



LEFT OUT

How Young Dads Access Services in
North East London



Introduction

The numbers of teenage pregnancies, in Britain today, has fallen to the lowest level since records began (BBC News, 2015). On top of this, maternity pay/leave is now shared between mother and father, "Parents will be able to share a pot of leave, and can decide to be off work at the same time and/or take it in turns to have periods of leave to look after the child" (ACAS, 2015).

The UK is, in many ways, moving in the right direction in terms of the services and support offered to families. However there is a group in society whom are almost always left out, that group is young dads. Young dads are almost invisible in policy, statutory services and society; in fact there are no accurate records of how many young dads live in the UK today.

Raising your child is a job most parents would like to do to the best of their abilities. However it's a job that can become increasingly difficult when you are young and there is no support available from your partner/family/community and government. In terms of our roles as parents, and despite significant need, many young dads are not aware of the statutory support available to them and will not access services like

Children's Centres. In a recent article in the New Statesman, Javed Kahn, Chief Executive of Barnardo's, described young dads as 'Cinderella' parents stating that,

"Research shows that from the moment their partner becomes pregnant, they face enormous barriers to maintaining contact with their children, with little or no contact with midwives, health visitors and social workers before and after the birth. Some Children's Centres, too, don't routinely ask about dads when mums first seek support, and often only ever come into contact with the mother and child." (Kahn. J, New Statesmen, 2015)

This report seeks to explore how young dads are accessing antenatal and postnatal services such as midwifery services, early years education and childcare. We have found multiple pitfalls in service accessibility, access to information and young father engagement.

Today we can look forward to a society where support for dads begins to mirror that of mothers. The recommendations in this report will address the changes the YDC would like to see for those dads that are currently being left out.

Background

The Young Dads Collective

The Young Dads Collective (YDC) is a London based peer advisory programme with national outreach that works to reduce levels of poverty and isolation experienced by young fathers, and at the same time develop the skill sets and employability of all the young fathers who are members. All collective members are young fathers under the age of 25.

Family and Childcare Trust

Family and Childcare Trust aims to make the UK a better place for families, through research, campaigning and information provision, and working with government, employers and parents to reduce pressures on family life.

Methodology

The action research project took place between June 2014 and August 2015 in North East London and was carried out by members of the Young Dads Collective. In total 29 young fathers aged between 18 and 25 were interviewed or surveyed.

21 young fathers agreed to take part in our survey in which they were asked a set of multiple choice questions. The possible answers to all questions were: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree and prefer not to say.

Eight young fathers took part in semi-structured qualitative interviews. The research findings have been combined with the observational discussion and the lived experiences of members of the Young Dads Collective.

The Young Dads Collective project is co-run by young fathers aged under25 and aims to reduce the levels of isolation and poverty experienced by their peers. Its team represents the interests of its peers on the local, national and international stage.

'Left Out' adopts the stand point that peers are experts in their fields and was carried out using a peer research approach.

Peer Research involves members of the subject group taking on the role of researcher and ensures the empowerment and participation of young people by involving them in every aspect of the research. Members of the Young Dads Collective were involved at every stage of the process including development, design, data collection, analysis and write up.

The Family and Childcare Trust provided training and guidance throughout the project to ensure that all those carrying out the research were properly supported. This provided the report with, 'the means to secure quality data as well as maximising opportunities to empower children and young people to have a voice, develop transferable skills and inform policy and practice...This has contributed towards the efficacy of the research and provided an inclusive, empowering and educational experience for all. (Catch 22, 2015)

Background

Are young dads present?

As David Lammy MP states in his 2014 essay, *Young dads: overlooked undercounted but out there*, "myths about young fathers need busting". One of those myths - that young dads are often absent at birth - has been challenged by many different researchers. For instance, The Fatherhood Institute notes that a significant number of the birth certificates of babies born to teenage mothers do not identify the father but the father's name was almost always in the hospital records. (Fatherhood Institute Research Summary: *Young Fathers*, 2013, p.5) With such little information on fathers we need more information to give an accurate picture of their presence. This clearly shows that information gathered at one point of contact can skew results and recommendations.

