

Consultation with Fathers

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Working in partnership with



There is strong evidence of the benefits for children of having an active and engaged father.¹ However, too many fathers miss out on the support and information that can help them thrive in this role and there is evidence that fathers' needs are not fully understood or met by family services.² For this reason, Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) have made understanding and embedding Father Inclusive Practice a priority for their work.

Coram Family and Childcare were commissioned by SSBC to develop and deliver a consultation with fathers living in Nottingham City to increase understanding of their wants and needs of universal services. This consultation with fathers is part of SSBC's commitment to co-production with parents and will be used to inform the development of services.

Consultation process

The consultation was due to start in March 2020, the same month we moved into national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning both the approach to the consultation and the timeline had to be adjusted. We had intended to interview 100 fathers, largely face to face, then follow up with focus groups. We delayed the start, and then moved from face to face to telephone interviews, recruiting fathers online through SSBC social media, word of mouth, partner organisations, such as children's centres, Family Mentors, the Children's Public Health Service, and paid Facebook advertising. Focus groups took place online using video conferencing software. Recruitment to interviews proved to be very difficult, and so to increase the legitimacy of the findings, we supplemented the interviews with an online survey. In total, 40 fathers took part in interviews, 49 completed the survey and 9 took part in focus groups, recruited from the fathers who took part in interviews and through the same channels as the interviews. Fathers who took part in the interviews and focus groups received a £15 and £20 shopping voucher respectively and survey respondents were entered into a prize draw for one of two £100 Amazon vouchers.

The interview template, focus group topic guide and survey questions can be found as appendices at the end of the report. The telephone interviews and survey aimed to build understanding of fathers' needs and this extent to which services on offer met their needs. We aimed to understand more about why engagement in services differs significantly between mothers and fathers and identify whether there were local drivers for this.. The focus groups aimed to increase understanding of the issues raised in the telephone interviews and the survey. All the fieldwork took place while social distancing restrictions were in place, meaning that many services and groups were not running or were running differently. Where possible, we asked fathers to think about services before the pandemic, although this was not possible for some fathers, particularly those with very young children born during the pandemic.

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. We separately recorded the key points from each question on the interview topic guide as well as scoring questions where appropriate, for example, level of satisfaction with current services. We used this as the basis of analysis of key themes as well as individual quotes and stories that illustrated these themes. We used findings from the interviews to identify the areas where further exploration was needed and to inform the design of the topic guide for the focus groups. The focus groups were recorded, then transcribed into a similar format. The survey asked similar questions to the interviews and was live at the same time that the focus groups took place.

1 See for example, Sethna V, Perry E, Domoney J, Iles J, Psychogiou L, Rowbotham NEL, Stein A, Murray L, Ramchandani PG. (2017). Father-child interactions at 3 months and 24 months: contributions to children's cognitive development at 24 months. *Infant Ment Health J.* 38(3):378-390

2 See, for example, Panter-Brick C, Burgess A, Eggerman M, McAllister F, Pruett K and Leckman, J (2014) Practitioner Review: Engaging fathers – recommendations for a game change in parenting interventions based on a systematic review of the global evidence

Key findings

There was a wide variety in preferences and experiences of the fathers we spoke to, but a number of key themes emerged. It was felt that the **weeks and months before and after birth** was a time when fathers were actively looking for information and support and where good engagement could help to set longer term patterns for use of services. There was not a clear preference for fathers only activities or changing activities to better meet their interest, but there was some interest in groups running at the weekend so fathers who worked Monday to Friday could attend.

The majority of fathers were **very satisfied with local services** saying that they were helpful and their children enjoyed using them. They were keen to engage more with services, but for many it was difficult for them to attend groups and services as they mostly took place at the same time that they were working. Cultural and social norms appeared to underpin and drive the gendered use of services, particularly around gendered working patterns and parental leave, but there were some challenges and barriers that could be met at a local level.

Fathers were keen that they were **engaged as an active (if not equal) parent** when attending appointments, for example, through having questions directed at them and professionals making eye contact with them and speaking to them as well as their partner. Many felt that although they were welcome to use these services, they were **primarily intended for mothers**. This meant that they often felt like a 'spare part' when attending appointments with their partner or conspicuous when they went to groups. While recognising the need for services to prioritise babies and mothers, particularly during the first months, some said that **their own needs were overlooked**.

This was particularly true around **mental health** with the vast majority of fathers saying that they were never asked about their own mental health or offered support, despite many saying they would have valued this. **Role models** were felt to be particularly important in shaping expectations about fatherhood - this was felt to be particularly important around helping fathers who are struggling with their mental health.

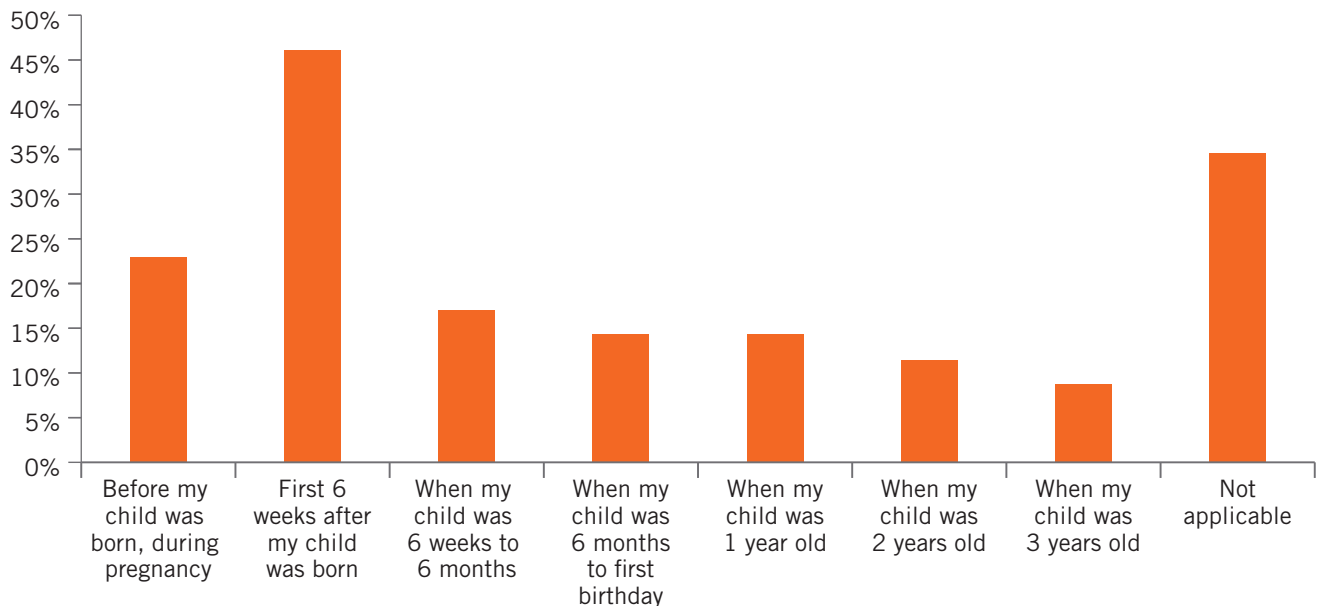
Many said that they simply **did not know where to find information** about what was on offer locally for families or where to find information that could help them in their role as parents. It was common for them to rely on their partners to provide this information. Fathers provided many different suggestions on how they would like to receive information but there was not a clear consensus on the best approach to use.

