

HELP.

Everyone needs help
at some time or another.



**Voices of young parents
in Greater Vancouver.**

Published April 2016.

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Introduction

Everyone needs help at some time or another. But sometimes helping can be complicated. Have you ever wanted to help and not known how? Tried to help and had it go badly? Needed help and not gotten it? Or, have you ever been “helped” in ways that were not helpful?

The stories and poems in this booklet were written by a group of young parents in Greater Vancouver. They gave permission for their poems and stories to be published here because they wanted to help others better understand giving (and receiving) help. Young parents know a lot about giving and receiving help. Many face economic challenges. Some face challenges finding good and affordable housing and childcare, completing their educations or launching their careers, as well as taking care of their own health while parenting. Many people want to help young parents and their children, but it isn't always easy to know the best ways to do so.

The authors of this collection are part of a Young Parents Study that includes over 100 young mothers and fathers in British Columbia. Young parents who engaged in creative arts workshops, as part of the Young Parents Study, created the stories that appear in this booklet. The workshop focused on the theme of “help”. And, these young people offered their writing to help educate others about what it is like for them as young parents. They provided us with their permission to publish their stories and poems and we are proud to share them with you.

These stories and poems have something to teach all of us about help and helping. We hope that these stories and poems also will touch your hearts and help you think about ways to improve the lives of young parents and their children in British Columbia and beyond.

This publication is part of the UBC Young Parent Study, led by Professor Jean Shoveller of UBC's School of Population and Public Health and funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (grants MOP-126032 and GIR-127079), with a CIHR Institute of Gender and Health ICS Knowledge Translation Supplement.

Illustrations by Sam Bradd, Drawing Change.



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

“She’s so young”

I had a 3 week old baby on the bus, crying. She was frantic and so was I. Every single person was staring at me, I could read their minds just by the awful looks they were giving me.

“Aren’t you going to do something?”

“That poor baby.”

“Uneducated teen mom.”

I was hesitant to take my daughter out from her stroller but I did. I couldn’t handle the looks, I knew it was unsafe, but I thought she might be hungry. So I held her in my lap with a receiving blanket over my shoulder, trying to latch her without anyone seeing my breast. I think the blanket slipped a few times because I got some weird looks.

I looked around to see these two older women gossiping across from me staring at me then looking at each other, whispering, laughing. I heard one say, “She looks so young.”

I was close to my bus stop so I buckled my daughter back in her car seat and she began again, crying her heart out. I had tears in my eyes, I knew she just wanted to be in my arms.

Everyone wouldn’t stop staring.

I ran home.

I ran home and cried holding my baby, thinking to myself, “I’m sorry I’m such a bad mom.”





When I found out I was pregnant I needed a lot of support from my family and friends, but I was scared to ask because I was afraid they would just turn away and say no. But they didn't, they helped me with whatever I needed.

My Helpful Experience

During the course of my pregnancy I received plenty of help from various organizations and members of the community. From countless donations to free medical care, my pregnancy was completely catered. The main organizations I accessed, all through referral, were a health program, a school, and a mentoring organization. I noticed that once my belly had deflated and my child had been placed in my arms, the help changed, something was different.

Through the health program I received a doula to help me carry out my elaborate birth plan, a public health nurse that would answer all my paranoia-infused questions, a dietician to make sure I gained weight properly throughout my pregnancy, an obstetrician to do regular checkups on my baby and myself, and weekly group meetings with other young mothers-to-be. The program not only delivered all of the afore-mentioned emotional support, they also provided

the expectant women with gift cards to health food stores as well as any medication they may need while pregnant, free meetings with a counselor, first dibs on the low cost produce in the area, and help with finding housing. Not only was I spared the stress of suffering emotionally and financially while pregnant, I was completely taken care of and worry free. All my questions were answered, my baby was healthy and my stomach was always full.

Once I became pregnant, doors were being opened left and right, that was how I became accepted into the most wonderful school for teen mothers that met a lot of my needs and continues to do so. The helpful aspects include an always-available youth and family worker, free childcare, transportation costs covered, free breakfast and lunch for mom and baby, incentive programs for outstanding attendance, a compassionate learning environment, diapers and wipes, and other emotional/

financial supports. The program also connected me with one of the best organizations in the city that could help me throughout my pregnancy and into the early stages of motherhood, the mentoring organization.

That is an organization that continues to amaze me each and every day. The program co-ordinator meets with a single mother and connects her with two other more experienced mothers in the community. The duo is specifically chosen to best suit the client's needs, they can help with transportation, offer needed parenting advice, and help their 'mother' financially and most importantly be a friend for the new mom. Between the health program, school, and mentorship organization pregnancy was a breeze.



