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DALE Young Parents School at Wyong changed my life, Hunter mother says

- [Helen Gregory](#)

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We are family: Shannon Trapman, with children Chase 7, Allirah 5 and Cruz 1, plus family dog Kaos, said she "wanted to prove everyone wrong". Picture: Marina Neil

SHANNON Trapman was determined to squeeze in as much schooling as she could before she became a mother.

Ms Trapman continued her studies until one week before she gave birth at age 15 to her son Chase.

She resumed her education when he was six months old, at St Philip's Christian College DALE Young Parents School at Wyong. It also has a campus in Newcastle.

"I wanted to be able to get a really good job and I still didn't know what I wanted to do yet," Ms Trapman said.

"I just wanted to study as much as I could, I did not want to be doing nothing - I wanted to set a good example for my son."

Fast forward seven years and Ms Trapman is now a mother of three and working as a mental health support worker.

She said the school helped her get her driver's licence, with food and housing, to move on from domestic violence - and complete her Higher School Certificate while raising two children.



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Since then she has completed her Certificate III in Community Services.

"There's no way I would be where I am now without it," she said of the school. "I reckon I would still be self conscious, I would not have finished school or anything. They've helped heaps, with confidence too and being outgoing. They helped bring me out of my shell."

St Philip's hopes to open a third school at Kurri Kurri by the start of next year, which would be the heart of a hub open to all young parents.

The hub will include a community area and other partner organisations, including an early learning centre, a vocational education training provider and agencies to help with parenting and life skills, such as wellbeing and financial literacy.

Principal of St Philip's Christian College DALE Young Parents and manager of the Young Parents Hub Bronwyn Thoroughgood said the school had submitted a state significant development application to construct the \$5 million hub on the former Uniting Church site, on the corner of Victoria and Rawson streets. It is before the Minister for Planning. She said St Philip's had applied to the Association of Independent Schools NSW Block Grant Authority for funding to build the school portion.

"In terms of number of teenager parents, the Central Coast is second in NSW, Newcastle is 12th and Kurri Kurri is 15th," she said. "We have a number of students who were travelling from the Hunter as far as Scone, Cessnock, Maitland, all coming down to the Newcastle hub. I still hear people who think young parents have babies just to get an income, but that's not the case. They are the most determined, inspiring group of people who have missed out on so much in their life due to circumstances out of their control."

She said the school allows students to sit their Higher School Certificate over three years, although this is flexible.

She said 45 mostly women had completed theirs since 2016, but there is a push to attract more men too. She said Kurri Kurri would have capacity for 60 students, but she didn't expect more than 25 to attend on any one day.



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Fees are kept affordable and negotiated on a case-by-case basis, starting at \$5 a day for both schooling and childcare. She said not being able to have their children on site was the "major barrier" to young parents returning to mainstream schooling.

She said the hub was a safe place and helped to "transform lives". "We have a number of students who, before they come to the hub, are isolated in their own home because they've been so judged," she said.

"We've had numerous incidents where buses have driven past them and not picked them up and if buses have pulled up and they've gotten onto the bus, no-one helps them. Their families have told them they are nothing, they have been tossed out, they've been laughed at, rejected, so judged. But they come in and there are no questions about anything that's gone on in the past, no judgment at all, just love and capacity building. We teach them how to advocate for themselves. The message is 'You're worth it, you'll do this, we believe in you, you're completely loved'."

Ms Trapman said she felt like a "completely different person" than when she enrolled at the school. "I wouldn't have been able to do it if the school wasn't so supportive and flexible. There were other people like me there, they weren't judgmental and the teachers treated you with respect."