What support and information do fathers want and need?

There was significant variation in the types of support and information that fathers wanted and needed, as we would expect from a varied group. However, there was consensus around wanting to be active fathers and to engage in support that could help them with this. The survey asked about what stopped respondents from using a services - not a single respondent said it was that they were not interested in the activities on offer. It is possible that respondents will be keen to answer these questions positively based on perceived expectations of 'right' answers, but even taking that into account, the feedback was positive.

When did fathers feel more in need of support?

Were there times when you felt more in need of support from services than others?



The telephone interviews and survey highlighted the weeks and months before and after birth as the time when fathers felt most in need of additional support and information. In the focus groups, many talked about the pressure of feeling like they needed to support both partner and baby, but feeling slightly lost and confused about how to do this. Many mentioned that as their child gets older they become slightly more independent, but that the early stages are where the most care is needed. Those who went to antenatal classes felt slightly better prepared, but still felt in need of further support. In terms of what sort of information was highlighted as being useful there was a clear preference for ‘the basics’, fathers discussed wanting to know practical things like what is the healthy temperature for a baby, nappy changing, how to know why a baby is crying, how to know if something is wrong and what to do if something does go wrong. Many talked about how anxious they felt during the first weeks of their child’s life. Fathers understood why maternity services were focused so predominantly on mothers, but also felt that they had needs at this stage that were not being met.

“I had to learn on my feet”

Many fathers referenced how things can become more difficult when they go back to work and their partner is still on maternity leave. Many felt that their paternity leave was far too short and that they felt like they still did not know their baby when they were suddenly back at work full time and trying to support their new baby and partner. Fathers who were able to take extended leave or work flexibly said that this made a significant difference, although generally still found the period very challenging. We heard specific anecdotes about partners starting to experience postnatal depression and fathers not really knowing how to deal with this.

“I have two jobs, I’m self-employed and I work as well. Things are difficult with limited paternity leave”

The vast majority of fathers involved in the research felt that their needs decreased as their child got older. Many were still keen for help and information, particularly around ideas for activities and supporting children’s development. Some wanted more information on childcare and navigating through transitions, such as moving from baby to toddler. Some also felt that their needs increased when they went through significant changes themselves, such as moving house or breaking up with their partner.

What works for fathers' support networks?

Most of the fathers involved said that they did not have a network of other parents that they could share their experiences with or get advice from, and many said that this was in contrast to their female partners. While the majority noted this as a difference, not all felt the need to change it. Some fathers saw the opportunity to meet other parents and other fathers in particular, as a key motivator for attending groups, but others saw the pressure to socialise as a disincentive and were more concerned with their child's experience exclusively. Some saw benefits to having other parents they could go to for advice and to share experiences with, particularly when their children were very young but also as they grew older. Some also noted that cultural norms made it harder for fathers to form these social groups than for mothers where it was seen as the norm.

"The girls in my NCT class [antenatal class] made a real effort to keep in touch, there's a sense of bravado amongst dads so they don't tend to meet up afterwards"

"My partner was part of a group with other parents, she had support that I didn't have"

Do fathers want father specific services?

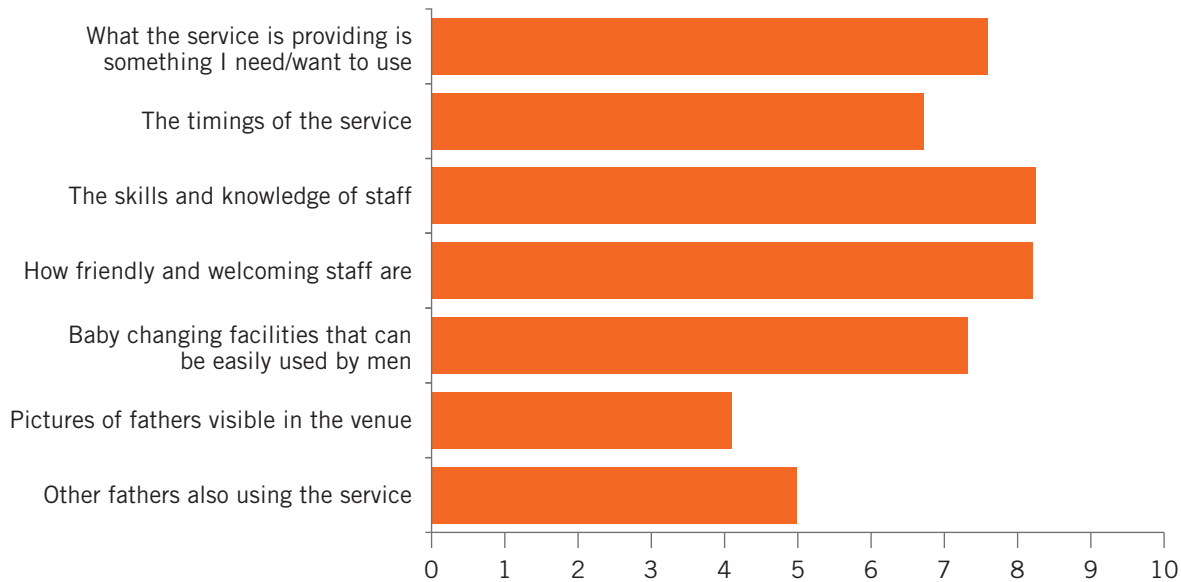
We also asked fathers about their preferences around the services that they wanted to engage with, including whether they wanted some father only groups where either mothers or fathers could attend with their child. There were mixed opinions about whether they would prefer services specifically targeted at fathers. From the survey, 88% said they would attend fathers groups. In the interviews, the majority of fathers said that they would prefer mixed groups open to both mothers and fathers over fathers only service, but most were open to the idea of attending fathers groups. Some said that they would be reluctant to attend as they preferred groups with women as they viewed them as better at small talk which is useful for these groups. A minority said that they would prefer groups just for men, or heavily targeted at men including through groups that focused stereotypical men's interests, such as sport. Many fathers were concerned about being the only male present at activities and activities with a gender mix was viewed as important.

