



The Power of Me

STORIES FROM THE PARENTSNEXT PROGRAM





Introducing ParentsNext

ParentsNext is a pre-employment program funded by the Australian Government. Commencing in July 2018, the program is designed to assist parents with young children to identify their education and employment goals.

Providers work with specialist services to help parents achieve their goals. ParentsNext providers help parents gain confidence and develop skills that are right for them, giving them a chance to engage in paid work when the time is right.



Introducing OCTEC Limited

OCTEC Limited is a not-for-profit community organisation providing high quality employment, training, advocacy and youth services from more than 250 service locations.

We provide services to all clients regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious belief, marital status or disability.

We actively seek to understand our clients, including the needs of jobseekers, single parents, training participants, disadvantaged

or isolated community members, community organisations, government agencies and local businesses.

We are flexible in the delivery of our services, allowing us to meet the changing needs of all we serve.



The Power of Me

OCTEC is one of Australia's largest providers of ParentsNext, with a national caseload of more than 6,200 parents. Our consultants work closely with each of our participants, assisting them to discover and achieve their goals.

Now, after two years of the ParentsNext program, we wanted to support our participants to tell their stories.

Here, a number of them share stories of how they fully embraced, 'The Power of Me'.

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OCTEC Limited CEO

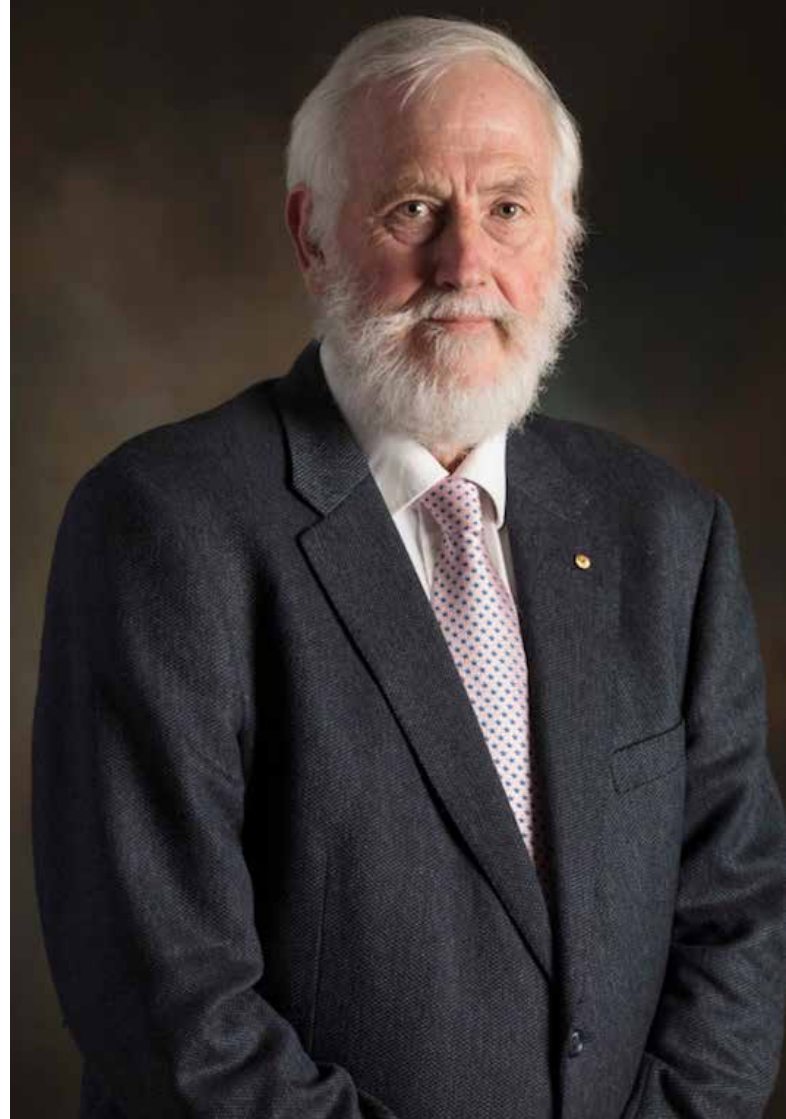
It is my pleasure to present to you, 'The Power of Me'
– Stories from the ParentsNext Program.

Since commencing in 1976, OCTEC's focus has been building communities by assisting people on a journey to employment. We are not-for-profit and our goal is to provide vocational education, training and employment assistance to individuals in local communities. The Australian Government's ParentsNext program assists parents who have disengaged from the workforce to care for their children. This made it a natural fit for our organisation.

Today, OCTEC is among the largest providers of ParentsNext, assisting a caseload of more than 6,000 parents across New South Wales and Queensland. It has been our privilege to work alongside these participants, giving them a chance to achieve their goals, and fully embrace 'The Power of Me'.