It has been noted that fathers are not only present but their presence has a positive impact on the whole family, even more so when the mother is a teenager. In fact teenage mums are more likely to be positive about their pregnancies if the father wants the baby (Hellerstedt et al, 2001).

There are so many reasons why a young father's name may not be on the birth certificate. One can be credited to the changes a relationship

undergoes during this period of their lives. Adolescent mothers and young dads find it hard to sustain a relationship throughout the full term of pregnancy. In a small scale study of very young teenage mothers in Nottingham, Gates & Byrom (2008) found that 80% had conceived in an ongoing relationship with their baby's father although almost none were still together within a year of the birth. So where ever possible, engagement from service as early as possible is needed. The lack of quantitative data available around young dads engaging with services suggests that young dads are not engaging with services shortly after birth.

It is clear that the myth of young dads being absent at birth is untrue or at the bare minimum over generalised. So if young dads are present at the birth then why are they not engaging with postnatal services?

Young dads and postnatal services

With much of the statutory support directed towards mothers, a father's needs become ignored or put on the back burner. This aids in the exclusion of young dads and builds barriers between fathers and services.

"Fathers are an important resource in early years child development, which is conducive to bringing about social

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mobility, but are underused and often side-lined when family services are developed. This issue means that parenting support is often designed with mothers in mind, and parental engagement conducted in environments preferable to women." (Baroness Tyler, p. 5, 2015).

During YDC training sessions we have observed that professionals did not understand the multiple barriers young dads face when accessing services and that many fathers often felt embarrassed when asked to approach them. This is supported by Quinton et al (2002) who found young dads were 'mostly ignored, marginalized or made [to feel] uncomfortable by services, despite their desire for information, advice and inclusion."

There appears to be a misconception about the engagement young dads would like to have with professionals, this is echoed throughout almost all support services. A lack of understanding of the needs of young dads allows for fundamental gaps in local services and support information.

However the YDC found that this can be rectified with simple information exchanges. After learning about the barriers young dads faced, 98% of professionals felt more confident about working with young dads and 51% could name changes they would make to include them in their practice (Turner. A, 2015).

A review of US and UK research studies found that "young dads often

have limited or no contact with midwives, health visitors and social workers" (Barnardo's, 2012, p. 7). Individuals and service such as midwives and social workers have a wealth of knowledge and information that can help point fathers in the right direction in getting support for the best possible outcome for their child.

It is fair to say a healthy and well supported mother is a major bonus for the life of a child, however the benefits of introducing young dads to services is often over looked. Quinton et al (2002) found that "young mothers themselves often placed a high value on the involvement of their babies' fathers"

With the level of support varying from borough to borough it appears that support for young dads has become a postcode lottery. Therefore state wide provisions should be created and communicated to local government and young dads within their boundaries. Baroness Tyler (p.3, 2015) suggests that programs should come from government but take into account local community.

The impact of an engaged father is wide reaching and benefits all – the mothers, children, dads and services. It is clear however that society caters more towards mothers. Whilst improvements are being made, most fathers are not engaging and still find it unclear on where to go for help and advice.

2.3 Where are young dads?

Many services that the YDC have consulted with have noted that they do not know where to find and engage with young dads. A recent study suggests that male workers may play an important part when engaging with young dads:

“Fathers and male carers have different needs. So we have different ways to engage them. Like having more male support staff on site, and activities available in the evenings and at weekends. That way it's easier for fathers

and male carers to access the support they need.” (Action for children, 2015)

If services don't have the opportunity to have a male staff member it is crucial that staff understand that young dads support needs to look different to the support offered to mothers. A more adaptable approach which better relates to the needs of dads may help bridge the gap with the amount of service reaching fathers.

The YDC survey found that a key obstacle to accessing services was that many of the young dads did not know where to go for support or even if there was support available to them.