"I have been to the reading group at the library and it was largely mums, I felt a bit like I shouldn't really have been there."

"You need to know it's a mixed space and be sure that both mothers and fathers feel comfortable with that. You want to feel like you're not weird and it can be hard to get over that feeling"

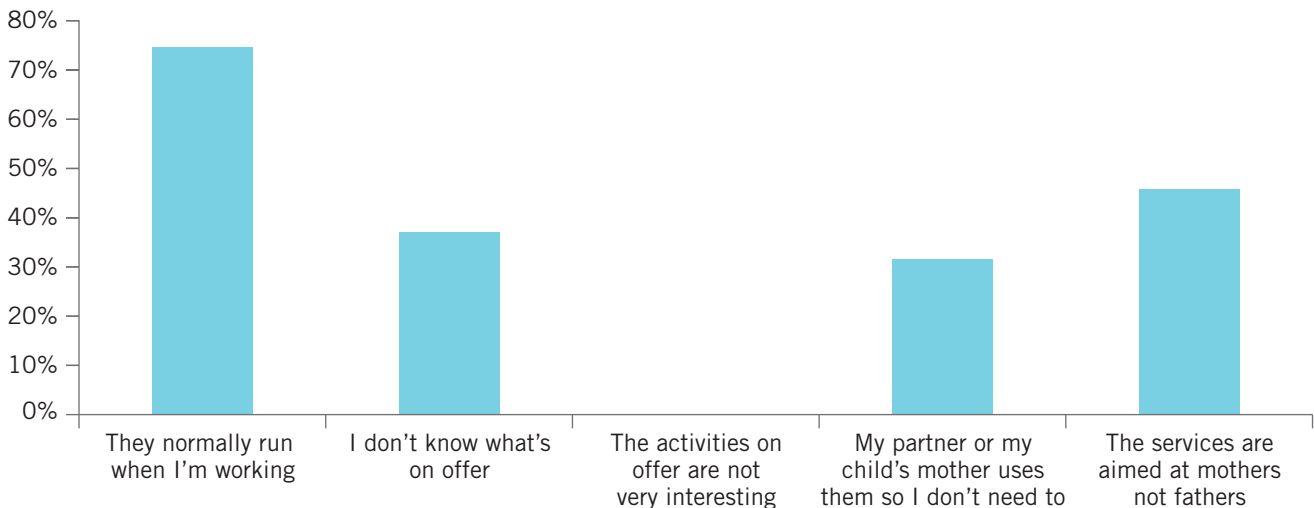
What helps fathers engage with services?

Factors influence fathers attending services



Note: The survey asked participants to rank each fact between 1 and 10. This chart shows the average ranking given to each factor, with the higher numbers being more important.

What stops you from using a service?

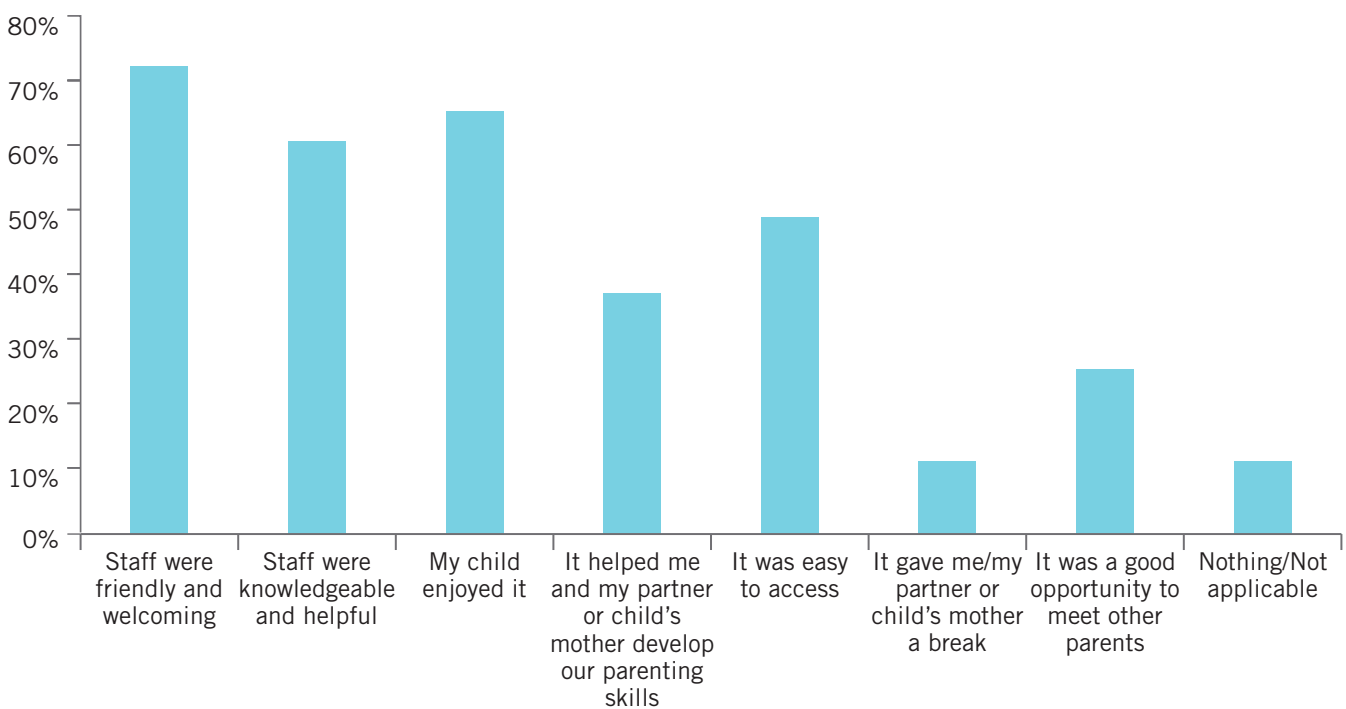


When we asked fathers about the factors that would make them more or less likely to attend services, they were more likely to pick out factors that were related to staff or what was on offer rather than factors such as pictures of fathers and father friendly baby changing facilities. Staff were felt to be the most important factor, followed by what the service provided. The timings of when services were offered was the most commonly cited factor in all stages of the research in determining whether or not fathers used services. Most of the fathers we spoke to worked full time and many worked standard office hours, and said that most of the support that was on offer was only available while they were working. Contrastingly, pictures of fathers being visible in the venue came out as less important than the other factors. This reflects that it is more important to many dads that staff create a welcoming environment where they feel they will be respected and their child appreciated rather than just dads being a presence in spaces. The survey responses reflected the discussions in the interviews and focus groups.

