



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

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22 AUG 2014



Dear Ms [Redacted]

Thank you for your email of 2 July 2014 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information about the reduction in the number of single mothers aged under 20 in the last three years. I will answer each of your questions in turn.

- *Please provide detail (no names of course) of where the 2600 single mothers under the age of 20 have gone to enable the Minister to state the Government has reduced the number of single mums under 20 by 2600 since 2011.*
- *What was the number of under 20 single mums on benefits for each year from 2002 to date? Please be specific, in relation to the 2600, including references to numbers, how the government has reduced these numbers.*

The table below shows that between December 2009 and December 2013, the number of young mothers between the ages of 16 and 19 who were receiving a main benefit decreased from 4,263 to 2,579. This is a reduction of 1,684 or 40 per cent.

Year (as at 30 December)	Number of 16 to 19 year old mothers on benefit
2002	3,428
2003	3,511
2004	3,588
2005	3,636
2006	3,648
2007	3,894
2008	4,253
2009	4,263
2010	3,935
2011	3,547
2012	3,058
2013	2,579

Note that main benefits exclude New Zealand Superannuation, Veteran's Pension, Non-Beneficiary assistance, Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit.

This reduction was partly due to fewer young mothers coming on to a benefit during this time. The table below shows that the number of main benefit grants to mothers aged 16 to 19 decreased from 4,169 in 2010 to 3,376 in 2013. This is a reduction of 793 applications or 19 per cent. The data in the table below represents a count of grants, not individuals, as the same person may have been granted a benefit more than once.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013
Grants of a main benefit to a mother (16 to 19 years)	4,169	3,633	3,391	3,376

Note that main benefits exclude New Zealand Superannuation, Veteran's Pension, Non-Beneficiary assistance, Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit.

There have been fewer benefit grants to young mothers due to a decline in birth rates in young women, which can be partly attributed to greater access to long-acting contraception. In the year to March 2014, the annual number of births to teen mothers aged 19 years and under was 3,200. This is 1,900 (37 per cent) fewer births compared to the 5,100 teen births in the year to March 2009.

Since 2009, there have been more exits from benefit by young mothers due to more educational opportunities for young people in general, and a strengthening economy, following the global financial crisis, which has provided more employment opportunities.

The Ministry is also implementing innovative ways of working with young people. For example, the Youth Service, which was launched in August 2012, has transformed the way the Ministry supports disengaged young people. The Youth Service is offered through youth-focused community providers or specialist youth case managers. It includes one-on-one mentoring to get disengaged youth back into education or training, as well as tools and support for managing money, budgeting, parenting and life skills.

The Youth Service comprises two separate services:

- The Youth Service (Youth Payment and Young Parent Payment) is for 16 to 19 year olds who receive financial assistance from Work and Income
- The Youth Service (Not in Employment, Education or Training: NEET) is for 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education, employment or training, or who are at risk of being NEET.

The Youth Service is a good example of the Investment Approach in action. The Investment Approach involves directing resources where they most effectively reduce benefit dependency. Nearly 70 per cent of New Zealand's future benefit system liability can be attributed to people who first came on to benefit as a teenager. The Youth Service focuses on ensuring that young people develop the skills they need to avoid becoming trapped in a cycle of long-term benefit dependency.

- *How many in full time work and when?*
- *How many in part time work and casual work?*

Between 2009 and 2013, 478 single mothers between the ages of 16 and 19 exited benefit to go into work. I am unable to provide you with dates of when these young mothers started work as this information is held in notes on individual case files. To provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

Between 2009 and 2013, no young mothers between the ages of 16 and 19 exited benefit to go into part-time or casual work. This is because beneficiaries can work part-time, or on a casual basis, and stay on benefit. Beneficiaries can work part-time or casually and earn up to \$100 per week before their benefit is affected.

- *How many adopted their child?*

I am unable to provide information on how many single mothers adopted their child, because the Ministry does not hold this information. This part of your request is therefore refused under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act 1982 as this information does not exist.

- *How many moved into tertiary or high school study and how many of those received government assistance including but not limited to student loan and or allowance*

Between 2009 and 2013, a yearly average of 13 single mothers between the ages of 16 and 19 years exited a benefit to undertake tertiary or high school education. Sole Parent Support recipients can undertake study or training for work while receiving a benefit. At the end of June 2014, 89 per cent of Young Parent Payment clients in the Ministry's Youth Service were in some form of education, training or work-based learning.

- *How many have moved from the Domestic Purposes Benefit to another benefit, and state what benefit?*

Due to complexities in internal reporting with monitoring multiple transfers to and from the Domestic Purposes Benefit (which was replaced with the Sole Parent Support/Young Parent Payment as part of the Welfare Reform changes), we cannot provide this information. In addition this is not standard reporting for the Ministry and substantial manual collation would be required to generate the data. As such I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

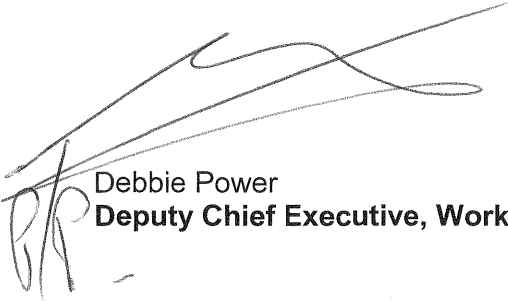
- *How many formed a partnership or marriage and rely on their partners income*

Between 2009 and 2013, 1,603 young mothers between the ages of 16 and 19 exited benefit due to a change in relationship status, which either involved reconciling with a partner or entering a de facto relationship. However, the Ministry cannot determine if these people were supported financially by their new partner.

I hope you find this information helpful. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, whose address for contact purposes is:

The Ombudsman
Office of the Ombudsman
PO Box 10-152
WELLINGTON 6143

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Power', written over a horizontal line.

Debbie Power
Deputy Chief Executive, Work and Income