Findings

There have been a wide range of different findings about the views held by young dads accessing service and information within their local community, all of which have been taken from the survey and interviews carried out via the Young Dads Collective. Below are the key patterns found in the research.

Antenatal Services

Since 2014, fathers and partners now have the right to take unpaid time off work to accompany expecting mothers to up to two antenatal appointments. Despite this, our findings suggest that young dads still view antenatal classes as an exclusive service. Whilst all of those interviewed were present at the birth, many either did not attend scans and classes, or attended but did not engage with the service. We noted multiple reasons for this:

Supposed service exclusivity leading to non-attendance

Half of those interviewed believed that most antenatal services were exclusively for the use of their partners. One interviewee who was in attendance during antenatal appointments waited outside during most of the sessions.

“She [the midwife] was talking to her [the mother] directly because I think she

was for the mother isn't it? So, I didn't really take in none of it. I mean most of the time I was mainly outside waiting for her when we went “

All of those interviewed made contact with an antenatal professional either at a scan or at the birth. However, two young dads did not know what a midwife was when asked, which suggests that they were not properly introduced or informed about the supportive role and responsibility of a midwife.

The findings suggest that young dads are still not being invited into or engaged with fully during antenatal scans. In this case a young father was present but ignored by the professional, leading to an increased lack of engagement throughout pregnancy.

Mothers barring Young Father's engagement

Mothers can also reinforce the idea that antenatal services are exclusively for expectant mothers. Our findings showed mothers often acting as a barrier to young dads engaging with antenatal classes. Three out of the eight young dads interviewed said they did not attend classes as the mothers did not want to go. Discussing this, one father noted, “Yeah, we looked at them but she didn't want to go to them.” Combined with the issue that antenatal professionals are not

informing young dads about the full range of services available to them has led to fathers feeling as if they have been left out, "No she didn't want to go to them....seriously, so I've been missing out?"

Lack of Interest from the Father

One of the fathers expressed that they would have liked some interaction with their midwife but also acknowledged that the reasons for not engaging were within themselves, "If they got me involved it would have been nicer, but like I said I wasn't too much into it myself at the time so I just sat there". However, this young father went on to discuss a growing relationship with his midwives, which led him to engage with the service and take useful information away with him.

Midwives and antenatal services should understand that positive relationships may take some time. Many YDC members have noted that visiting antenatal services put them outside of their comfort zone. One young father interviewed explained the journey he took trusting and working with his Midwife:

'Yeah, she was cool actually, she was very cool. But at the beginning we wasn't on the same path because she tried to talk a certain way, but then we had to come to a middle innit and just compromise, so by the end of it she was very supportive. And yeah, she just done what she had to do as a midwife.'

It is clear then, that building a positive relationship between father and

antenatal professional can help fathers to understand the process of pregnancy and provide them with the necessary support.

When it works, it really works

Of the five that did meet their Midwife all expressed positive, warm interactions and felt supported and informed when engaged with, "It was very helpful actually, because we got to see pictures, we got to understand what was going on in her and the doctors are there for support" One young father was extremely passionate about their experience stating, "I love my midwife."

Information and resources in varying forms greatly benefit young dads' experience of antenatal services. One young father in particular noted that he found this very useful:

'Yeah, yeah, very resourceful. Like I said, it kept me aware of what the situation is and what cautions to take, and how to look forward. Yeah. So yeah, very helpful...It was presented on a piece of paper at first and then she done a verbal description, so yeah she did her best to make me understand actually. And plus if you don't know something you can ask. So I done a lot of asking.'

In some cases when the service has worked well young dads had not recognised the usefulness of the service until questioned about it in the interviews, "Well the Midwife we had was quite helpful so yeah I did find them quite useful". This demonstrates how effective communication can

make a young father feel completely at ease during visits.

This example shows that when a young father is fully engaged with antenatal services they find them very useful, however, there is a clear distinction between a young father attending antenatal services and engaging with them. When engaged, those interviewed found antenatal services to be a unanimously positive experience.

Antenatal Recommendations

The research conducted found that young dads often felt excluded from antenatal services but benefited from a good relationship with their midwives. Just as young mothers require tailored support, the needs of young dads should be taken into account by antenatal services.