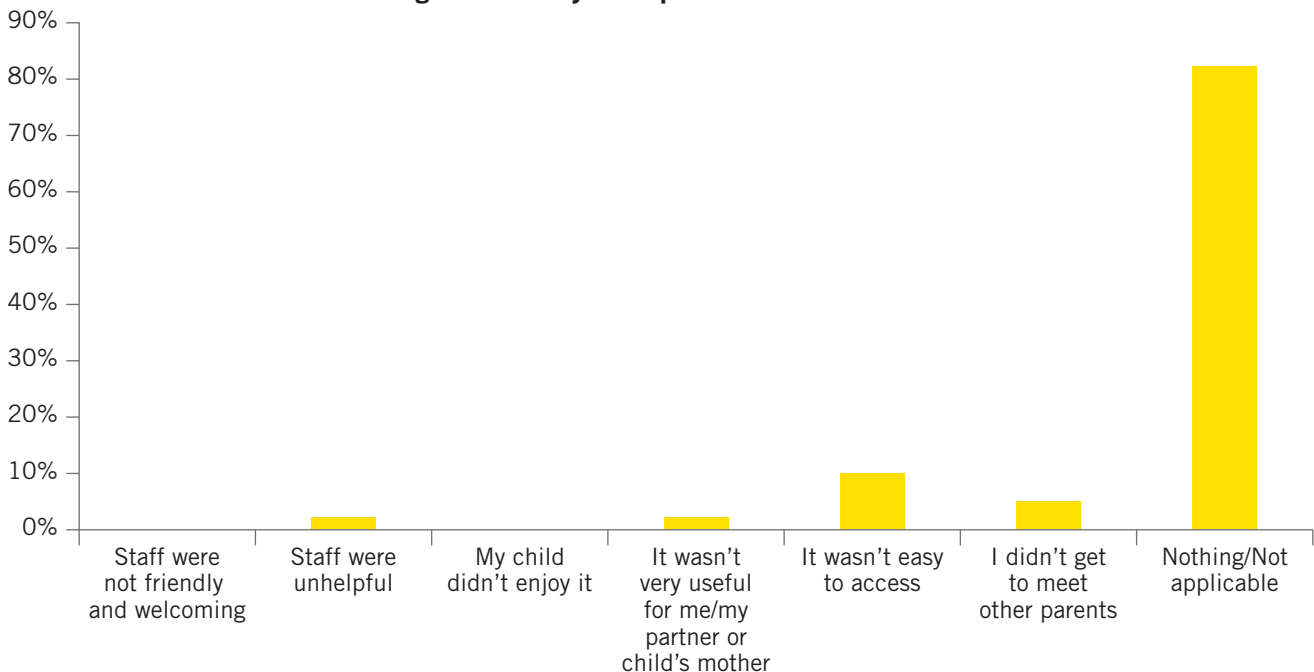
Fathers' experience of services

The fathers involved in the research were generally positive about their experience of services. Most who have attended activities and services felt that they had met their own and their child's needs and they would want to attend more if it wasn't for barriers such as work. The graphs below show that survey respondents were significantly more positive than negative about the services they attended, and this sentiment was similar for focus group attendees and interviewees. The feedback about the importance of staff being friendly and welcoming was strongly felt to be the most important factor in determining a positive experience when using services.

What was positive about your experience at these services?



What was negative about your experience at these services?



However, when asked further for more information about services, fathers did mention some aspects of the services themselves that acted as barriers to fathers. While we asked about services and groups at the same time, the barriers discussed were slightly different for appointment based services, such as midwifery, health visiting or specialist support services, and universal group services, such as stay and plays, cook and play or rhyme time. For both, they frequently mentioned attending services much less than their partner, with some stating that they did not go because their partner did. The overwhelming majority mentioned working full time as the major obstacle to attending services, with the majority of activities taking place during the working day, many felt both unwelcome and unable to attend. Although this is largely related to work, there was also a general sense that fathers felt that it wasn't their space, and this was compounded by services taking place at a time when they felt that they should have been at work. Concerns around going and being the only father present consistently appeared, both in terms of what fathers had already experienced and they worried that they might experience.

Experience of appointment based services

For appointment based services, many fathers said that they did not get the same level of support as mothers, and some felt that they were in fact forgotten about. Many saw this as a sensible or necessary approach, particularly around maternity services where participants felt that mothers should be the priority, but it is also likely to be a driver in the gendered engagement with services. Some fathers said that questions were directed at the mother and that engagement with them was limited. A small number said that it would be useful to have a key point of contact for fathers, particularly within the health visiting and maternity team, so that they could access key information. Some had also not been able to attend appointments because of COVID-19 risks. While they understood the reasons for this, they had found it difficult to miss out on these important opportunities.

“The few things I went to I would've gone with my wife and the greeting was directed at her. Felt like I was tagging along rather than being an active participant.”

“I might as well have not been in the room ... All the information was loaded onto my partner”

Feedback about group services

Most of the feedback from participants was about both groups and services. One participant said that they felt staff did not engage with them conversationally, instead focusing on the mothers, and that this made them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. Some also said that other mothers there did not include them in conversation which made them feel uncomfortable. The requests made by fathers were quite simple but were felt to be important - they wanted staff at groups and appointments to greet them directly, make regular eye contact with them, involve them in conversations and, at appointments, have questions that were specifically for them rather than just for the mother.

“We [fathers] have our own viewpoint which isn't tapped into”

“You can feel bad that your partners not there if there are a lot of women, but it shouldn't be like that”

“The women all sit around in a clique and I'm sat on a chair on my own”

Were fathers' mental health needs met?

In all parts of the research, we asked fathers about whether they had been asked about or offered support with their own mental health. This emerged as a large gap in service provision. Only 10% of survey respondents had been asked or offered support with their mental health since becoming a father and 91% said it would have been useful to receive information about their own health or mental health. The fathers involved in focus groups and interviews talked about similar experiences.

