



**SCHOOL AGE MOTHERS REPORT
2003/04**

This report summarises the provision for pregnant girls and mothers aged 13-18 throughout N.I. during the 2003-2004 academic year. The provision is funded directly by the Department of Education through Executive Programme funds. The report also includes comments from those involved in the service.

The School Age Mothers' (SAM) Service aims to support girls to remain in compulsory education and continue beyond this.

This is achieved by:

- ❖ Working closely in each of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to support girls to remain in school for as long as possible.
- ❖ Working collaboratively with voluntary, community and statutory partners ensuring a wide range of needs of the girls are met.
- ❖ Providing healthcare, childcare and personal development programmes.
- ❖ Offering needs-led flexible support such as individual, project-based, term time and/or "out of term" programmes.
- ❖ Ensuring a consistent approach operates regionally through local Co-ordinators supported by a Regional Development worker.
- ❖ Monitoring and Managing the service through a Regional Steering Group.

This report will provide a more detailed breakdown of the provision in each of the Education and Library Board areas.

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Our terms of Reference were to:

- Identify the range of support available to young girls who became pregnant whilst of compulsory school age.
- Provide an overview of the age range, type of school attended and level of support offered in each of the ELB'S.
- Combine the data from each of the Boards to provide a regional overview for the Department of Education.

Key Findings:

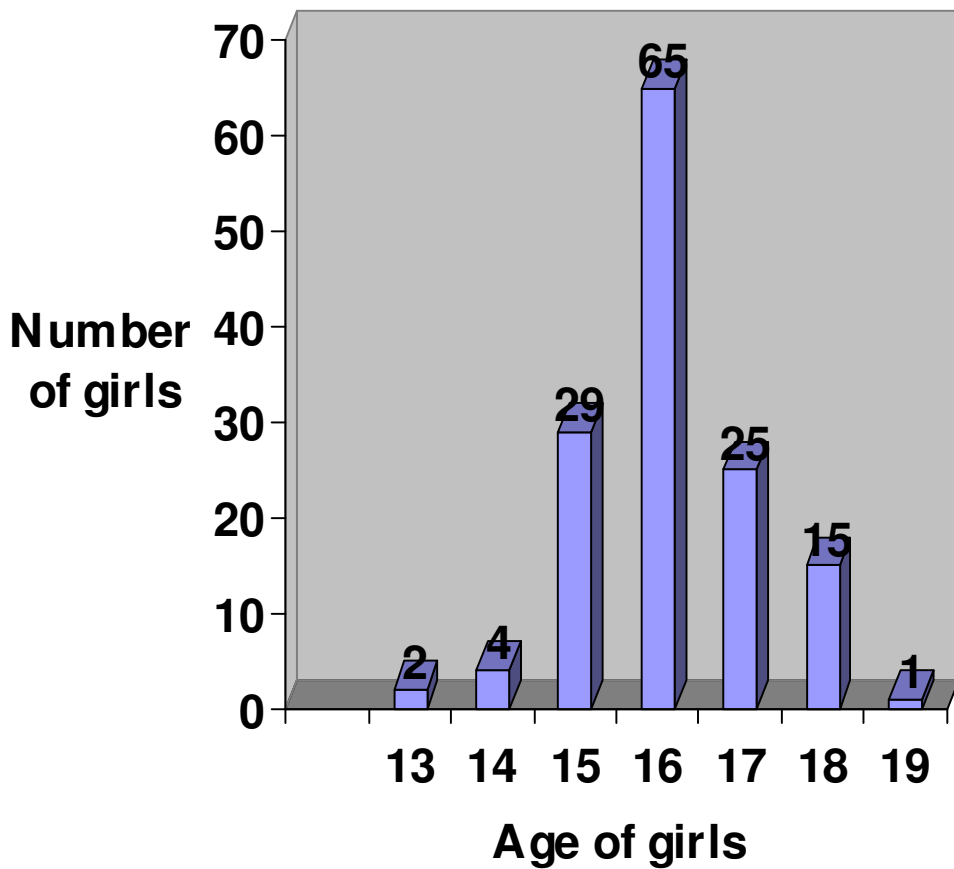
This year **141** girls were referred to the SAM Co-ordinators for support and assistance in continuing their education. Although SAM's primary goal is to ensure girls remain in their school of origin, if appropriate, there are occasions when this is no longer feasible and an alternative is offered. Support to the girls came in a variety of forms and range from individual, short term input to more focussed long term programmes. The programme endeavoured to offer a holistic model of support ensuring the health, personal development, social, physical and emotional needs of the girls are met as far as possible as well as their education needs.