NHS bodies should ensure that antenatal services have appropriate training and resources to engage and support young dads. Services should use training programmes to aid midwives in their understanding of a young dad's feelings of awkwardness and unfamiliarity. The Royal College of Midwives should build on its guidance, Reaching out: Involving fathers in maternity care, collating and sharing good practice.

Children's centres

The Department of Education states that, "A children's centre should make available universal and targeted early childhood services either by providing the services at the centre itself or by providing advice and assistance to parents (mothers and fathers) and prospective parents in accessing services provided elsewhere." (Department for Education, 2013, p.6) Our findings suggest that this is not being achieved for multiple reasons.

Awareness of children's centres

There is a distinct confusion surrounding children's centres and their functions. Three quarters of young dads interviewed could not tell us what a Children's Centre was. When asked to describe a children's centre it became clear that a further two young dads were in fact talking about youth hubs and nurseries. This suggests that young dads are not aware of this important early years' service.

This has been widely documented in past studies. Writing for the Children's Society, Dr. S. Royston and L. Rodrigues noted that, "Of those who had never used a children's centre...42% said that they had never used one because they had not heard of them" (Royston. S & Rodrigues. L, 2013, p.7).

One interviewee was aware of their existence but was hesitant about explaining the services they provided, "Yeah there is one, which is opposite our house. I'm not sure ... I'm aware

that it is there but I'm not sure, what's the times they do." This suggests that information about the functions and the services Children's Centres are not effectively disseminated through some communities.

Maternal environment

In the 2013 report, *Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters* it was noted that, 'Fathers frequently feel excluded from services that are largely geared towards mothers and children' (Fractured Families, 2013) This is true of Children's centres, which are predominantly run and attended by women.

"Practitioners said that creating welcoming environments for fathers can be a particular problem. The lack of male workers for the fathers to identify with and the perception of children's centres as women only environments often contribute to this." (Royston. S & Rodrigues. L, 2013, p.16)

The one young father who had visited a children's centre expressed feeling out of place and isolated saying:

"You're the only guy there. It's like everyone looks at you funny like-not funny, they don't do it intentionally but all looking at, just they don't know your circumstances so they pre-judge you so I don't like going into it much".

Many members of the YDC have shared similar experiences, often feeling out of place in Children's Centres. One young father mentioned it being very busy with no other male

presence, whilst another indicated he would like to see more men for him to share ideas and insight of how it feels to be a young father.

Recommendations for Children's Centres

The findings demonstrated a great deal of confusion about the functions of children centres. When young dads do access the service they feel unwelcomed due to the lack of male workers present.

To combat these issues, children's centres should seek to employ a male staff member to lead father-facing activities and involve volunteer dads in the centre's work. Children's centres should hold events designed to engage couples or fathers in father-friendly spaces as far as possible to encourage young dads to attend their services.

Libraries

Every young father interviewed regularly visited their local Library. All spoke highly of the service, noting how comfortable and happy they were when visiting with their children or alone, "Yeah we go to the library, that's cool, went to the library two days ago actually", another stated that of all the services the library was 'the best place to go'.

The young dads interviewed noted that they knew what to expect and how to use the Library which made it more likely for them to visit:

'Oh, we know the libraries there. We know these children's place up there. The library is the best place to go anyways, we know see...you know what you're doing there; you know what you're getting there. The [children's centre] place is different. You know we don't go there.'

Education in Libraries

It was clear that those interviewed valued their children's education highly. Young dads spoke enthusiastically about the value of reading schemes, signing their children up and noting that it was enjoyable to read with their children.

"[On] Wednesday my Dad told me that the library do some, I don't know what it's called but they encourage kids to read other books and they like I children two hours of. Especially with the kids so they can come early."

Libraries are effective multipurpose spaces that can be used for family times or for the personal academic development of the young dads themselves. This proved effective for one young father.