The majority of participants felt that fathers should be asked about their mental health, but that they did not think services were currently doing enough to ask. Many felt that this was a significant contrast to mothers where services were impressively responsive to their potential needs. Fathers felt that professionals regularly checked in on mothers' mental health, and those whose partners had faced issues with their mental health, felt that services had picked up on them. There was recognition of the impact of postnatal depression on mothers and therefore how important it was for services to prioritise it, but there was also a feeling that the impact on fathers is less understood or thought about. For some, this also impacted on their ability to support their partners. The disparity in support between mothers and fathers was exemplified by one father whose wife experienced serious mental health problems after the birth of their first child and moved to a mother and baby unit. It was only after him supporting her for 5 months while she was there, and struggling to cope throughout this period, that staff asked him about his own mental wellbeing.

On his mental wellbeing: *"I was personally overwhelmed when my child was born, and it would help for it to be acknowledged that it can happen"*

"We know men are less inclined to talk, but I don't think it helps when mothers are proactively asked and fathers are ignored"

"When my first child was born I found my emotions were all over the place, I was crying uncontrollably at things like sad films. Something to prepare me would be good"

Interestingly, in interviews, many fathers were uncomfortable directly talking about mental health, instead preferring to talk about their partner's experiences. In the focus groups we were able to probe more into what caused this discomfort and how to overcome it. Some participants talked about the importance of role models in giving space and freedom to talk about their own struggles. The potential effectiveness of a role model approach was exemplified in the focus groups where fathers became more comfortable talking about their own mental health as other fathers in the group also discussed it openly. The idea of having fathers who have had mental health problems speak at classes, particularly antenatal classes, to set a powerful precedent was suggested as a development that would help fathers to feel comfortable talking about their own mental health issues. The power of this was also modelled in the focus groups where fathers became more comfortable talking about their own mental health once another participant also opened about their struggles.

While there was a strong feeling that professionals should be asking after the mental health of fathers, there was less certainty on what the best way to do this was, especially as many felt that this was an issue men struggled to talk about. In the interviews, fathers often said that they were unsure how they could or should be asked about their mental health, particularly at group activities. There was recognition that this is the big issue especially since many men are less comfortable talking about their mental health. A suggestion that appeared multiple times was that questions about mental health for fathers should follow the same process as for mothers, with midwives and other regular check ups providing a key avenue for this. On top of this, being given a regular point of contact was seen as very important.

Finding information on mental health

When we asked fathers about how they would like to find out more information on mental health if they were looking for it, fathers thought that the internet and professionals were the best sources. The internet was mentioned as it's a fast and easy way to access and research information. Professionals, such as GPs and midwives and health visitors, came up due to them being trusted by many fathers to provide accurate and helpful information.

“Other men who are willing to share their experiences and open up can give space to those who say ‘oh yeah, I relate to that’...it’s always hard to be the first person to open up”

“It’s good to acknowledge you might feel depressed and if you here are services you can contact”

In addition to support around their own mental health, some also said that they wanted to know how to support their partner better. Fathers wanted more information on what their partner is going through at different periods in order to properly support them. It wasn't mentioned as something essential, but something that would be useful.

“More information on what my partner may be going through at different times would be great, I felt like I just bumbled my way through”

How do we reach fathers effectively?

One of the key barriers fathers identified to engaging with services and information was that they simply did not know where to start looking for information. In both the interviews and focus groups, the overwhelming majority of fathers found out about services and activities through their partner - in fact many of them took part in the research after their partner gave them the information. The fact that partners are able to find the information suggests that the issue is not with the information itself, but instead how it reaches fathers. We explored this issue more fully with fathers to build our understanding of what could help to overcome this information gap, including whether services adopting different models could help with engagement.

In the interviews many fathers showed a preference for social media as a key way to access information but this was less popular when discussed in the focus groups. In the interviews, there was a sense that it is the easiest way to reach people as most fathers are on social media. In the focus groups, we asked in more detail about this preference including what would make them follow a social media account. Some did not use social media regularly, others felt that information would get lost in busy newsfeed or that it was not a very efficient way of looking for information. Many also said that they did not pay attention to paid content. Of those that felt social media could be useful, they would prefer it to be a place for finding out about events and activities rather than for discussion, for example, using the calendar function on Facebook. As with activities, some fathers thought that they would be more likely to engage with accounts or posts that were targeted at fathers in particular, but for others, this was not important. Some were concerned about how to know whether to trust information on social media or forums and wanted information to be verified.

There was a clear preference for a 'one stop shop' approach to providing information so that they could find everything in one place. Some wanted to be sent regular emails with content tailored to the age of their child, and others preferred the idea of an app or website. In the focus groups, there was some enthusiasm for using an app as a fast and easy way to get information. In particular it was mentioned that it could contain classes that are nearby and tips for fathers or parents more generally. However, it was also felt that an app would have to have a large suite of up to date information in order to encourage people to download it which may not be possible.

“An app would be absolutely ideal”

“I would download an app if it was useful, but there would have to be a good hook, I think you would have your work cut out for you”

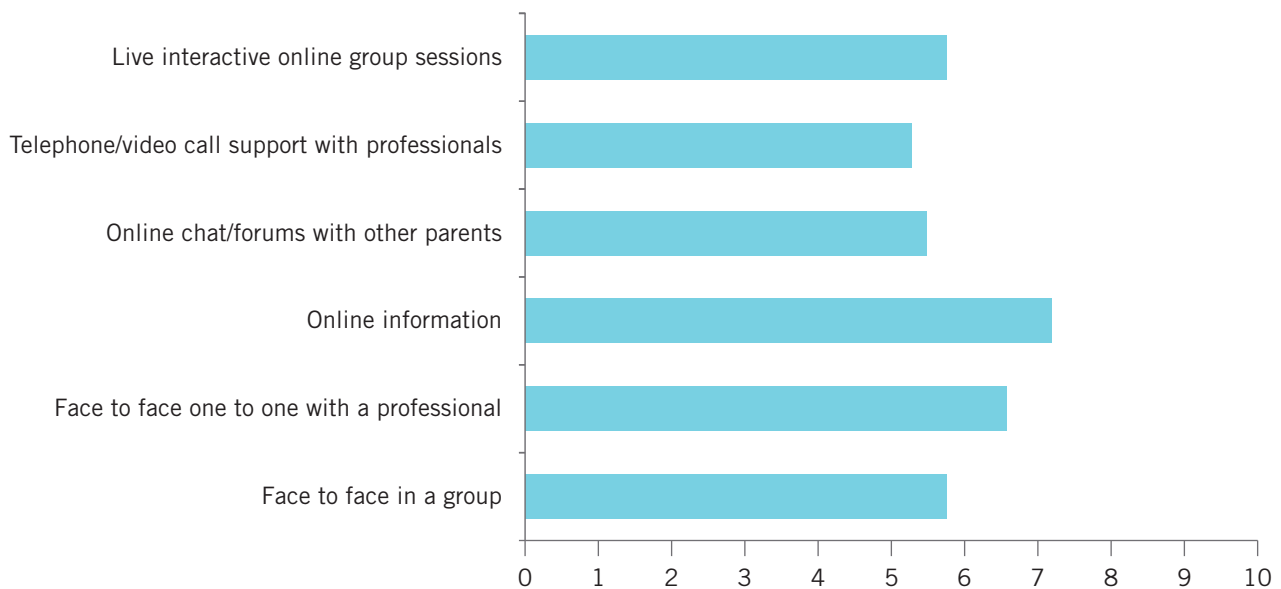
“I just want a one stop shop for information...spending time looking for information means you’re not with your kids”