I would like to thank our ParentsNext Manager, Charissa Mossop and her team, for their dedication and hard work. And special thanks to our participants for sharing their journeys with us. I trust you will be as encouraged and humbled by their stories as I have been.

Andrew McDougall OAM
CEO, OCTEC



OCTEC's ParentsNext Program Manager

It can be a challenge for parents of young children to balance work and family. In many cases these parents are women who need to spend considerable time away from the paid workforce. And while they develop new skills as carers of young children, these parents risk disconnection from the world of paid work and many find it difficult to reconnect with employment. That is why OCTEC Limited is so passionate about the Australian Government's ParentsNext program.

Our ParentsNext consultants work with each participant, helping them identify their work goals and setting in place steps to make those goals a reality. This includes referring participants to our training partners, helping them improve their work-related skills, build confidence and realise their goals.

Each ParentsNext participant receives assistance specifically tailored to their needs and goals, and aligned with employment opportunities in their local community. We meet regularly with each participant – including by phone and social media, which has been critical during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown – providing an environment that is welcoming and supportive.

Where participants require assistance from local specialist services, our consultants are there to organise referrals and provide support. We offer participants assistance to connect with local child care centres, financial assistance, and alternative child



mind options. And we give participants the chance to be involved in the future delivery of ParentsNext through our OCTEC Parents Advisory Groups.

The stories you will read in this booklet are a sample of the various experiences our consultants and participants share every day. Through ParentsNext, we are working with thousands of parents, helping them realise their goals, to feel empowered and return to the workforce when the time is right.

Charissa Mossop
ParentsNext Program Manager

A great opportunity
for me and my son.

- NATALIE



Before I fell pregnant with my son, I was in love with my career. I am an environmental scientist and had been blessed to work as a terrestrial ecologist throughout Australia. Then, in 2014, my partner and I decided to extend our family. I fell pregnant straight away. However, after the birth of our son, my partner began to struggle as a full-time parent.

When my son was one month old, my partner abandoned us. I was left to raise my boy alone. I attempted to go back to work a few times but my son experienced separation anxiety. My son needed a full time mum, so I made the decision to put my career on hold for him. I gave him all my time and taught him life, social, and educational skills.

I began ParentsNext when my son was in his fourth year.

“Honestly, when I first joined the program, I didn’t understand why I needed to do ParentsNext. I’d developed a great career and I had a university degree.”

In April 2019, I decided to relocate to a bigger town with the prospect of landing a good job and having access to great schooling options for my son. I relocated to Penrith, in Western Sydney. It was then I met my new OCTEC ParentsNext consultant, Cheryl. And Cheryl changed everything! Together, we discussed my movements and future goals. Straight away I felt supported and confident about going back to full time work. Cheryl helped me find a great early learning placement for my son, and this allowed me to concentrate on my job search and to attend interviews. In November 2019, I was offered a great

position with a wonderful company in Wagga Wagga, NSW. My new employer understood that I was a single parent and allowed me to work flexible hours, and to work at home when feasible. This was a great opportunity for me and my son. Cheryl provided me with relocation advice, even doing additional research when it transpired I didn’t qualify for government relocation assistance. She also arranged for bond assistance for my new home and OCTEC even paid my bond. I was overwhelmed.



“Because of ParentsNext I had the chance to work with a wonderful consultant who cared for me, believed in me, and helped me get back into my career.”

I am truly grateful to Cheryl and to OCTEC and for all I was given through ParentsNext.

I know I can make a positive contribution.

- ANTHONY

Lossing your partner is devastating. When I lost my wife to illness, my grief led to depression and anxiety and a lack of confidence.

*“I was now a single dad.
I had two daughters to care for.”*

In August 2019, I commenced ParentsNext with OCTEC in Chatswood. Robyn was my ParentsNext consultant. She listened to my story and she helped me to see that my situation could improve. Robyn connected me to online counseling services, to assist me and my girls deal with our grief and improve our mental health.

Before my wife passed away I had been working as a self-employed Acupuncturist. Through Robyn I began to explore new plans to increase my work options. She put me in contact with the local Business Chamber and a government program for small businesses called NEIS.

Things are still tough, but thanks to ParentsNext I feel happier and more in control of my life. I know that I can make a positive contribution to my family and my working life.

I'm balancing my work, family and house life more sustainably. I'm achieving my goals.



I've come a long way!

- SIMONE

I live in Logan, south east Queensland. I'm a mother of seven children, with four of these kids in my care. I guess I've had a lot of challenges in my life, and I didn't have much education.

I experienced domestic violence and I was receiving assistance for my mental health issues from a specialist Indigenous service.

“I really didn't know what I was going to do with my life.”

Then, in October 2018, I started ParentsNext with OCTEC. They suggested I do some short courses, but I was concerned about how I would study with my kids and the threat of more violence. But the team at OCTEC were with me every step of the way. Can you believe I completed my first short course in only three weeks, using my mobile phone! And, when I successfully completed a First Aid course, it was the first certificate I'd ever received in my life.