Fifteen months after the birth of my son paints a very different picture. As time has gone on, a lot of my community supports have ended, either from my son or I aging out of their programs

or simply because volunteers or nurses cut contact with no known reason. Eighteen months is the age when my son is supposed to age out of all the programs we are involved in (aside from school), but we've discovered that eighteen months really means any time after the child's first birthday. The cut off for school is when I turn 19, in one year. I'm not sure I'll manage the loss of several valuable support systems. Emotionally and financially I will be at a loss. I've received a lot of great supports, however, none of them helped prepare me for being completely alone once my son and I aged out of our community programs. Surprising to some, even organizations such as the food bank provide considerably less food for families after the youngest child turns one. For BC Housing, rent raises (the following year) when there is a new family member added to the lease. This creates a need for more money to replace the missing food and rent payments. Which means there is no extra money for new boots, or books, or transportation, every expense will need to be evaluated and in many cases cut completely.

In addition to my son aging out of food, medical and learning programs, I will be aging out of school, meaning more expenses, less emotional support, and eventually needing to pay for my own daycare if I choose to continue my education after high school.

All of the programs for teen mothers are wonderful and have been extremely helpful, for the most part, during the first fifteen months of my son's life. However, when a huge support comes with a time limit and disappears abruptly it can create a devastating impact. We aren't always capable of sorting out alternative supports once our zero-eighteen month programs stop helping us. When the help disappears, many may not realize that it almost never becomes replaced which leads to emotional, financial and sometimes mental break-downs. By removing help from one day to the next it creates a larger need for support.

In conclusion, my main experience with help as a teenage mother is that in the beginning, the help was tremendous and over-flowing, but once my son grew older it became increasingly vague

and impersonal until the day I learned the services I was involved with would no longer be helping my child and I. The discovery created a devastating panic, immediately my mind was plagued with wondering where I can find supports for him and myself. I couldn't bear the thought of no longer having our free library sing-alongs, lunches and classes, and most difficult of all, my school. What I wish my organizations had done, on top of what they did already, was somehow prepare me for my life without help. In my opinion the worst thing about receiving help is that it's only temporary and the conditions are made by those in charge of the services. When things start to feel manageable, the support system delivers their cut off dates and once again their client becomes helpless.

Trapped

Being with him made me feel trapped.

Contained from the world, locked away in the dark space that captivated me.

I was supposed to be afraid, right?

I should've been afraid of him but I wasn't.

I wasn't afraid even after two trips to the emergency room with a minor concussion and scars that were too deep to even see.

Prescribed this and that from too many doctors to even count.

Sleeping pills to stop the nightmares but no amount of pills would stop the feel of your breath against the back of my neck.

I was stuck between a boy I loved, and a boy I despised who was within the same person.

A constant tug of war between my heart and my mind but my heart was always winning.

Pressed against the wall with tears streaming down my face,

The broken glass surrounding my feet from the mirror you threw at the wall.

I wouldn't get away.

He was like chains that bound me tight.

Chains that only he had the key to.

Trapped and terrified of what could happen next.

He was my storm and I was his calm.

The sad thing is, a storm can only be calmed when the storm is ready.



The bus ride

I remember my first time riding the bus. It was horrible. It was cold rainy Monday morning. I was with my baby with our black monster truck size stroller. It was a busy day so most of the busses were full. I remember waiting at the bus stop for an hour. FIVE busses passed us by. Finally one stopped. The driver was an old man with a dying cat voice. For some reason I remember his hair. It was like somebody had diced a coconut and planted it onto his head. He said to me "You need to wait for the next bus because your stroller is way too fucking big for this one." I was taken back. I was speechless. I wanted to speak, but my tongue felt like it was anchored to my rumbling stomach. I knew I had to say something, but he had already left.

If I could speak to Translink today, I would tell them that they need to hire someone who is not rude to customers. Someone who prioritizes people with disabilities, strollers and the pregnant ones.

Many Translink drivers are rude and they don't ask the people who sit at the priority seats to move for the people who really need it. They also need to add more bus service from 3pm to 6pm because students and workers are off at that time so most of the strollers and wheelchairs couldn't get on the bus because they're all full. Or they can just change the time for busses so that instead of every 5 to 10 mins do it every 3 minutes. Hopefully this will change soon because I have to take the bus with my son.



Helping Others

Giving people help when needed or asked for, help cleaning, help poor people, help learning, help people you love, help sick people.

Being Helped

Being helped at school, being helped at work, being helped at the hospital, being helped to walk, being helped to learn.

Wanting to Help

Wanting to help decorate, wanting to help someone in need, wanting to help pass, wanting to help love.

Needing Help

Needing help to stop smoking, need help for home, needing help during pregnancy.

* * *

I want to be left alone because I am tired and have back pain. All I can think of is sleep. My baby kept me up my brain is shut I can't focus my body and mind is so tired.

Being Helped

Being helped when you need it the most when you have no one to turn to good karma will come back to you out of love and kindness the joy.



Our research team would like to thank the young mothers who contributed their stories and poems to this chapbook. We would also like to thank all of the other young parents, service providers, and community stakeholders who have participated in our study.

For more information about the Young Parents Study, please visit our website: youthsexualhealth.ubc.ca

