

Policy Briefing 2

MODELS OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR WORK WITH YOUNG FATHERS

Co-creating knowledge about inclusive and intersectional
approaches in the 'Diverse Dads' project

2021

ABOUT

Following [Young Fathers Further](#) (2020–2027) is a seven-year qualitative longitudinal research study, funded via the prestigious UK Research & Innovation Future Leaders Fellowship scheme (grant number: MR/S031723/1). A major aim of the research is to generate an extended evidence base about the lived experiences and support needs of young men who become fathers or experience a pregnancy aged 25 and under. In productive partnership with young fathers and the professionals who support them, the study is also implementing innovative methodologies to produce both practice-informed research and research-based practice (Neale, 2021) through the generation of in-depth, longitudinal, and international evidence about young fatherhood. Facilitated by co-creation methodology, a form of participatory action research, that directly involves young fathers and national multi-agency support services in creating and promoting new service approaches, the study is also driving social transformation through the implementation of a support and policy environment in the UK that is both compassionate and participatory.



A collaboration between

KEY FINDINGS

- There is a commonly held assumption among support professionals that young fathers, especially those from minoritised communities, are either few in number or are 'hard-to-reach' (See Policy Briefing 1). However, the reason for their limited engagement with services is often assumed rather than understood.
- The voices and experiences of young minoritised fathers are under-represented both in practice settings and research.
- Many young fathers are experiencing a complex set of challenges and have diverse needs that may be a barrier to their participation in the lives of their children and with services. Young minoritised fathers experience additional challenges linked to racial discrimination and inequality.
- Practitioners can support young minoritised fathers through a bespoke offer premised on authentic engagement and a strengths-based approach that involves active listening, alliance building with other local services and signposting.
- Fatherhood is a shared experience that can bring men together around a shared identity while also respecting difference and diversity. The creation of inclusive shared spaces for fathers, rather than additional spaces, is essential.

VIEWS ABOUT THE PROJECT BY A PEER RESEARCHER

"I am a young dad of 3 and also a researcher for the Diverse Dads project. I feel like this a really important issue to research because there is such a gap in support services for young dads from ethnic minority communities. I did a lot of work to find data about the demographic profile of the North East. This helped us to understand that the North East is a more diverse region than we thought"

Will, now father of 4, NEYDL

THE 'DIVERSE DADS' PROJECT

'Diverse Dads' was funded by the Research England/ University of Lincoln QR fund and the North East Young Dads and Lads between November 2020 and May 2021. This peer research project supported young men and fathers to co-create knowledge with researchers and professionals about gaps in regional support and outreach for young fathers from minoritised communities in the North East (Way et al. 2022). Linked to the Following Young Fathers Further (FYFF) research study, Diverse Dads addressed a gap in knowledge about diversity in young fatherhood (Tarrant and Neale, 2017) and highlighted the need for a focus on fatherhood and service approaches that are premised on intersectionality and inclusivity to improve service outreach and support.

Young men and fathers from the North East Young Dads and Lads (NEYDL), conducted a survey and qualitative interviews with young fathers and professionals in the North East region to a) understand the demographic profile of the region and understand the existing service support offer for families and minoritised communities, and b) to gain insights about the parenting experiences and support needs of minoritised young fathers. A key aim was to address their marginalisation from mainstream family and specialist support services through the generation of knowledge about the lived experiences of young fathers and of professionals. The use of the peer research method aligned with the participatory and father-inclusive principles of the FYFF study and involved a creative collaboration with young men and fathers who conducted the research with their community and peers, with guidance and support of the FYFF research team and professionals from regional and national support organisations.

The project comprised four key activities that supported the co-creation of knowledge about diversity in young fatherhood:

- The production of a demographic profile of minority ethnic communities in the Tyne and Wear region, including the prevalence of young parenthood to understand local demographics.
- Establishing new alliances with services who work with minority ethnic communities and young parents to enable outreach, updated training, and the embedding of inclusive forms of support.
- Generating evidence about how and why services should engage with a wider constituency of young fathers, especially those from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- Co-disseminating evidence to professionals and policymakers at a 'sharing and learning webinar' and through films created by the North East Young Dads and Lads' new digital offer called DigiDAD.



