



INCREASING EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT

# Creating inclusive early years support for every dad in Blackpool

The Fathers' Inclusive Practice Group has been created in response to male carers across the town feeling that services and support were focused solely on mothers and babies. The group is a collaboration of local authority, voluntary/community and statutory organisations which aims to:

- Find out, and act upon, the opinions and feelings of fatherhood
- Work with fathers on how accessible services are to them
- Co-produce and design new services with fathers
- Remove male marginalisation and biases within behaviours and practices
- Create good practice standards for inclusive practice in early years services
- Support and advocate for wider inclusive practice through Blackpool.

*At best, they were their partner's supporter and, at worst, they were excluded or ignored: the unique relationship they had with their baby was not acknowledged.*

Machin, 2015

## Understanding the Challenge

Early paternal involvement has a lasting and positive influence on children's behaviour and wellbeing, and positive interactions from infancy supports children's emotional, social and cognitive development.

A Fatherhood Institute report highlighted extensive exclusion dads experience in services throughout the perinatal period; not being treated as individuals, with their own concerns, experiences, and clear role in their child's development.

A 2020 mapping exercise of early years' services in Blackpool identified limited participation by dads; and workers acknowledged that when dad may be present, only one caregiver, usually mum, was recorded as participating. Conversations with dads also highlighted that they felt many programmes were targeted at mums only and did not feel they could attend or participate.



## What we did

The Fathers Inclusive Practice group has developed a holistic strategic approach to education and engagement with the workforce. The group holds the ambition that Blackpool can demonstrate the very best practices in supporting fathers to be incredible parents and as a town lead the way in inclusion for fathers.

## Education

Enhancing practice through the early years workforce has been a key focus of the group. Since launch they have provided training to **20 different services**, with over **500 attendees** across the offer reaching **300 individuals**.


The training offer includes introductory training and awareness raising- developed with Blackpool dads and a Blackpool Social Action group- which is intended to be offered across Blackpool to all existing staff and new starter inductions. The training covers the importance of male carers, bringing national and local insight together to understand the barriers and challenges for fathers within early years services.









Following this introductory training the innovative **'Engaging Dads'** workshop which has been co-designed, produced and is delivered with Blackpool dads, focusing on the perinatal period is offered. The workshop presents the lived experience of Blackpool dads, their wider values, extended challenges and the capacity/ capability of services to directly engage with them. The workshop is intended to enable services to reflect on experiences of fathers and implement changes which will make a difference.

Working with the Institute of Health Visiting, **'iHV Fathers and Perinatal Mental Health'** has been developed which raises awareness of the barriers faced by dads in the perinatal period and the impact of paternal mental health on babies' development.



**Meet the Dad's Champions**  
The Dad's Champions are made up of people from different services committed to helping Blackpool Dads.



 <b>Craig Adams</b> Business IT Co-ordinator Role: Help mental health is very important in our life. Participants are helped to understand how to stay committed, overcome barriers and network with others. Strengths: [ ] Email: [ ]	 <b>Kirsten Beattie</b> Family Support Role: Kirsten is committed to dads being heard, getting support and community including dads in the hearing experience and supporting them to feel acknowledged in her hearing. Strengths: [ ] Email: [ ]	 <b>Claire Fletcher</b> Health Visitor Role: Claire is committed to dads being heard, getting support and having the same opportunities as mums, so children get the best care for them. Strengths: [ ] Email: [ ]	 <b>Flora Gutteridge</b> Health Visitor Role: Flora supports families, especially up until your child goes to school. She is always looking at how to improve involvement of fathers. Strengths: [ ] Email: [ ]
 <b>Mark Greenough</b> Business IT Co-ordinator Role: Mark is a Coordinator for the Blackpool, Fylde and... Strengths: [ ] Email: [ ]	 <b>Dean Englewood</b> Health Visitor Role: Dean works with... Strengths: [ ] Email: [ ]	 <b>Bik Lee</b> Health Visitor Role: Bik is a Dad Helpline... Strengths: [ ] Email: [ ]	 <b>Sharon McCarty</b> Health Visitor Role: Sharon is a... Strengths: [ ] Email: [ ]

## Engagement

**Dads' Champions** have been identified within services who are able to act as advocates for best practice. These champions have worked alongside Blackpool dads on the development of an inclusion toolkit which allows services to self-assess their practices identify strengths, weaknesses and gaps, and focus on supporting improved practice.

The content of the **Inclusion Toolkit** has been informed by dads' experiences of what inclusion means to them and services can reflect on what they are able to do to lead to positive change. The toolkit offers three levels of inclusion- thinking, doing and advocating. With a strengths based approach which celebrates what a service can do, not what they can't, and providing a standard and practical tip of how to adapt and be inclusive.

## Outcomes

### Multi-Agency Support

Collaborating with the workforce across various services and support systems for families during pregnancy and early years has led to noticeable improvements. Through advocacy and the implementation of best practices, the Fathers Inclusive Practice Group has successfully increased the proportion of fathers participating in these services as part of the overall parent presence.

### Increased Participation

Services funded by Better Start have seen a significant rise in the proportion of fathers participating, increasing from 5% to 19% of recorded parents engaging with these services.

In actual people terms this is an increase of nearly 1,000 dads per year.

### Meeting Dads in the Community

Community Connectors, peer-to-peer supporters, have tailored their service offerings to include a presence on maternity wards and the Women and Children's outpatient reception on a weekly basis. They actively engage with both parents, focusing on connecting with dads at the earliest opportunity. Their efforts aim to encourage fathers to participate in services and support while providing essential information about the critical role dads play in their babies' early development.