OCTEC then suggested that I do a longer course - one that led to a qualification. With their help, I enrolled in a Certificate III course in Individual Support. I was nervous about doing a course like this, but I knew now I wouldn't be alone.

Just as I was about to start, the Coronavirus happened. I didn't think I would be able to do the course because of the lockdown, but through OCTEC I was given a laptop computer to help me



study online. I had never owned a laptop before and I wondered if I would be able to work out how to use it. Well, last week I enrolled into the online Certificate III course ... and I even worked out how to digitally sign my enrolment form!

In the future, I want to use my qualifications to gain a position in Aged Care. I hope this will be a good place to develop more skills and then I can apply for a Bachelor of Nursing. I really have come a long way since that first appointment back in 2018!

Site Amenities for Children

All OCTEC ParentsNext sites have children's 'play corners' with mentally stimulating toys, activities and books, plus TVs showing educational videos.





Above: winners of our easter colouring competition.
Left: OCTEC ParentsNext Christmas party in NSW.

Children – and their parents – also have the opportunity to participate in fun events, activities and competitions.

“There were people looking after my daughter and the other children. This meant I could concentrate and enjoy meetings without being interrupted.”

- Luana, NSW

I didn't know how to make it happen.

- CHLOE

Before I commenced ParentsNext with OCTEC, I was a stay-at-home mum living in the New England region of NSW. I had a vision for what I wanted to do with my life, but I didn't know how to make it happen.

“The pressure of not being able to provide for my family weighed heavily on me.”

I became more and more depressed. I just didn't know what to do. The team at OCTEC ParentsNext really listened to me. They wanted to know about my problems, but also where I wanted to go. They put me in touch with mental health services and, when I felt ready, they helped me enrol in a course I've always wanted to do – a Certificate in Education Support.

Because of ParentsNext and OCTEC, I have completed my course and I'm now looking to commence an Administration course in the near future. Not only that, but I've been working at the local school!

My mental health has improved and my family is much happier. Nothing I have achieved in the past twelve months would have been possible without the help of ParentsNext and OCTEC.

I cannot begin to thank them for how much they have helped me!



Harnessing my creativity.

- LESLEY

Before I started the ParentsNext program, my life was unstable. I had recently relocated to Toowoomba to be closer to the father of my kids. My daughter has an auto immune disease that requires frequent specialist assistance, and she also needed surgery. After her surgery, my daughter went into full-time rehab which took me away from my other kids. It was at this time that ParentsNext and OCTEC came into my life.

Sarah, my ParentNext consultant spent time with me, helping me to re-evaluate my goals and then to move forward with them.

“I wanted to run my own business.”

I had started doing timber art, curing photos onto timber, framing and then selling them at local markets. Sarah gave me information about support programs for small businesses, as well as information to help me create a business plan for myself.

Not long after I'd begun moving forward with my business, the 2019 bushfires came through our region. The property I was using to source timber for my art was completely burnt out. I thought this was the end of my small business idea.

Sarah sat down with me and we began discussing new options. I wanted to do something that harnessed my creativity, but was sustainable into the future. Working alongside my consultant, I decided I wanted to do a Certificate III in Nail Technology.



I enrolled and began straight away. Despite the coronavirus lockdown, I am still able to study. Both TAFE and ParentsNext have been helping me. I am passing all my assessments and will complete the course soon.

My goal is to set up a mobile beauty service that visits women in rural locations. These women sometimes miss out on beauty services. While I build my business, I am going to enrol in an evening Diploma in Beauty Therapy course. I will make a future for myself and my children.

ParentsNext changed my outlook on life. I am supported. Sarah is someone who genuinely listens to my ideas. And it's really nice when someone takes the time to call you to say you've achieved a goal!

Developing my strengths.

- EMMA

I was living on the NSW Central Coast, a single mum of a one year old son. I came to ParentsNext in July 2018.

The team at OCTEC encouraged me to participate in the Parents Engagement and Learning (PEAL) Program which helped me understand more about parenting, as well as building local connections and developing my own strengths.

Not only did I complete the program, but,

“I had the chance to support some of the other participants in the program.”

I enrolled into a Certificate III in Community Services which ParentsNext and OCTEC paid for. They also covered costs of police checks and fuel cards.

“I have been surprised by how well I’m doing!”

Even though I am due to have another baby before the end of the course, I am determined to complete it and keep moving forward.



Doing something for myself.

- CHANTELLE

I must admit, I was frustrated when I was asked to attend ParentsNext. It was late 2018, I was tired and stressed.

“I was a stay-at-home mum, living on the NSW Central Coast and struggling with four kids.”

When I joined ParentsNext, OCTEC advised me I could seek an exemption from the program because of my large family. That was what I did.