“It would be great if staff said to you “Oh you’re going to be a new dad, consent to this and we’ll send you loads of emails”

“There is a wealth of information out there but there’s also a risk of things being misleading. We need actually verified accounts giving out information that is trustworthy”

Note: The survey asked participants to rank each fact between 1 and 10. This chart shows the average ranking given to each factor, with the higher numbers being more important.

How would you like to access information and support?



In the interviews, there was a strong desire for alternative means of contacting services for advice and support, in particular calling and texting came up as an option for those who work full time, as well as out of hours services and video calls. We asked about these alternative ways of engaging with services in the survey and while the most popular channels were online information and face to face with a professional, these were not significantly more popular than online group sessions, remote one to ones with professionals or online chat. However, some also voiced wanting to find a balance between in person and online/phone engagement, as the face to face part of engagement is important.

“For those who don’t have flexibility, more out of hours services would be great”

“Both in person and online should be an option. Online support could be just as important”

There is also potential learning about how best to reach fathers from the recruit to this consultation. We found it hard to reach fathers and the recruitment took longer than originally planned. This recruitment took place between May and October 2020, during COVID-19 restrictions, so it is hard to know whether recruitment would have proved as challenging even under original plans and context, but the difficulties in finding fathers to take part in the research could be indicative of the difficulties family services face in reaching fathers. We initially focused on recruitment through SSBC social media, Parent Champions and services working with families. When recruitment was proving difficult, we started asking participants where they had heard about the research – the most common answer was from their partner or another friend or family member. Fathers at the focus group also said that they predominantly found out about family activities and support through their partners, rather than the communication channels typically used by services to reach parents. We used paid Facebook advertising to reach fathers to complete the survey, which reached some new fathers however after a fortnight, its effectiveness diminished. Our main learning from this was that channels targeted to parents were not widely reaching fathers. Paid Facebook advertising was slightly more effective, but we found that the most effective way for us to reach fathers was through their family and friends.

Areas for action

This consultation highlighted a number of reasons why fathers were less likely to engage in the support that was available to them. For many, the brevity of paternity leave meant that they were returning to work before they had been able to fully engage in their role as a father and really feel like they knew their baby. The fact that their partner was off work while they were working then meant that their partner led engagement with services and became the expert that fathers relied on. Beyond maternity leave, it was common for mothers to work fewer hours than fathers so continuing these roles. Even fathers who took extended paternity leave or shared parental leave felt the strong cultural norms around mothers being the primary parent. These embedded and structural differences and inequalities are hard to tackle on a local level. However, the consultation also highlighted areas where changes could be made to help empower men in their role as fathers.

Better support for fathers in the weeks and months before and after birth

The weeks and months before and after birth came out strongly as the time when fathers felt most in need of additional support, with particular mention about wanting greater support from health visitors and midwives. It is also the time when the new family unit is setting up and so strong engagement at this point could set up habits and ways of working for the family that will last through childhood. Many fathers talked about being reliant on their partners to find out information about their children's development - early engagement with services and support could help fathers to develop knowledge of where to information early. We would recommend that any piloting of changes focus on this period in order to have the biggest impact.

Professionals effectively including fathers

Staff came out as the most important factor in determining whether fathers viewed their engagement with services positively or negatively. Fathers' made simple requests on what would encourage them to engage in services: greeting fathers when they arrive, regular eye contact with fathers, having questions specifically for fathers at appointments and actively engaging them in conversation. Fathers were generally very positive about the services they had used and the skills of staff, but many started using these services already feeling self conscious about whether or not they should be there or were welcome, and at groups sometimes felt other mothers were not as welcoming to them. This means additional work is needed in order to overcome these concerns.

Better support to fathers around their mental health

Support for fathers' mental health also emerged as a significant gap. The vast majority of fathers were not asked about their own mental health and some felt quite alone during a challenging time while trying to support their partner and child. Fathers wanted to be asked about their own mental health in a similar way to mothers.

Use role models to help reach fathers

Role models also emerged as an important way to help fathers feel confident engaging with services as well as addressing any challenges. This was raised by fathers in the context of being able to talk about mental health issues and was modelled within the focus groups, but could be useful more widely and help fathers feel more comfortable when engaging with services.

Consider whether services can be available for fathers outside office hours

Fathers' working patterns often posed a significant barrier to engaging with services which often ran at the same time as they were at work. While this is not the only barrier in place, it was raised by the majority of fathers that took part in the research. It is worth considering what services can be offered outside typical office hours or whether remote engagement could be offered during typical office hours to make it easier for fathers while working, for example, through offering telephone or online chat support.

Test different ways of providing information to fathers

While the consultation identified an information gap for fathers, there was not a clear consensus around changes that were needed to overcome this. Engagement with fathers in their own right when they attend appointments with their partner, such as gathering their contact details for ongoing communication, could help with this. It is important to recognise that the majority of fathers are not receiving information through the channels that are targeting families (apart from via partners) and so there is a need to pilot and evaluate different approaches.

Thank you

Coram Family and Childcare would like to say a huge thank you to all the fathers who gave up their time to take part in this consultation – your feedback is invaluable. We would also like to thank everyone who helped to recruit fathers to this research including SSBC, Framework Family Mentor Service, The Toy Library Family Mentor Service, Home-start Family Mentor Service, Nottingham CityCare Partnership Children's Public Health Service, The Literacy Trust and all the Parent Champions and Parent Ambassador volunteers. We would also like to thank the Fathers Inclusive Practice Group for providing valuable feedback during the course of the research. Special thanks go to Sara Salem at SSBC whose insight, challenge and support throughout has significantly improved this consultation.

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Introduce self and thank for taking part. I work for Coram Family and Childcare, and we have been commissioned by Small Steps Big Changes to do this work. They are a National Lottery Community Fund programme supporting families, babies and young children in four Nottingham wards and are looking for father's views on services in the city.