The type of provision provided by each Board is summarised in separate sections, however, the following tables provide a Regional overview of the age of girls and types of schools they attended at the time of referral to the Service.

Table 1 illustrates the age range of the 141 girls who used the service.

Table 1

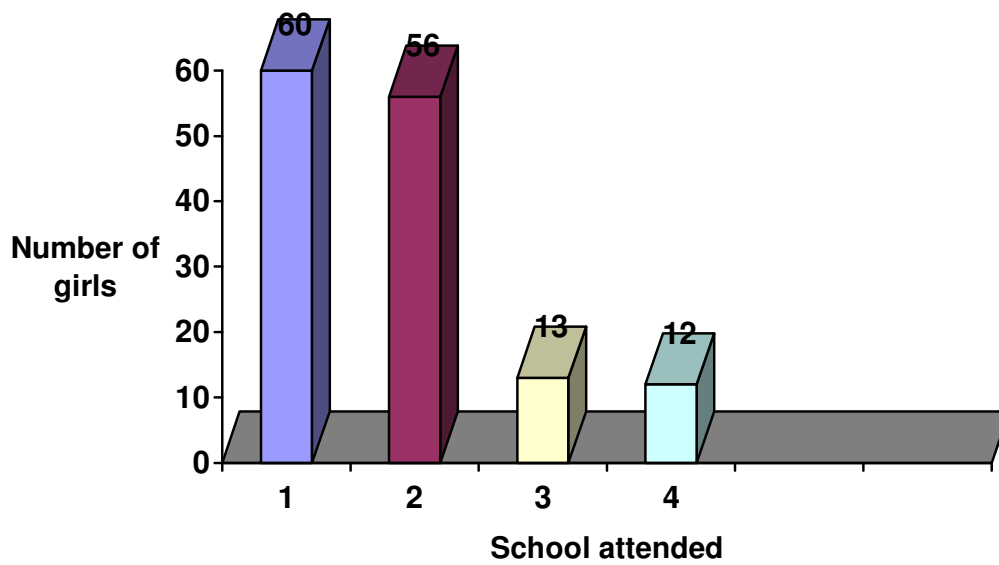
Age of participants in NI



As illustrated the majority of referrals are for pupils in year 12, 65 of whom were age 16. There were 41 young women aged 17-19 years: they opted for a range of support including Childcare, project based provision and parenting programmes.

Table 2

Type of School of origin



1= Controlled

2=Maintained

3=Further Education

4=Other

As illustrated the majority of the girls came from mainstream Controlled and Maintained schools with 13 attending FE College.

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA.

21 girls were referred to the dedicated SAM worker this year in the Belfast area: 16 from N&W and 5 from S&E.

The **North & West (N&W)** SAM project was facilitated by the Whiterock Family Learning project based in Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education (BIFHE).

This ran one day a week providing healthcare and a personal development programme until Christmas increasing to four days in January to include the education components.

6 girls attended and completed a total of 63 certificates in English, Maths and ICT (AQA unit award scheme). Another **9** remained in school while **1** chose not to accept the offer of support.

A comparison was made between previous attendance record at school (Average 62.5%) and that at SAM (Average 73.3%) which demonstrated a marked improvement.

A summer programme also ran for those who had participated in the project, running one day a week for 6 weeks to include sessions in Baby Massage, Benefits Advice, Arts and Crafts and a social event.

The **South & East (S&E)** project only ran for four weeks as 2 young women left to have their babies, Individual support was offered as an alternative to the remaining girls and 1 returned to school. A 5th girl was later referred to Project Worker for support. She remained in school and received home tuition for a three month period.

Qualitative Feedback from girls:

"I am taking all my certificates away with me and I am happy with them and I feel more confident with myself and that I really want to do something with my life."

"The crèche being so close helped me. The taxi picking us up, the times that we came and went at. The work also helped me a lot."

From Midwife: "The young women were showed a video of the birth; they were put off at first but leaned on each other for support. I took them to the hospital and helped reassure them and prepare them for being a mum. The work was very rewarding."