In June 2019 my ParentsNext consultant, Nahria contacted me to see if I wanted to remain exempt. This time I decided I would do something for myself. I had no qualifications and I liked the idea of doing some study. Through ParentsNext, I was enrolled with TAFE Central Coast and commenced a Certificate IV in Property Services. It wasn't easy at first. Studying at home was really hard. I tried the library, but with four kids in tow, it wasn't very practical. So, Nahria offered to buy me a laptop that I could use to study. A new laptop ... I was so incredibly grateful.

I completed my study in December 2019 and had to decide whether to do more study or try and get a job. I decided to look for work and I did it! I got a job with a real estate agent in Tuggerah. I needed a Real Estate license, which cost \$500, and OCTEC paid for this. They paid for a petrol card and even offered to supply me with corporate clothing for my new job. I couldn't believe it!



I started work in February 2020. I was nervous, but Nahria kept in touch with me and helped me to keep focused. Then, wouldn't you know it, after I had settled into my new job, the Covid-19 lockdown happened and I lost my job. I was disappointed, but I knew it wasn't my fault. And I feel OK about the situation, because I now have some work experience. I have referees and contacts and I will be ready to apply for a new job as soon as the lockdown restrictions are lifted!

Participating in ParentsNext changed my life! I now have work experience, qualifications and I'm licensed. I feel more confident and encouraged. I've been homeschooling my kids during this pandemic, and I'm thinking about doing more study for myself.



Then the fires came.

- JESSICA

commenced in ParentsNext as a mum of two young kids. Through ParentsNext I did some volunteer work at the local public school. Not only was I contributing to my local community, I was also developing some work skills. Things were looking good.

“Then the fires came.”

I lived in a small village south of Casino in Northern NSW. In October 2019, bushfires tore through our town. More than 50 homes were destroyed and two people died. There was almost no warning.

“I had 15 minutes to grab a few things for the kids before we escaped. Our house and all our belongings were destroyed.”

I didn't know what to do next. I called Margaret, my OCTEC ParentsNext consultant, to ask for her advice. Margaret was there for me. I couldn't believe it when OCTEC gave me financial assistance so I could buy some personal items and start to get back on my feet.



I knew I'd been given a second chance. I was determined to rebuild my life. I secured a job with a local golf club. ParentsNext and OCTEC paid for hospitality-related training as well as purchasing some of my work clothes.

In early 2020, I completed my time in ParentsNext. I'm now working and building a new life for myself and my kids. I'm so thankful to ParentsNext, OCTEC and Margaret for helping me make a fresh start.

I just wanted to be a mum.

- GRACE

I was a contented single stay-at-home mother with three kids. After I left school at the end of Year 10 my life had spiralled downhill. I had two jobs but couldn't keep them due to anxiety and depression. Really, I had no career ambitions. I just wanted to be a mum.

“I wasn't interested in doing any programs. I felt I was too busy with my kids.”

I attended ParentsNext at OCTEC in Tamworth and met my consultant, Beth. She began to change my outlook. We discussed what my future could look like. I started to think about studying and creating a career.

“I realised I could be a mum and have a career.”

With the help of ParentsNext, I was able to gain a Certificate III in Pathology and enrol in an Assistant in Nursing certificate course. I found employment with NSW Health Pathology. OCTEC paid for my work clothes and for 'Working with Children' checks.

I've been working since October 2019. Thanks to ParentsNext, I have a good job and challenge myself every day. Plus, I'm also a great role model for my kids. My youngest even pretends to get ready for work with me each day!



Making something of my life.

- KATRINA

I first came to ParentsNext in July 2019. I wasn't sure what to do. I'd left school before I finished Year 10 and my writing and maths weren't very good.

“I had a young child to support.”

After speaking with Tania, my ParentsNext consultant from OCTEC in Nerang, I decided the best thing to do was to improve my education.

Tania told me about a government program called Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) which helps people like me improve our literacy and numeracy and have a chance to get a job.

After I had finished SEE, I was keen to do more studies. Tania helped me to get into a Certificate III beauty course and I love it!

“Because of ParentsNext, I have the chance to make something of my life.”

I'm so grateful.



My consultant was a single mum herself.

- SHALINA

I was a young single mum who left school after Year 10. I'd explored employment options, but ongoing mental health issues continued to get in the way of my goals.

“But, when I went to OCTEC ParentsNext in Toowoomba, things changed.”

My ParentsNext consultant, Ashleigh was a single mum herself. She was so inspiring to me because she'd completed school and uni and was working in a good job. This gave me so much confidence about my own goals.

I had decided to do a Diploma in Beauty Therapy, but the costs of doing such a course really stressed me. Ashleigh told me ParentsNext and OCTEC would cover my costs and that was such a relief.

I've now enrolled in the Diploma course. I feel confident about completing the course and excited for the future.

“And I am so happy with the assistance I've received from ParentsNext.”