The background to the research – We know that dads are important to their child's health and development and so we want to talk to you about it's like when coming into contact with services and activities for children and families and what support you need as a dad

Check whether they had any questions on the information they received about participation. Remind them they can decide to stop at any time. Agreement to record interview.

We are going to ask you about using services and what support you would like to receive to help you with being a dad. By this we mean information and support services, such as health visitors, midwives and family mentors, as well as parent groups at children's centres, libraries, play groups, etc.

You might not have an answer for every question – that's fine, just say so and we'll go on to the next question. There is no right answer to the questions, we just want to hear about your views and experiences.

At the moment, lockdown obviously makes it impossible to use the majority of services. As far as possible, please could you try to answer these questions based on normal times when services were open.

Data monitoring to be asked in screening survey

- ▶ How old are you?
- ▶ Relationship to child E.g. father, stepfather, foster parent
- ▶ What is your ethnic group?
- ▶ Are you currently employed? If yes, is that full time or part time?
- ▶ What is your full postcode
- ▶ If your child lives at a separate address please provide their postcode

Data monitoring questions to be asked in the interview

- ▶ To start, could you tell me a bit about your family. How many children do you have?
- ▶ How old are your children?

Identifying need

- ▶ Have you had any experience of using services or groups with your children? Eg children's centres, nurseries, libraries, parenting programmes (like Triple P), midwives, antenatal groups and health visitors. Could you tell me a bit about that experience?

If yes:

- When a particularly positive or negative experience is mentioned follow up on it, eg what would improve this for you? What made the service particularly useful?
- What has stopped you from using services? Prompts: times they run, whether they are for mothers or fathers

If no:

- Why have you not used services? Prompts: not knowing about them, timings, unwelcoming
- ▶ We know some parents with young children can experience some mental health difficulties e.g. low mood, depression, anxiety. Was this something you were asked about or offered support with? What's the best way to get info and support on this?
- ▶ If you think back to pregnancy and when your child(ren) were very young to now, how have your needs as a father changed as your child(ren) have grown older? Was there particular support you received or would have liked when you at different points?

Using services

- ▶ I'm going to give you a list of different things that might make you more likely to use a service. Could you tell me which ones are important and unimportant in encouraging to use a service?
 - A. Other fathers also using the service
 - B. Pictures of fathers visible in the venue
 - C. Baby changing facilities that can be easily used by men
 - D. How friendly and welcoming staff are
 - E. The skills and knowledge of staff
 - F. The timings of the service (e.g. daytime/evening, week day/ weekend)
 - G. How easy is it to find out about the service
 - H. What the service is providing is a service or activity I need/want to use
 - I. None of the above.
- ▶ (Read back their ranking to check if correct) Can you tell me a bit about why you put them in that order? Are there other things that would encourage you to use a service?
- ▶ When you use these services, how do you think fathers are viewed by staff and/or others attending?
- ▶ From your experience, do you think services work equally well for all Nottingham families? Are there any families that you think are more likely to use these services?
- ▶ What information would be helpful to you or has been helpful to you before as a father? E.g. child health, fathers health, mothers health
- ▶ Would you prefer activities specifically for fathers or mixed activities for parents/caregivers?
- ▶ What would you change about services in Nottingham if you could?

Finding out about services

- ▶ What is the best way for you to hear about services? E.g. social media, friends and family, flyer in public space

Concluding questions

- ▶ Could I ask where you found out about the interview? Did someone refer you, if so would you like to provide their name for our referral scheme
- ▶ Thank you very much for your time. We will send you a voucher to say thank you for your time – would you prefer Asda or Sainsburys? Check email address.
- ▶ Would you like to have your details passed onto SSBC so they can contact you about future work they are doing to improve services?
- ▶ (optional) Would you be interested in taking part in a focus group for a further £20 shopping voucher? These will be held towards the end of summer, either online or face to face
- ▶ Check email address for sending shopping voucher to participant

Appendix 2: Focus group topic guide

Introduction

Thank you for taking part in the next stage of the Father's Consultation. Many of you have already participated in the interviews (this depends on who's there) so hopefully you understand a bit about the project.

Just to recap: We are from Coram Family and Childcare and are working with Small Steps Big Changes, a programme supporting families in four Nottingham wards, to get father's views on services in the city and their needs as parents.

Dads are really important to their children's health and development, but we know that you often miss out on the support and services that help in the tricky role of being a parent. This works aims to help understand what can be done to help fathers get more involved in the help that's out there. Hopefully the interviews we've done and our discussions today will contribute to this.

The topics we will be talking about today follow up on some of our main learnings from the interviews, covering the sort of information you'd like, what you'd like from services and how things can be better communicated.

Logistics: booked for an hour and a quarter, but hoping for it to take an hour, £20 voucher sent out by email afterwards once we get the vouchers. I'm going to ask some questions – please just come in and answer when you have something to say and respond to what each other are saying. There's no need to raise your hand or wait for me to bring you in. However, please also try not to talk over each, although I know this is often more tricky on video calls.

Check whether they had any questions on the information they received about participation. Remind them they can decide to stop at any time. Agreement to record interview.

Icebreaker: Everyone introduce themselves and how many kids they have, and the noisiest thing that their children do.

Perinatal period

From the interviews we did with you and other fathers, we found that the first weeks and months were a time when you really wanted and needed information and support. We'd like to understand a bit more about how professionals can best meet those needs.

- ▶ Imagine you've just arrived home with the baby for the time and those first weeks of your baby's life. What are the first things you want to know about? What information do you need?
- ▶ What about support from professionals - how can they help you and help you to support your partner or ex-partner and child?
- ▶ How would you like this support and information to be provided? Prompts: online, leaflets (posted to home, at services), face to face, over phone
- ▶ Would it be helpful to have more information and support before your child is born? And what should this information be about?
- ▶ (Optional) It's common for fathers to go back to work within a month or so after a new baby is born. Imagine you're back at work with a very young child. What information and support do you want now?