From Tutor:" My work with the young women involved building trust as many have had a poor response from school and society. There is no such thing as a bad student, some are lonely, depressed and dejected and they need to regain self esteem and confidence. The main impact of the work is that they see education as a process, that's why they don't feel overwhelmed by it. The learning environment on the project is based on the young women taking responsibility; they recognise that if they work hard, they get their certificates. Above all our project is student centred and needs led."

SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

48 girls were referred to the 3 project workers based in, Craigavon/Banbridge, Newry/Mourne and Armagh/Dungannon areas.

Most of these girls received individual support which included:

- Home visits
- Telephone contacts
- Referral for home tuition
- Referral for childcare assessment

The referrals come from a range of sources such as Health professionals, schools etc and were often duplicated due to the high profile of the project and good links with other agencies.

In addition to individual support the girls got together on a bi-monthly basis for personal development and peer support. A summer programme also ran in August 2004, four mornings in a two week period. 17 young women from across the Board attended the programme held in the Chrysalis Women's Centre, Craigavon.

Topics covered were:

- Advice and Benefits
- Arts and Crafts
- First Aid for Babies
- Sexual Health

Qualitative Feedback from girls:

"The summer programme gave me the chance to meet other mums and hear about their experiences. I got help with things I didn't understand."

"All the topics helped me in different ways. The first aid was really helpful in case an accident might happen. So was the Sexual Health Advice."

"The project made a difference as I feel more reassured knowing that other people who are in worse situations than myself are achieving goals and I feel more confident to continue my education."

"The project made me see things in a different light. I now know that if I decide to go to University it shouldn't be a problem just because I have a kid."

WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA.

21 girls were referred to 2 project workers in WELB.

The project ran from September- June offering a four day programme. The project workers from the Education & Library Board were responsible for co-ordinating the day-to-day running of the programme which ran in the Women's Centre, Londonderry. Referrals came from Londonderry, Strabane, Limavady and Irvinestown. Childcare was provided on site. (Places on an additional programme were also offered by the Women's Centre during the summer).

As this was a full time programme a comparison was made between attendances of girls at SAM project versus their attendance the previous year at school. The average attendance at the project was 84 % compared to 64 % the previous school year, a marked improvement.

The girls involved in this year's project completed a total of 67 exams in June 2004. Some returned to school to sit exams and others sat their exams at Altnaglevin Hospital School. These exams included G.C.S.E's, AS levels and entry level exams.

**Qualitative Feedback:
From family member:**

“My daughter’s participation in the project resulted in a happier baby, a happier mother and a happier Grandmother. The whole family benefited from SAM.”

NORTH EASTERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD AREA.

40 girls were referred to 3 ELB project workers in Ballysally, Newtownabbey and Ballykeel areas.

In Ballysally the project ran a one-day per week personal development programme.

The SAM project worker co-ordinated this and offered individual support to **18** young girls. **12** were referred for personal development support but remained in school or college for the rest of the week. 1 girl received home tuition and attended the personal development day and 1 girl relied on the project for full support as she was out of school and looking for a school placement. Childcare for young mothers was provided on-site.

There were **11** referrals in the Newtownabbey area this year. 6 girls returned to education, 1 receiving home tuition for an interim period. 1 of the girls who remained in school attended a half day a week session of the Parenting programme run by Antrim Homestart which was offered to the SAM referrals.

Of the remaining 5 girls, 2 received home tuition and did not return to school, 2 received home tuition in conjunction with attendance on the parenting programme and the remaining girl left school and participated in the parenting course.

A new network in the Ballykeel area was re-established this year and is supported by representatives from Surestart, Family Centre, Antrim, North East Institute, Parents Advice Centre, NEELB and Barnardos. Proposals are underway to commence a new project in October 2004. Individual support for **11** young women has continued this year.

Qualitative Feedback from girls:

"I feel happy that I have come to the SAM project to meet new people. The SAM project has got me out of the house and meeting people."

"I feel more confident in myself to know that I'm not alone and that having a child at 16 years isn't the end of the world."

SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

11 girls received support from SAM this year.

The project based in the Lagan Valley Education Project (LVEP) ran from January to June receiving its referrals from the SEELB education welfare service.

Through a partnership with the local Surestart project the LVEP Manager was able to liaise with the local Home-start, specialist home visitors, local childcare providers, infant mental health and the Housing Trust ensuring the girls had access to all these resources and facilities if required.

The project commenced in January 2004 for those of compulsory school age, those over the age of 16 were invited to use LVEP facilities i.e. computer suite, crèche facilities and adult courses. Past SAM participants return each year.