'I just came from the library just now from doing revision. They have a little children's part still. They've got things like the little play area that they've got books and colouring books and stuff like that.'

It is clear that the Library is a community space often used by young dads. Perhaps this is because the emphasis society places on the importance of reading throughout life. As children we grow up with libraries in

schools, their value being repeatedly demonstrated. This combined with that fact that it's a free service, which is gender neutral, means that young dads feel at ease and fully understand the benefit of the space.

Despite this young father library engagement strategies do not currently exist in any of the boroughs this research was performed in. Regardless of this, young dads engaged with this service more than any other. The 'Are we nearly there yet Dad report' suggests that more information about services should be disseminated through libraries. Perhaps instead of signposting, these spaces could be used as young dad hubs.

Recommendations for Library Services

Young dads are very present in library services; this provides professionals with a platform through which they can engage with them. Young dads use libraries more than any other community service. Libraries are therefore well-placed to work with children's centres to offer drop in sessions for parents needing advice and support.

Children's centres and other local services should consider hosting support services for young dads in libraries. Libraries should also have regular 'Daddy Days' celebrating fatherhood, including activities aimed specifically at dads 25 and under.

Soft Play Centres

All of the young dads interviewed had been to their local Soft Play Centres, with all speaking positively of the service and its staff. It is one of the services young dads looked forward to using most.

“Feels great when using soft play centres because I know my son's happy doing it so I'm happy that he's doing it...It's all right.”

Many young dads described feeling comfortable and welcomed in the space. The approach soft play centre has on parents interaction means those young dads are free to enjoy time with their children and call upon staff when needed. This has led to all the positive service reviews. One young father spoke positively when discussing staff “They're laid back. They got respect no problem.”

Others commented on the ways in which the staff worked in the service suggesting a hands off approach might make them more likely to engage.

“They basically just leave you to it because you, you're allowed to be in, they got respect no problem”

Another father expressed a feeling of belonging when discussing the service,

“Feels great when using soft play centres because “I know my son's happy doing it so I'm happy that he's doing it...It's all right. They basically just leave

you to it because you, you're allowed to be in.”

Perhaps dads find an environment where they feel free to spend time without being approached by a professional beneficial. In addition to this soft play centres are private companies and have the budget to advertise effectively. One young father could only name his local soft play centre when asked about services:

“In my area personally there's not much, apart from like I said [local soft play centre] or, yeah, it's probably that really.”

“I mean they're plastered everywhere on, in the council, website or just general adverts.”

Unlike any other service the young dads also described the centres as a space to socialise with other parents.

‘And then on Fridays we go [with other] kids, if you ever had a [soft play centre] type of thing, we go there and let him play with one of his mates because my Mrs her mate has a child as well so we just go together and let them do what they want to do. Let them go together and let them do what they want to do. Sometimes say see you on the fly, you know. [Laughing]. Not trying to get involved, you know.’

The relaxed attitude allows dads to enjoy their time with the children and also give the peace of mind knowing they're not being scrutinized. As well

as this, the soft play centre is a venue utilised for many young children's party which shares a community and family friendly atmosphere that many members of the YDC also regularly use.

Recommendations for Soft Play Centres

Our research shows that soft play centres are very popular amongst young dads. These centres could be more effectively utilised as introductory spaces to inform dads of other support services.

Local services should collaborate with soft play centres to make the most of their reach to young dads, for example by using them to signpost young dads to other sources of support or providing drop-in sessions on site. Support services should also seek to learn from the welcoming, relaxed and community atmosphere of these settings to better engage young dads in their own services.

Housing

The structure of the benefits system in the UK means that many vulnerable young dads do not get the support they need. Since 2012 single people under the age of 35 have mainly been restricted to claiming benefits for a single room in a shared house - and there has been no exemption for an estimated 10,000 non-resident parents. (Barnardo's et al, 2015)

Non-resident parents then find themselves in accommodation that

does not fit their needs as a parent. Despite that 'Homelessness legislation in England states that councils should consider anyone to be in priority need if they are responsible for dependent children who normally live with them (or would do were accommodation available)' (Barnardo's et al, 2013)

Young dads are overwhelmingly non-resident parents and as such are not entitled to social housing and many of the benefits that would enable them to be good parents. Despite this most of those interviewed spoke positively about their accommodation, still living at home with their parents or having moved in with the child's mother, or their maternal grandparent's family home.

