured. This suggests that service providers and policymakers should steer away from focusing on teen parents as inherently at risk, and aligns with researchers who have recently suggested that teen families may face risks that are more related to the social determinants of health than parental age (e.g., Diaz & Fiel, 2016; SmithBattle, 2013). To be sure, teen families living in challenging circumstances (e.g., poverty) face risks for poor social, economic, and health outcomes, but so too do other families living in poverty who are headed by older parents. In addition, not all teen parents live in challenging circumstances, and those who do have varying levels of resources available to navigate their challenges.

KNOWLEDGE GAINED ABOUT CHILDREN OF TEEN FAMILIES IN A SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAM

Adding to the literature on the development of children of teen parents, the profile of participants’ developmental domains appears consistent with that of the general population, in that some children are above the expected level in certain areas, some children are below the expected level in certain areas, and most children are at the expected level in most areas. This is an important finding given the stigmas surrounding teen parents and the widespread assumption that the children of teen parents may lag behind their peers developmentally. More work is needed with teen families and their children to test the reliability of these findings and whether similar findings can be seen across different groups of teen families in different contexts.

TAKING A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

A promising means for supporting teen families, as enacted by the Successful Families Program, is the use of a strength-based approach (Ricks, 2016). Use of a strength-based approach can aid in developing programs and policies that are effective and meaningful for children and families (Black & Hoeft, 2015). Strengths are discovered through relationships, emphasizing the importance of a relational approach to working with teen families (Saleeby, 2008). This
represents a shift away from the deficit focus that has infused research and public policy regarding teen families toward a focus on the resources, strengths, and assets of teen parents and their children as well as the provision of learning and support opportunities to bridge potential and strengths. Teen parents have wisdom and knowledge that can be critical for dealing with challenges, and the family unit itself can represent a source of strength and resources. Service providers’ use of a strength-based approach can instill a focus on strengths in teen parents’ own interactions with their children. A strength-based perspective may also serve to disrupt pervasive stereotypes about teen families, thus impacting parents’ experiences of stigma. The Successful Families Program is one example of supportive housing model that uses a strength-based approach to service delivery and participants identified many positive impacts that this program has had on their lives (e.g., basic needs met, able to afford their rent). Other models of service delivery and supportive housing for teen families should also consider the value of taking a strength-based approach in their work with teen families.

**FURTHER RESEARCH**

Overall, there is a need for future research to more clearly elucidate the strengths and resources of teen families, along with the supports that can most effectively further their success. There is also a need for programs and practices to align with this research, and a need for sustainable, relevant policies to scaffold conditions for success for programs, systems, and teen families themselves. For the Successful Families Program specifically, future research that examines how the program is influencing their outcomes (e.g., child development outcomes, parental capacity outcomes, family stability outcomes) would also be valuable and information that could inform program practice. However, the decision to take on this type of research project will depend on the community partners involved and their expertise on whether this vulnerable group of youth would receive more benefit than harm from this. As discussed earlier in the report, the researchers and community partners had to learn how to be flexible and accessible with participants in order to engage them in the research process. It is difficult to engage vulnerable youth in research, but if researchers are willing to invest time to build trusting relationships with participants and community partners involved in the work, valuable information about teen families and their needs can be gained. It will also be important to take participatory approaches to engaging teen families in future research, as this can allow participants and community partners to be appropriately involved in the research process.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Teen pregnancy and parenting are affected by multiple factors that are difficult to control, making the processes of researching and evaluating the supports provided to teen families complex and challenging. Through this project, we have (1) provided insight into the needs of teen families from the perspectives of teen parents themselves, (2) presented a starting point to address the lack of baseline information across specific parent and child constructs by
describing the characteristics of teen parents and their children accessing the Successful Families Program, (3) demonstrated how staff evaluation capacity can be built through a CBPR partnership, and (4) offered suggestions for future research. With an enhanced evidence base that builds on teen parents’ strengths and acknowledges the complex past and current factors that contribute to their circumstances, it will be increasingly possible to facilitate positive, long-term health, social, and economic outcomes for teen parents and their children.

“The fact that I wanna give my child a future. That’s what keeps me going through everything I go through.”
— Participant