Attendance of this year's project averaged 80%. Most young women completed the full programme, completing courses in CLAIT, maths and English, OCR basic skills and some young women had opportunity to start their NVQ in beauty therapy.

Qualitative Feedback from girls:

"Being part of the project helped me to get to know other peoples views and ideas as well as interacting with other people which can be useful in 'jobs and school'.

"I plan to continue my education. A better job means a better life for both of us."

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

The Barnardos Development Worker has worked to build on the work undertaken in the previous years establishing new provision where required, supporting the project workers and the education welfare officers as well as strengthening the Networks.

Providing best practice among all the projects is a prime objective. Attempts have been made to emulate high quality provision throughout Board areas.

Referrals this year have been particularly high in one area of SELB: Craigavon/Portadown and in one area of NEELB: Causeway. Often the young girls referred have a wide range of needs including childcare support and transport requirements. In order to offer holistic support to pregnant girls and mothers attempts have been made to address as many of their needs within the context of available resources.

ADDITIONAL SAM SUPPORTS:

Childcare:

One of the biggest expenditures for the provision is that of childcare. The cost of this can vary within Trust areas and is affected primarily by the availability of suitably registered childminders. In some of the more rural areas this can be problematic.

The provision of appropriate childcare is essential if young mothers are to take full advantage of all that the SAM programme has to offer in terms of supporting their return to education or their maintenance in education/further education.

Young mothers are assessed as 'Children in need' and the expertise in assessing need and determining the availability of the childcare arrangements of these young mothers rests with the Health and Social Services Trusts.

Childcare assessments remain an ongoing issue for some project workers. Some have experienced problems in relation to a lack of clarity about the assessment process despite letters issued to HSS executives by the DHSSPS.

NEELB have attempted to alleviate this issue by developing a protocol in consultation with Homefirst Trust who carries out the majority of the

assessments. This protocol is an example of “joined up” working at a local level and hopefully can be replicated elsewhere.

Although SAM's primary support with childcare costs has been to girls remaining or returning to school, in exceptional circumstances this has been extended to girls attending Further Education. This is unlikely to be required in the future as FE Colleges are now planning to introduce a 'Care to Learn' NI scheme through the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) which will provide assistance with childcare and transport for 16-19 year olds who attend courses within this sector. Initial proposals indicate this scheme may be implemented in August 2004.

Families:

Although the support given to **141** girls in its various forms can be quantified to a certain degree the overall impact this makes on the lives of the girls, their children and their extended families has not been properly measured. Some young women who have been disaffected from school have been encouraged to engage in the SAM programme and in doing so regained their confidence, self-esteem and motivation. Many have continued with their education and gained qualifications with some past participants going on to University.

Grandparents and extended family members have commented on the positive impact the SAM provision has made to a young persons life and the rest of the family.

One Grandmother's experience

The birth of my grandson bought new hope and the whole family pulled together to support my daughter. My husband adores his grandson. My daughter attends SAM four days a week and takes the baby to the crèche, it gives us a break and she loves it.

It's great to see my daughter coping so well and she has become a more confident and focused person. She has plans to continue her education and get her own home.

We are delighted things have turned out well and appreciate all the support my daughter has received through the SAM project.”

Advice and support worker:

This year saw the introduction of a new support service for SAM girls and their families.

An Advice and Information worker from Barnardo's Young Parents Network provides information and advice on 14 benefit categories

ranging from social security benefits, education, employment and housing as well as consumer rights. Benefit checks are carried out to ensure that each young woman is in receipt of the correct benefit and benefit rates. The Advice Worker carries out group consultations where general advice is given on benefits, housing and complaint procedures and how to approach government bodies i.e. letter writing. Individual work involves home visits and telephone queries.

An information booklet produced by Barnardo's entitled "An essential guide to being a Young mum" was also provided for each SAM participant.

Example of case study:

Girl aged 17, contacted Barnardos Advice and Information Bureau for assistance as she was pregnant and due in 16 weeks time. She explained that she was estranged from her parents and lived in private accommodation paying over £320 a month. The girl said she had claimed housing benefit, Incapacity Benefit and Income support but the claims had not been assessed. She had had no success in trying to ascertain why this was so.

As a result of her not having her housing benefit assessed her landlord was becoming impatient and was threatening her with eviction.