'At the moment I'm with my missus because I was at my mom but because of the child situations really right now. We're looking to move soon as well. So yeah that's pretty good right now.'

Many noted that this was a good, practical solution that fit their needs as dads. However, this is not reflective of many young dads.

Members of the collective have noted that living in homes where they are not officially residents can lead to an increased risk of homelessness as they have no rights on the accommodation they reside in. One young father found himself homeless multiple times after arguments with his partner had led to him being kicked out of their property.

Primary Parents

In cases where the father is the primary carer the living accommodation has not been appropriate. When asked if his accommodation fit his needs as a father one father noted;

“Well, um, at the moment, he is not sleeping in his cot and he needs a room to himself and all that and I think it would be best if we could get another flat with a two bedroom flat so no not really at the moment...he needs a separate bedroom.”

This experience is reflected by those YDC members who are primary carers. One member noted his frustration that he was still living in a bedsit, sharing one room with his six year old daughter.

Recommendations for Housing Services

Our findings show how difficult and important a young father's accommodation is to supporting him as a dad. Housing for young dads is often unstable which can lead to a breakdown. It is important that vulnerable young dads, whether resident or non-resident, can access stable and appropriate housing which enables them to undertake their parental role. Failing to provide appropriate housing to young dads may exacerbate family breakdown and create obstacles to joint parenting.

Vulnerable young dads should be provided with housing that is suitable for their role as a parent. Housing services should look at the whole

family and take a needs-led approach to supporting young dads when supplying and allocating housing.

Early Years Education and Care

Parents of children aged three and four year olds can register for 15 hours of free childcare, for 38 weeks of the year in England. Our research found that young dads took great interest in their child's early years education, understanding the benefits of a child interacting with other children.

“It's good for your kids because they're going to meet other kids.”

“Yeah I find them very useful because now, my son's set, in school because he's in year one now and he's taking to it nicely. The professionals treat me with a lot of respect.”

Of those that had children between 2 and 3 years old, every parent was aware of and using the 15 hours free access to childcare places and one even mentioned the importance of Ofsted:

“Yeah, I know about child care, with the Ofsted reports, and things like that...I check into that stuff before I even put him into them it's no joke”

It is positive to see dads utilising their 15 hour free childcare entitlement. Alongside young dads' unanimous use of local libraries, this suggests that young dads are taking a major

interest in the quality of education and care their children receives.

Recommendations for Early Years Education and Care

The findings here demonstrate an example of successful practice and engagement between services and young dads, although it cannot be extrapolated if this is true for the population as a whole. Nevertheless, the broad take up of free childcare across the young dads surveyed suggests successful dissemination of information about the availability of childcare support. The success here presents opportunities for how these achievements might be replicated and extended across support services.

We recommend that early years providers and local services such as children's centres, health services and third sector providers should collaborate on engagement strategies to reach and refer dads to targeted services. Local authorities should also consider how they can use the wide reach and high awareness of free early education to engage with young dads.

Secondary/ Higher education

Writing for The Times Educational Supplement Tobias Fish (2015) expressed concern about the level of support available to young dads in school, arguing that "Schools/colleges should do more for young dads as they can sometime feel judged by

professionals." Similarly, he argues that "Often, young fathers want to play a role in their child's life but face barriers to doing so, including the negative attitudes of professionals" (Tobias Fish, 2015).

Fathers who were in education at the time of the pregnancy or child's birth explained that they did not have many friends that could relate to their situation and did not inform any professionals in school/colleges. Whilst not explicit, the following statement also hints at concerns about stigmatism and being judged, corroborating Fish's argument.

"I didn't really want other people opinions to be playing in my head and making me feels some sort of way, so I just kept it all to myself and kept quiet."