Finding a family friendly career.

- SEFORA

I am a single mother of three children as well as an immigrant to Australia. In 2010 I became an Australian citizen and I commenced ParentsNext with OCTEC Logan in July 2018.

When I first started ParentsNext, I was asked to identify my strengths and my career goals. This was really helpful because, although I had previously completed a Certificate III in Pathology Collection,

“I realised I needed a career that was more family-friendly.”

With the assistance of ParentsNext and OCTEC, I completed a Certificate IV in Education Support, First Aid training, a CPR Certificate and a National Police Check. I was given help to create a resume and cover letter.

“I secured a part-time job as a teachers’ aid with the Education Department.”

You know, I didn’t stop there, and I’m now enrolled into a Diploma of Early Childhood Education. I was able to achieve all these things thanks to OCTEC and the ParentsNext program.



It's hard to do it on the phone.

- CHANTELLE

I am so grateful to ParentsNext, OCTEC Windsor and my consultant, Cheryl, for providing me with a brand-new laptop to help with my studies. For months I had been attempting to complete a Diploma of Community Services using only my phone. It's really hard to study on your phone! I was a single mum of three boys and finances were tight.

I found it extremely hard to come up with enough money to even buy a second hand laptop. Within a few months of receiving my laptop I was able to complete my Diploma. This would have taken at least a year if I'd had to continue using my phone and public libraries.

Thanks to ParentsNext and Cheryl I'm now also enrolled in an online Bachelor of Community Welfare course through the University of New England.

“Had it not been for ParentsNext, I would not have even attempted to enrol in this degree.”

I have even found casual work as a Family Support Worker. Without the assistance ParentsNext provided, none of this would have been possible.



A breath of fresh air.

- LOUISE

Before I started with ParentsNext, I felt like my life was a mess. I was all over the place. I had a rough idea of what I wanted to do but,

“ I didn’t know how to get there, or really where to even start.”

My consultant, Brittany and the ParentsNext team at OCTEC Ipswich have been amazing. From the first day, they listened to my story and answered all my questions. They have been the support I needed, pointing me in the right direction and then walking beside me to make sure I take the right steps. They were the breath of fresh air my daughter and I needed in our lives.

With Brittany’s help,

“I now have a career pathway into fast growing job sectors, like healthcare.”

I have completed a Certificate III in Business Admin and have since enrolled into Certificate IV in Health Administration. I honestly feel that ParentsNext was the right program for me. It came along at just the right time, helping me to choose a pathway to a great career.





International Women's Day

Monday 8th March 2020 was International Women's Day – a day to celebrate all women, in all their diversity; a day to call for equal rights and to celebrate the achievements of women around the globe. This was a perfect opportunity for our ParentsNext consultants and participants to come together.

Celebrations were held across Brisbane, the Gold Coast, North Coast NSW and in Sydney, with participants, staff and local community partners all participating.





“I’ve really enjoyed participating in ParentsNext activities and events, such as International Women’s Day in 2020. I always really try to make new participants feel welcome and included at these events.”

- Miranda, QLD

Struggling to find direction.

- KATIE

I was a single mum with three kids. It had been a long time since I had done any kind of work and I was struggling to find direction in my life. In September 2018, I was referred to ParentsNext with OCTEC in Toowoomba.

I worked with Alana, my ParentsNext consultant, to discover what it was I wanted to do with my life. Eventually, I decided that I would like to be a teacher's aide, but to do this I needed qualifications.

Alana told me OCTEC would provide financial assistance with my course costs as well as obtaining a blue card so I could work with children during any job placements.

Thanks to ParentsNext, I have completed a short course in sign language and I am also close to finishing a Certificate III in Education Support.

“I feel like I have a clear path now. I feel like I have achieved some great things.”

And I'll be ready to start searching for work once the Covid-19 restrictions ease and the schools are fully-functional again.



I really thought it was a waste of time...

- TORI

I really thought doing ParentsNext would be a waste of my time ... until I began the program. I started ParentsNext with OCTEC Caboolture in October 2018. I had really low self-esteem, because I'd been applying for jobs every day and had received constant rejections.

“I really had no idea about looking for work”

– what made a good resume, how to write a cover letter and what were the best job-seeking techniques.

My ParentsNext consultant, Melinda assisted with updating and improving my resume. I learned how to rewrite cover letters and where to apply for the community services jobs I was interested in. My confidence began to improve. With guidance from ParentsNext, I began applying for community support roles.

“I got a call back for a job interview! Two weeks later I was completing an induction with my new employer.”

It came along at just the right time, helping me to choose a pathway to great career.



I did not want to participate.

- SONYA

I did not want to participate in ParentsNext. I went to OCTEC in Bankstown, but I did not want to be involved.

“My husband and I are refugees to this country.”