The young girl was understandably very upset as no one was listening to her. With her permission the advisor telephoned Incapacity Benefit Section and spoke to the relevant Social Security Agency about the clients claim. After considerable investigation the advisor was able to find out what had happened to the claims and was able to sort out the problem. The young girl was reassured that the claim would be dealt with immediately. She was advised to inform her landlord and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive of her situation and to keep them informed of any changes in circumstances. With the assistance of the advisor the young girls claims were assessed and all monies were backdated and the landlords was paid the rent he was owed. The girl said that she was grateful that the advisor had stepped in and advocated on her behalf as the Social Security Office had not taken her seriously. She also commented that she had no one else to turn to and was glad of the service. SAM Co-ordinators inform all participants of the availability of this service and advise them to contact the worker just to check they are receiving the correct entitlements.

Appendix 1:

Background information on development of SAM.

NEELB:

The first School Age Mothers project in Northern Ireland was piloted in Coleraine in 1999. Partnerships were established with NEELB, Northern Health and Social Services Board, Causeway Health and Social Services Trust, Coleraine Borough Council, Ballysally Youth and Community Centre and Barnardos.

The pilot was successful in meeting its main objectives: to ensure that young women who were pregnant or who had a child would be supported to continue their education and at the same time have their personal development and health care needs met.

8 young women attended the first project. Ballysally Youth and Community Centre continues as the venue for projects which have run every year since 1999.

Newtownabbey

A Network was set up in Newtownabbey in 2000 to assess the needs of local school age mothers with a view to pilot a project in 2001. Young women from Larne, Newtownabbey and the Glengormley area were targeted and 7 attended the project from February – May 2001.

The Network, supported by NEELB, Barnardos, Homefirst Trust, United Hospitals Trust and the BELB worked well during the year. By the end of 2002, however, some agencies were unable to provide the workers to run the project and support dwindled. No further projects were held in the Newtownabbey area although there were 6 potential participants referred in September 2002. All the young women received individual support from the Education Welfare Service. A part-time worker took up post in 2003.

Ballymena (Ballykeel)

Ballykeel Family Centre was the venue for a SAM project which took place in the Ballykeel and Antrim area of the NEELB area. The project was facilitated by a Barnardos Development Worker and ran for a few days each week March – June 2000.

The Network continued to meet throughout 2001 and young mothers received individual support, most remaining in school. Surestart was considered as a possible venue for future projects with the new building due for completion in Ballykeel in February 2002. A part-time SAM worker took up the post in 2003.

SEELB:

A Network was established in 2000 with proposals to set up a SAM project in the Lagan Valley Education Project (LVEP) based in Poleglass, Lisburn. The project aimed to support young women who were pregnant or mothers in the Lisburn area (SEELB) and was extended to participants from the West Belfast area (BELB). The Network was represented by Down and Lisburn Trust, SEELB, BELB, LVEP and Barnardos.

A pilot project commenced February 2001 with a four day week programme running until June 2004. A Barnardos Development Worker co-ordinated the project and 10 young women attended. Each agency offered their services in kind.

The local Surestart became a partner agency of LVEP in 2002. They provided on-site crèche facilities and funded two tutors for the SAM project. These funding arrangements remained the same for future projects.

A third project ran from January – June 2003 with 8 young girls attending. A tutor from LVEP has co-ordinated the project since 2002.

WELB:

WELB ran their first pilot project from March – May 2001. This nine week project ran four days each week and was successful in meeting its objectives. There were positive outcomes for the 3 young girls who attended and for the partnership agencies that managed the project. The Network was comprised of representatives from Altnagelvin Area Hospital, Foyle Health and Social Services Trust, The Red Cross, Strabane Surestart, WELB and Barnardos.

A second project ran in February – June 2002. 6 girls attended that year.

A third project ran October 2002 – June 2003 with 13 girls attending. This was facilitated by the Women's Centre, Londonderry where there was a crèche on site. The girls who participated felt welcome and supported in this environment by the friendly staff. The Family Services team also

supported this full-time project which owes much of its success to the close co-operation and teamwork between the various multi-agency participants.

BELB:

North West provision

The Family Learning Project based in the Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education (BIFHE) has provided the venue for the SAM project since 2002. A network was established in N/W Belfast with representatives from BELB, Whiterock Family Children's centre, the Royal/Jubilee Maternity Trust, North & West Belfast HSST and Barnardos.