Improving services

- ▶ As your child gets older, there are groups and services on offer to help your child's development and to support you as a parent. What would make you want to attend these groups?
 - What activities?
 - What information provided?
 - Timing?
 - Sharing experience with other mothers?
 - Sharing experience with other fathers?
 - Just for fathers?
- ▶ What would you hope to get out of it in the end?
- ▶ Imagine there's a group running that perfectly meets all the things that you've just said. What could get in the way of you going to that group? How likely do you think it is that you would go? Prompt: other things happening in evenings and weekends, other responsibilities taking over (DIY, cleaning, shopping)
- ▶ So now I'd like you to think about when you arrive at a group or an appointment with a service, for example, with your health visitor. What would make you feel comfortable and welcome? Prompts if needed:
 - Staff (what does good or bad staff practice look like? What actions can be taken by staff to make dads comfortable?)
 - The facilities
 - The activities
 - Other parents at the activity
- ▶ Would you want to be treated differently to a mother? How so?
- ▶ What about differently to other fathers? Are there reasons why some dads should be treated differently to others? (optional)
- ▶ So far, I've been asking about going to groups or appointments, but we know that working dads often really struggle with finding the time for this. Do you think it would be better for dads to be able to get information and support in a different way, such as over the phone or online chat?

Communication/ Advertisement

Many of the fathers we interviewed said they didn't know about groups and services for families, and normally relied on their partner to provide this information. You also said that online and on social media would be the best way to provide information.

- ▶ Have you looked for information regarding groups and services before? And if so where have you looked?
- ▶ What would make you follow a social media account with information for parents in Nottingham? Which platform would you prefer - instagram, facebook, twitter?
- ▶ Would you download an app to give you this information? What would it need to include? Would you want to be able to online chat with professionals? What about other fathers?
- ▶ What about a website - what would you want this to include?
- ▶ Should these be marketed to dads in particular?
- ▶ How would you want to find out about them?

Mental Health Support

Having a new child is really tough and it's very common for parents to have problems with their mental health.

- ▶ Many fathers mentioned not being asked about their own mental health by services even when their partner was. Should services for parents in Nottingham be asking fathers about their mental health in the same way mothers are asked about it?
- ▶ What would be the best way to do this?
- ▶ In our interviews, some fathers felt uncomfortable talking about mental health. What can services do to make it easier for fathers to talk about this?
- ▶ Another regular theme was fathers being there to support their partner's mental health. What do you need to be able to support your partner to the best of your ability?

That's the end of the questions that I have. Is there anything else that you would like us to know about meeting dads' needs locally?

Next steps: voucher, report. Thank you for your time.

Appendix 3: Online survey question

1. How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-46
- 46-55
- Over 55

2. What is your relation to your child?

- Father
- Step-Father
- Foster Parent
- Guardian

3. What is your ethnic group?

- White British
- White Irish
- Carribean
- African
- Indian or British Indian
- Pakistani or British Pakistani
- Bangladeshi or British Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- White and Black African
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Asian
- Other

4. For the purposes of ensuring we have representation across Nottingham, what is your full postcode?

5. Have you personally attended any of the following services/activities?

- Antenatal Classes
- Midwives
- Play Groups
- Children's Centres
- Nurseries
- Parent Programmes (e.g. Triple P)
- Libraries
- Health Visitors
- Family Mentors
- I haven't attended any of these

6. What was positive about your experience at these services?

- Staff were friendly and welcoming
- Staff were knowledgeable and helpful
- My child enjoyed it
- It helped me and my partner or child's mother develop our parenting skills
- It was easy to access
- It gave me/my partner or child's mother a break
- It was a good opportunity to meet other parents
- Nothing/Not applicable

7. What was negative about your experience?

- Staff were not friendly and welcoming
- Staff were unhelpful
- My child didn't enjoy it
- It wasn't very useful for me/my partner or child's mother
- It wasn't easy to access
- I didn't get to meet other parents
- Nothing/Not applicable

8. Have you been asked about or offered support with your mental health since becoming a father?

- Yes
- No

9. Factors encouraging you to use a service

Below is a list of things that may encourage you to use a service. For each one, rate how important it is to you in encouraging you to use a service on a scale between 1 and 10 with 1 being not important at all, and 10 being incredibly important.

- Other fathers also using the service
- Pictures of fathers visible in the venue
- Baby changing facilities that can be easily used by men
- How friendly and welcoming staff are
- The skills and knowledge of staff
- The timings of the service e.g. whether there are evening/weekend sessions
- What the service is providing being something I need/want to use

10. What stops you from using a service

- They normally run when I'm working
- I don't know what's on offer
- The activities on offer are not very interesting
- My partner or my child's mother uses them so I don't need to
- The services are aimed at mothers not fathers
- Would be helpful to me had I received the information
- I have received this information and it has been useful
- Information about my child's health and development
- Information about my health/mental health
- Information about my partner's health/mental health
- The experience of other fathers
- Information on accessing childcare
- Information about what's on in your local area

11. What information would be helpful to you or has been helpful to you before as a father?

12. Were there times when you felt more in need of support from services than others?

- Before my child was born, during pregnancy
- First 6 weeks after my child was born
- When my child was 6 weeks to 6 months
- When my child was 6 months to first birthday
- When my child was 1 year old

-
- When my child was 2 years old
 - When my child was 3 years old
 - Not applicable

13. How would you like to access information and support?

On a scale of 1 to 10, please describe how much you would favour the following ways, with 10 being your favourite and 1 being your least preferred method.

- Face to face in a group
- Face to face one to one with a professional
- Online information
- Online chat / forums with other parents
- Online chat / forums with professionals
- Telephone / video call support with professionals
- Live interactive online group sessions

14. Would you attend groups or activities for fathers only?

- Yes
- No

15. Do you have any other comments about using services as a father in Nottingham?

Thank you for taking part, your input will be crucial to informing SSBC's work. Please enter your email below to enter the prize draw for one of two £100 Amazon vouchers. We will also be running online focus groups for fathers in Nottingham who will be paid a £20 voucher

to say thank you. If this interests you and you would like to be contacted about it please tick the box below.

Email address

Focus group consent:

I would like to be contacted about participating in a focus group

Appendix 4: Demographics of fathers involved

Ethnicity of participants

	Survey	Interviews
White British	73%	58%
White Irish	0%	3%
Caribbean	4%	
African	2%	15%
Indian or British Indian	0%	8%
Pakistani or British Pakistani	6%	5%
Bangladeshi or British Bangladeshi	4%	
Chinese	0%	
White and Black African	0%	3%
White and Black Caribbean	6%	3%
White and Asian	0%	
Other	4%	8%

Age of participants

	Survey	Interviews
Under 18	0%	0%
18-25	8%	8%
26-35	55%	45%
36-46	35%	45%
46-55	2%	3%
Over 55	0%	0%

Age of youngest child (interviews only)

Not yet born	Under 6 months	6 months - 12 months	Aged 1	Aged 2	Aged 3	Aged 4
13%	18%	11%	18%	8%	16%	16%

In or out of ward

	Survey	Interviews
In SSBC ward	20%	43%
Out of SSBC ward	80%	58%