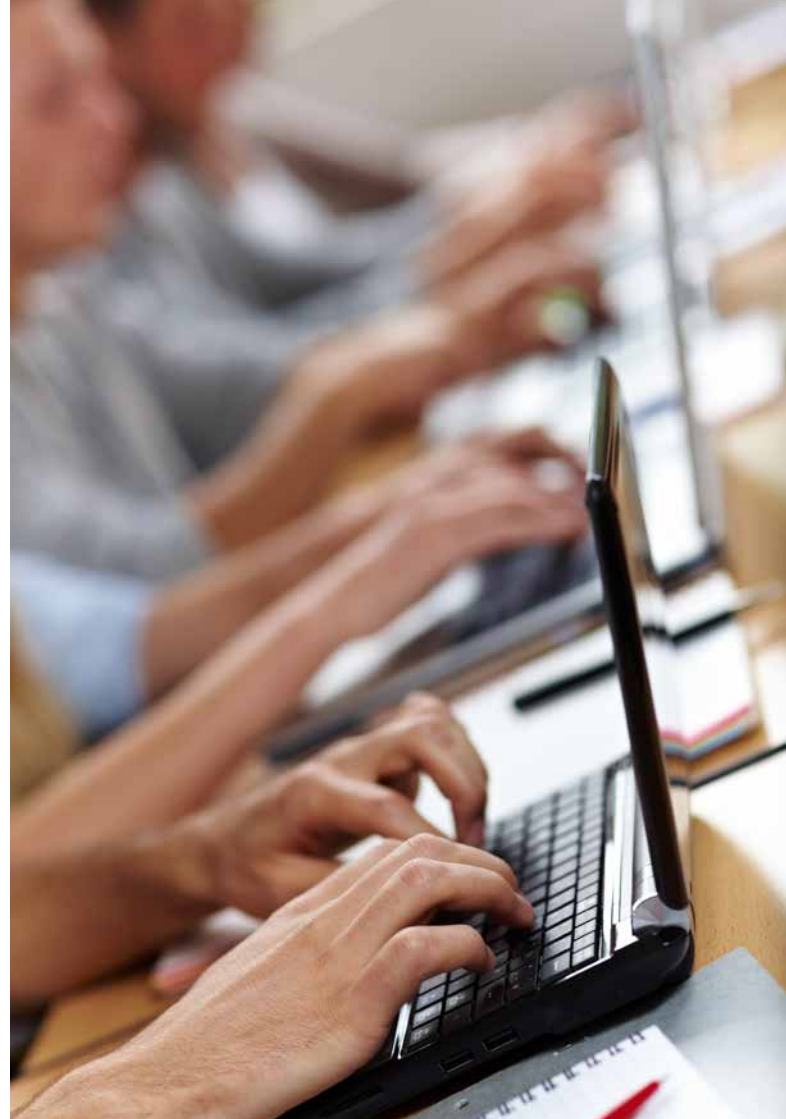
I'd had four miscarriages as well as a young family to care for. My husband was unemployed and did Work for the Dole five days per week. I did not know how to connect to services or use the government systems.

I was depressed and tired.

Thuy is my OCTEC ParentsNext consultant. She never gave up on me. She always contacts me on the phone to see how I am going. She has been flexible and understands my situation. She even helped me research childcare so I could study.

“Now, I want to study English so that I can have a better chance to find work.”

Thuy told me about a program called Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) which helps people to improve their English. Thuy has helped me with the application process and I will begin my studies soon.



How could I possibly study?

- ANGELINA

I first attended ParentsNext in October 2018. I was a young Indigenous mum with an eighteen month old daughter and another baby due in May 2019. I was interested in doing some sort of business training course, but where did I start?

“How could I possibly study with a young child to care for?”

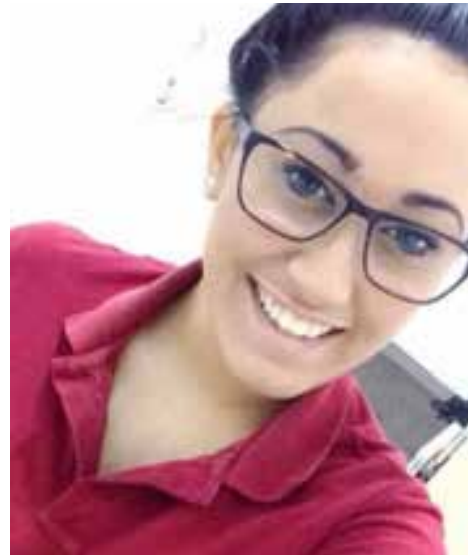
My ParentsNext consultant, Vanessa arranged for me to attend an information session for an upcoming business course which was going to be run at the Young Parents Hub in Wyong.

This would be perfect for me as there were childcare facilities available onsite. However, the course was due to finish two weeks after my baby was due, so I decided to wait until after the birth.