Overall, the YDC survey found many of the young dads expressing a lack of knowledge about where to go for support, or if support was even available. This acts as a major obstacle in interaction with services and is also indicative of a lack of communication between schools and young dads. These findings lend support to Fish's assertion that, "Support measures for young fathers at school should be holistic and formulated collaboratively, involving parents and referral agencies" (Tobias Fish, 2015).

Recommendations for secondary and higher education

Our research found that young dads in education are often missed and

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often do not disclose their situation. Furthermore, a number of young dads and education authorities fail to communicate with one another.

To confront these issues, schools and colleges should collaborate with health and care services in order to

identify and reach out to young dads. Schools and colleges should adopt a needs-led approach to supporting young father and adopt a positive, pastoral attitude to nurturing and supporting young dads beyond their academic achievement.



Conclusion

Like everything in life, communication is the key, and it's no different for young dads and services. This report found that many young dads are left out of services, leaving them with an uphill struggle to get help and support when they need it. Services that support young dads do exist, however ground work needs to be done to get the word out that support is there for young dads. There are really good services available, such as midwifery and antenatal classes, but many of them are not fully utilised by young dads due to lack of information and enthusiasm.

It has also shown that when services are utilised, communication can still be a deterrent and there can be a lack of resources and information orientated towards young dads.

At the same time, the report also highlights the positive achievements and accounts of services that are less geared towards mothers and are clear in their offerings, such as libraries and soft play centres. The willingness of young dads to engage with these community services presents an opportunity and platform which professionals can utilise to both facilitate engagement and reach out to young dads. Services should formulate stronger relationships with these community services as they can be employed as introductory spaces for other more supportive services.

The recommendations provide suggestions on how practice can be adapted to better suit the needs of dads, but also give an insight to what an alternative, more father friendly, service can look like. Such as antenatal classes where a young father can go with or without the mother, children's centres with male workers who can support inclusion, and weekend and evening workshops that suit the times available to dads. These are just some of the recommendations that can benefit services and their interaction with young dads.

For the betterment of young dads, all services need to embrace the positive influence a father can make in a child's life, and accordingly, build relationships at the earliest stage possible between dads and statutory services. The findings in this report suggest that there needs to be a greater emphasis on information provision to young dads and a culture shift within support services to better aid the inclusion and involvement of young dads.

Overall, the report shows how dedicated young dads are to their child's upbringing and with improvements, services can be a key factor in shaping and enhancing the future of a young father and his child's life.

Key Recommendations

It is evident that young dads often stop accessing most services very soon after birth. This is why it essential that any changes start there.

Staff training

Maternity services should be aware of the needs of young dads, encouraging them to play an active parenting role, engaging with them appropriately, providing information in a range of forms and recording their details at the earliest time possible.

Father Focused Services

Antenatal class should be offered directly to dads who would like to engage, regardless of their partner's level of interest. Other services should also seek to ensure that their services are geared towards both parents and adopt tailored approaches for dads.

Partnership work

Children's Centres should make arrangements to build relationships with young dads through the services that they use most frequently such as libraries, soft play centres and free childcare. Father-facing services should seek to diversify their workforce and adopt father-friendly practices such as utilising more neutral spaces for events designed to engage couples or fathers.

Information Campaign

The Royal College of Midwives and local government should build on good work in reaching out to dads by updating guidance and developing information materials, promoting an effective and nationally consistent approach to reaching out to young dads.

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About the Author

Ruben Vemba, 25, is a father to his three year old son and has experienced first-hand the barriers that young men face when becoming fathers. Ruben became a YDC member and advocate for young dads after finding himself with minimal support and having to learn the skills and coping mechanisms necessary to be a great father on his own. Ruben is keen to represent the interests of his peers through this project and give a voice to those young dads who remain invisible.

Report Editors

Oliver Diss

Adam Butler

Young Dads Collective Team

The research project was designed and carried out by Aaron Lewis, Anthony George, Lemar Johnson, Ruben Vemba and Hannah Turner-Uaandja.