Following a successful pilot project which 6 girls attended from March – June 2002, Whiterock Children's Centre and Family Learning project have facilitated the project for two consecutive years.

South East provision

A network was established in South and East Belfast in January 2002 consisting of BELB, S & E Belfast HSST, BIFHE and Barnardos. A pilot ran for 6 girls March – June 2002 and following its success a second project commenced October 2003. Due to a poor turn out this project ran for only four weeks.

SELB:

SELB set up two Networks in 2002/03 to ensure Managers in all relevant agencies were included and all young pregnant women and mothers were supported by SAM. These Networks ran in the Dungannon/Armagh area and the second in the Cookstown area (Homefirst Trust). Individual support was given to 10 girls in 2002/03 by 2 part-time SAM workers who took up post in April 2003. A third Project Worker took up post in October 2004.

Appendix 2:

Personal Story 1:

Finding out you are pregnant when you are 15 years old has been the scariest thing ever. How am I going to cope? What will my friends think of me?

At the start of my pregnancy I was ashamed, I hid my bump, wearing big jumpers but then I realised I had nothing to be ashamed of and that I had made a mistake but who doesn't. I was going to love my baby.

School was strange, other pupils had speculations about my pregnancy, and I denied it. The teachers who knew were supportive towards me. I left school two months before my baby was due, but planned to finish my G.C.S.E.'s after the birth.

I found out about the project through my Social Worker and the SAM project worker came to my house to tell me what support the SAM project could offer me. I attended the summer programme in August 2003. You get a lot of support within the group from the other mums, because we are all in the same boat. We talked to each other and gave friendly advice to each other about our babies. It is comforting to know you are not on your own.

The SAM project is great, you get a lot of support and you learn things of interest and that reinforces your own strategies of being a parent.

From the start of the project I have gained a lot more confidence within myself and as a young mother.

I have just finished my G.C.S.E.'s and passed all 8 of them. I am in Lower 6th studying AVCE Health and Social Care and ICT.

My plans for the future are to get a house for my daughter and myself, to complete my AVCE's, do a further A level and progress on to University to do a degree in social work.

Personal Story 2:

When I first became pregnant I felt like an outsider and very unsure of the options available to me. I thought that having a baby would be the end of my life; I didn't think I would be able to lead a normal life, get an education or be able to handle the responsibility of raising a child. I was terrified and became very withdrawn from my family, I felt sure they were disappointed in me and did not want me near them. My boyfriend was very supportive and with his help I finally got the courage to talk to my family and tell them my worries and fears of having a child. They talked to me and reassured me that I would get through it and I would be ok. I finally accepted the fact that I was going to be a mum and returned to my school in September as I still had my final year to complete.

I had to let my form teacher, friends and year head know I was pregnant. I was so scared and thought that they would judge me and see me as just another hopeless pregnant teenager. I was wrong, my year head and friends were very supportive. It was my year head that told the Vice-Principal of my school about my situation. The Vice-Principal called me into her office and told me about a programme especially designed for pregnant teenagers called School Ages Mothers or SAM's.

The group was designed to offer support such as antenatal and health care to help teenagers prepare for the birth of their babies and get their education. I had never heard of this project and I wasn't sure if it was right for me but I went home, and told my mother what I had been told about SAM's. We both agreed that we would go and have a look at the project. I returned to school the following day and told the Vice-Principal that I would like to have a look around the project to be sure that it was right for me before I started. She then got in touch with the Project Officer of the group and she agreed to meet me and show me what happened and what benefits I would get from attending the project. Both my mother and I went and heard all about the group and decided it was the best option I had. I then continued in my school until I was almost six months pregnant and then left to join SAM's.

I first day I went I was very sceptical and unsure if I would fit into the group but all my doubts were cast aside once I met the other girls attending. They ranged from the ages of 14 to 16. Some were pregnant at the time and some already had their babies but I could relate to them and them

to me. At first I felt lonely because I didn't know anyone but then I got to know the other girls and they got to know me and after a while I made some very close friends. The other girls from the group answered any questions I had and made me feel normal. The Project Officers were there anytime I had a problem and I knew I could trust them which was a big help. Before I joined the group I wasn't aware that a teenage mother could still get a proper education but with the help of the tutors at SAM's I managed to pass ten of my GCSE's and I am currently studying administration at FE.

Without the SAM project I would not be where I am with the qualifications I have today. I owe a lot to the project and the people that helped in the project and I would just like to say thanks.