After my new son was born, I was really keen to start studying, but I thought that online study would be more manageable. Through ParentsNext, I was enrolled into an online Cert III in Business (Medical) course. OCTEC even purchased a laptop computer for me to help me study online. I was so thankful for that! I have already completed five units of my course and I hope to graduate by the end of 2020.

And because I'm studying online at home,

“not even the Covid-19 lockdown slows me down!”



Living on the NSW Central Coast means less available public transport than in Sydney. So, to be independent, and more employable, it's important to be able to drive. I had my L's and had completed 120 hours of driving, but I was anxious about driving because I'd been in an accident. My ParentsNext consultant arranged driving lessons for me to help rebuild my confidence and get me out on the road again.

Finally, I felt really motivated to look for work and Vanessa told me I could receive services under both ParentsNext and another program called Transition to Work. I've been referred to this new program and we're now planning a pathway into work once I finish my online study.

OCTEC ParentsNext and MTC SEE – a learning partnership.

Bankstown is a suburb in Sydney's south west. It is in an area that attracts thousands of newly-arrived residents each year. Many of these people are refugees and come from non-English speaking backgrounds, and many have experienced war, famine and other extreme hardships. They have come to Australia to start a new life.

OCTEC's ParentsNext caseload in Bankstown reflects this cultural diversity. We work with participants from countries such as Sierra Leone, Iraq, Vietnam, Pakistan, Egypt and China. A significant number of these parents have limited use of English and need assistance to improve their vocational communication, allowing them to participate in the labour market.

To assist with this goal, OCTEC Bankstown partners with MTC, an employment and training provider operating across greater Sydney. We refer suitable ParentsNext participants to MTC's Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program, which is funded by the Australian Government. Our ParentsNext consultants partner with the team at MTC to identify and refer parents in need of SEE program services.

Through SEE, our participants learn how to navigate everyday life in their communities. They develop skills in conversational English, but also other vocational skills such as computer literacy and job searching.

Because of this learning partnership, our ParentsNext participants are growing in personal confidence.



“They are improving their career prospects through the development of new skills, and through building both social and professional connections.”

Parents Advisory Groups



Bankstown OCTEC Parents Advisory Groups give our ParentsNext participants direct input to program delivery. Current and former participants are encouraged to be involved, to give feedback on their experiences as ParentsNext participants, and to suggest ways the program can be improved.

Luana was a member of the OCTEC Parents Advisory Group in Lismore, on the NSW North Coast. Luana says she was “excited to be able to come into the Lismore office to meet other women and talk about our future needs.”

Importantly, participants are able to attend the advisory group knowing that their children are being looked after. “There were people looking my daughter and the other children,” Luana says, “so that I could concentrate and enjoy the meeting without being interrupted.”

Being involved in the future of ParentsNext has been a positive experience for so many participants. Luana says: “the meeting

was amazing. I felt like I was being heard and asked what I needed and how I felt. I had the chance to suggest what the program could do to help me and the other parents in the future.”

Another advisory group participant, Clarrisa, adds: “It was useful listening to others and their experiences with the program and to be reminded of the range of assistance that ParentsNext can provide. I found it an enjoyable event.”

Participant Leanne says: “I felt privileged to be invited for the advisory meeting. I really enjoyed the feedback from other people’s prospective to what other parents go through.”



Our Parents Advisory Groups have reported that ParentsNext delivers flexible, empowering services, fostering coping strategies, self-discipline, and helping parents to model positive behaviours for their children. Participant feedback also suggests the program is evolving. Participants felt it must continue to be more flexible in order to meet parents’ needs, especially considering recent uncertainty in local labour markets due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

What were my goals?

- NATALIE

I was a single mum of two young children – a six year old and a three year old. I was at home raising my kids on the Gold Coast. Then I was referred to ParentsNext. I was nervous and I didn't know what to expect, but I wanted to see what it was all about and what support was available to me. What were my goals? How would I achieve them?

“I hadn't completed high school and was apprehensive about my future.”

I met with Tara, my OCTEC ParentsNext consultant. She told me about some education options to start my future career. Together we planned to meet with the training organisation and completed my enrolment. Tara was helpful because she arranged all I needed to start my Certificate III in individual support course. She was always there for me and I didn't feel judged when I met with her and talked about my goals. The support was really helpful and kept me believing in myself. OCTEC ParentsNext assisted with the cost of my course, followed up with my training provider and gave me positive feedback.

I have now been employed for a year as an assistant in nursing and I'm no longer in ParentsNext. I feel more confident in myself. I now have something for me that I enjoy and I earn an income for my family. It is challenging some days, but so rewarding and it teaches my kids to be independent as well. I wouldn't change a thing and I feel very happy where I am right now.



Single mum looking for a new direction.

