



FYFF  UK Research and Innovation


UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

Following Young Fathers Further



UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

School of Social & Political Sciences

Webinar Report

October 2020

Establishing the Young Dads Collective in Grimsby: Support for young fathers, “By Grimsby, For Grimsby”

Overview of the Webinar:

The webinar was held on Tuesday 20th October 2020, with ten representatives from local support services, the statutory and voluntary sectors and local government in Grimsby and the North East Lincolnshire region.

Aim:

The objectives of the webinar were three-fold;

1. To introduce the project, the Young Dads Collective model and its main aims and goals in order to raise awareness of the work for local professionals,
2. To establish the project as a community led and supported initiative in line with the ethos of co-production that underpins the work,
3. To gain feedback and insights from local professionals about how the YDC might support them in their work and enhance the existing local offer, not just for young dads, but for families and young people more generally.

To meet these varied objectives, the webinar comprised key presentations from relevant team members, as well as two interactive breakout rooms that were structured around key questions to facilitate reflection, discussion and feedback. In line with the approach upon which the Young Dads Collective model is premised, we were also honoured to be joined by a previous YDC member, Ruben Vemba, who shared his experiences of being involved with the YDC and responded to questions from the participants.

[Copies of the presentations are available on the FYFF website.](#)

Introduction

The UKRI funded [Following Young Fathers Further](#) research study (2020-24) is a major qualitative longitudinal research study that is exploring the parenting journeys and support of young fathers aged 25 and under. A major strand of this work is the establishment and evaluation of the Young Dads Collective in Grimsby, North East Lincolnshire. The Young Dads Collective, which was established by London based charity Coram Family and Childcare, is a model of support for young fathers that empowers them as experts by experience and both supports them and trains them in advocacy work on behalf of other young fathers to engage in practitioner training and consultation.

Building on expertise acquired during previous research where the model was implemented in Leeds (Tarrant and Neale, 2017) and as a direct response to community identified needs in Grimsby, this work assumes a dynamic view of policymaking and support practices for young fathers. It does so to explore how effective research and practice innovations can be driven and shaped through methods of co-production and created and sustained through the longitudinal frame of social research (Neale, 2018). Methods of action research and real-time evaluation are being employed with key project partners to document and evaluate the process as it unfolds. A key aim of this process is to explore how effective practices of support offered by the Young Dads Collective (YDC) can be adapted to Grimsby in both a flexible and sustainable manner. This is being achieved by:

- working directly with practice partners from the third sector and local government in Grimsby, as well as national partners who established the model,
- directly acknowledging and responding to the expertise of young fathers and frontline practitioners, and
- tracking developments in innovative forms of good practice that respond directly to key policy challenges both in the locality and nationally.



Insights from local organisations

Following brief presentations by the project team, the webinar participants were asked a series of questions during breakout sessions to understand their views. Responses to the questions posed are summarised below:

What does Grimsby already do well to support fathers/young parents?

The overall impression received by the professionals was that they were aware of the value of involving young fathers, but also that there are challenges in doing so (see below). It was evident during the discussions that those who attended had chosen to be there because they were committed to changing things and recognise that services can do things differently. The opportunity to reflect on what already works well in Grimsby however, prompted several responses:

- The provision of weekend events for families had been received well in the locality suggesting that offers for families are welcomed.
- Local housing service Doorstop already offer a wrap-around package for mums and dads and are committed to looking at ways that they can support both parents.
- During the pandemic, there has been an increase in referrals by men seeking support for mental health issues through new specialised support groups. In response, a men's group has been set up with men who have lived experiences of mental health issues.

Are there any barriers? What are they?

When asking webinar attendees about potential barriers, a range of local, structural and cultural issues were identified:

Recognition of a support gap for young fathers in the locality:

- The attendees acknowledged that more could be done specifically to support young dads, suggesting that the YDC initiative was welcome,

- Several of the attendees acknowledged that local young fathers lack confidence because they feel judged and do not feel engaged as parents. This is a key barrier for seeking support from services. One attendee noted that many fathers lack a voice because they are often not invited to be involved in the care of their child.

Challenges specific to Grimsby:

- It was noted that local young fathers are not taking up services. Issues of learnt behavior (concerning what being a dad means) and pride amongst men raised as a barrier.
- It was suggested that there is a need to identify male figure heads to act as role models who can provide guidance to the community. It was suggested that this may help to support young dads to address the pride and fear they may feel when pushing a pram and to help them to engage in services that are run predominantly by women,
- Both physical and social barriers were identified. Grimsby comprises different, divided communities which are territorial and physically distinct. A key challenge that the YDC might work to address is how services in key localities might work more closely together. We were encouraged that representatives from East and West Marsh had decided to meet after the webinar to discuss productive ways forward.

Changing the culture of existing services:

- A key issue that was raised was that many dads had not been supported early enough and had missed information early on (i.e. by ante-natal and maternity services), making it harder for them to engage later. Existing research suggests that engaging fathers as early as possible in their parenting journeys is desirable (Cundy, 2016). However, there is also value in engaging with them later in their parenting journeys too and over an extended period where possible,
- There was general agreement that existing service offers remain 'mother-centric' despite the sense that dads want to be included in support,
- A specific professional culture of, 'We don't do this well enough but it's always been like this' was identified as impacting on opportunities for change prior to the pandemic although the pandemic was noted as an opportunity and catalyst for affecting positive change,

Fears about the impacts of Covid-19 on the support landscape:

- West March community centre which was engaging with over 500 residents is no longer able to do so to the same extent because of Covid-19.

What are the key priorities in Grimsby currently with regards to support for families?

- The need to move services online and provide a digital offer because of Covid-19 was recognised as a high priority, including the need for more evidence by services to gain an understanding about what dads want and need,
- A survey that has already been done locally with mums during covid-19 indicated that people prefer to be given information directly rather than having to seek it out and find it. There is an incentive here for services to be proactive in their offers and outreach to families.

Project team reflections on the value of the webinar

Overall, the webinar met its key objectives. Via an introduction to the YDC and plans for its implementation in Grimsby, important early questions and reflections were prompted for local organisations who demonstrated a strong level of support. The collaborations and conversations that the webinar facilitated invigorated expectations among the project team about the real potential of the YDC model to have a positive impact on the wider family support offer in Grimsby.

Indeed, the YDC is expected to encourage another layer of motivation for the community to affect change, via the adoption of genuine, community led, evidence-based practice approaches that both prioritise the voices and experiences of young fathers and are father-inclusive.

Feedback from organisations following the event

Overall, feedback from participants about the webinar and about the establishment of the YDC in Grimsby was positive and there was enthusiasm regarding their potential involvement in work to improve the local support offer for young dads.

Feedback suggested that the webinar was informative, had made practitioners reflect on the needs of young dads, and had served as a useful networking opportunity.



Key project partners

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References:

- Cundy, J. (2016) Supporting Young Dads' Journeys through Fatherhood, *Social Policy and Society*, 15 (1): 141-153.
- Tarrant, A. and Neale, B. (2017) *Supporting Young Fathers in Welfare Settings: An Evidence Review of What Matters and What Helps*, Responding to Young Fathers in a Different Way: Evidence Review.