- LINDSAY

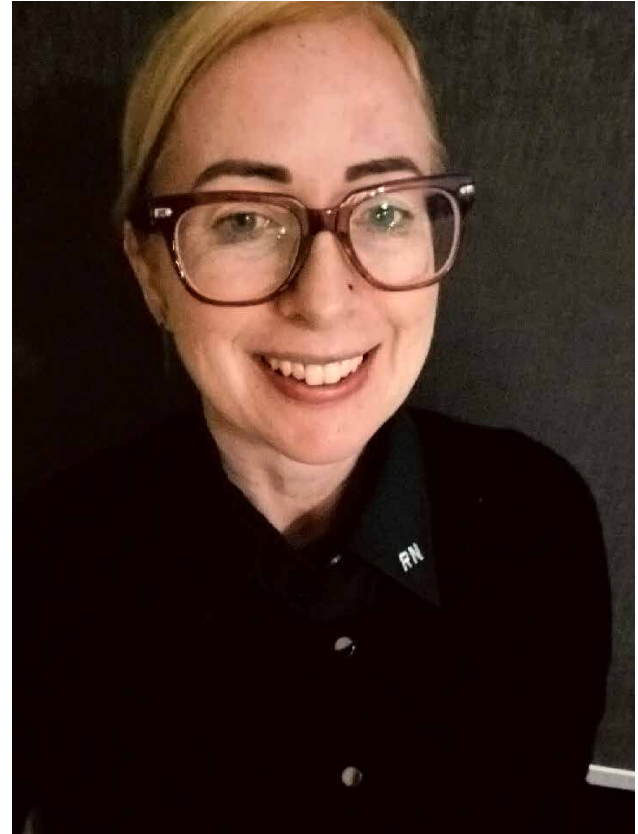
When I came to ParentsNext in October 2018, I was a single mum looking to change direction in my life. I wanted to return to work with a career that was both rewarding and offered flexibility so I could be there for my children.

“I decided I wanted to be a nurse.”

I met with my OCTEC ParentsNext consultant at Strathpine. These meetings were more than just appointments. They became a valuable time to discuss needs and seek advice. My consultant showed me how to put together a resume and send it out electronically to gain maximum impact. I was given interview preparation coaching and ParentNext booked a first aid course for me to attend.

“I successfully gained a graduate position as a registered nurse.”

My confidence has grown. ParentsNext has been a life-changing experience!



A beacon of hope.

- GEORGINA



When I was first told I had to participate in ParentsNext, I was really annoyed. I had a three year old son with sensory and developmental delay, which meant I was constantly in and out of meetings and appointments to address his needs and health issues.

“I found myself frustrated at the idea that, on top of these demands as a single mum, I was now being forced to look for work because of some government bureaucracy.”

I attended ParentsNext with OCTEC in Auburn. I had Googled the program and my opinion started to change. I began fantasising about completing the degree course I had started. This had long been a goal, but hadn't been achievable because of cultural clashes and domestic violence with my now ex-husband. ParentsNext suddenly appeared as a beacon of hope. My ex-husband couldn't stop me from participating in the program – because participation was compulsory.

I met with Tina, my OCTEC ParentsNext consultant, who took me through the program. She started me thinking about my future. For the first time in many years, I actually felt empowered. I discovered I had options! I could juggle my child care responsibilities and study. I was going to reclaim a little bit of my life and ensure a successful future for me and my children.

With Tina's support, I contacted the careers advisor at Western Sydney University and was accepted into the final year and a half of my degree. It hasn't been easy. The cost of returning to study, and the demands on my time, have been significant, but I am achieving high credits and distinctions for my assessments and I'm



well on my way to realising a dream of being a psychologist. I want to be someone who helps others.

I hear a lot of negativity about ParentsNext in the community, but without OCTEC and ParentsNext, I would never have been able to continue with my studies. Tina is also a mum and she understands the pressures I've been under. She has helped me to achieve my goals and be a role model for my kids.

“I feel empowered. I feel freedom.”

ParentsNext made that possible.

My chance to shine.

- TANYA

ParentsNext was my chance to shine. When I first went to OCTEC Murwillumbah I was an unemployed full-time mother.

“I had vision and goals, but was really unsure how to execute them.”

Naomi, my ParentsNext consultant, offered me immense support. She referred me to an Entrepreneurial Facilitator who helped put my business ideas into action. OCTEC funded marketing for my business, including items and equipment I needed to pursue my goals.

Naomi put me in contact with organisations and groups that could give me ongoing support and advice. Most important of all, she gave me emotional support.

Thanks to ParentsNext and OCTEC I am now employed, studying and expanding my career. My business is called Ayurvedic Therapies and in the future I want to use the yoga qualifications I am currently completing to complement my business.

“I feel more confident, motivated and hopeful than ever!”





“I was jobless and I had no qualifications. I didn’t think I could accomplish anything. Because of ParentsNext, I have the confidence to achieve the goals I set for myself, and take better care of my children.”

- Louise, NSW

For more information regarding OCTEC Limited's

ParentsNext Program

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