KEY FINDINGS

There is a common assumption among support professionals that young fathers, and especially those from minoritised communities, are either few in number or are 'hard-to-reach' (Neale and Davies, 2015). However, the reason for their lack of engagement with services is often assumed rather than understood. The young men who conducted this research spoke to professionals who support minoritised communities and fathers, as well as young men from minoritised communities to learn more about their experiences. The peer researchers found the following:

'Not seen, so not heard': challenging the myth that localities lack diversity: Localities are often described as lacking in diversity despite limited awareness by professionals and services about local and regional population characteristics. Committing time to understanding local demographics, mapping local and regional resources and building new partnerships with community leaders and across services are important steps in identifying minoritised young fathers and making services more accessible to them via outreach.

Why it is essential to ask about dad: Mums and female family members are rarely asked about dads unless to determine if they pose a potential risk. Asking about dads and whether they have any support needs is an underutilised approach that professionals can use to improve outreach and embed the idea that fathers have a positive role to play for children and family life if properly supported.

Fatherhood as a common identity: Where fatherhood is a shared experience it can bring men together around a common identity, while also respecting difference and diversity. The need for more inclusive, rather than new, spaces of support for dads from all backgrounds is therefore essential.

Demystifying diversity: Central to the effective provision of individualised support is the naming and demystifying of issues around diversity. Training in cultural competency and father-inclusive practice is essential to professional development yet it is often overlooked. Building productive partnerships with local services and organisations and improving communication between voluntary and statutory services, will better enable the identification of families who require support and lead to improved outreach and signposting.

Authentic engagement: Effective and authentic support should be driven by the understanding that fathers can make a positive contribution to their children's lives regardless of background, socio-economic status or relationship status. Professionals who build trust with young fathers can play a key role in developing both parenting and personal well-being strategies with them. This will help young fathers to build and nurture confidence and competency by investing in developing their skills, identities and responsibilities as fathers.

This also involves adopting a strengths-based approach. Listening actively to fathers and approaching them with care and compassion rather than suspicion, enables professionals to better understand them and their circumstances and to provide individual support that balances their needs alongside the management of behaviours that may present a risk, either to the fathers themselves, or to others (see Policy Briefing One for evidence informed ideas about what works).

Some young fathers may be so unaccustomed to asking for, or receiving support, that as a first step to accessing mainstream services they may initially need a more tailored approach or signposting to culturally relevant specific services. This should always be approached with the long-term aim of their inclusion in mainstream services.

Engaging fathers as peer researchers: While not a straightforward or uncomplicated process, peer research can be an effective way for fathers to gain confidence and competency in their professional lives and develop skills that enable them to advocate on behalf of themselves and others as fathers. Where services have the remit, resources and partnerships with researchers to support fathers in this way, both fathers and services can benefit from context and culturally sensitive insights and knowledge that contributes to, and embeds, a more father-inclusive support environment with wider benefits to individuals, families, services and society.

“ We’d make sure that we were responsive and sensitive to different cultural needs and work in a way that was bespoke to meet that need.

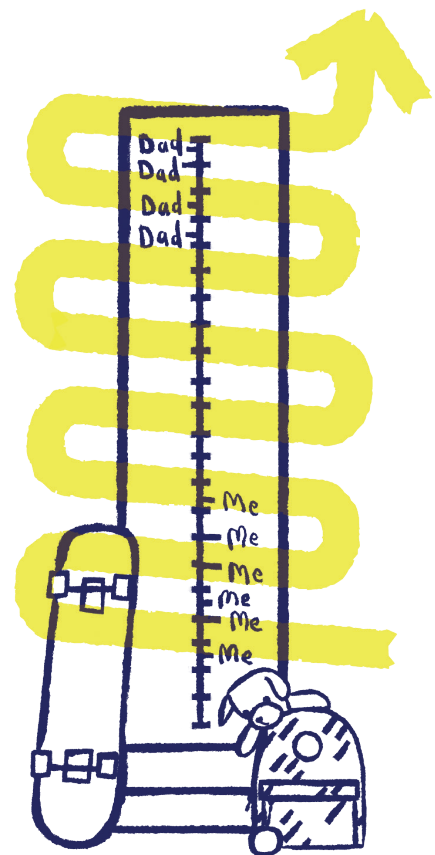
Young Dads Worker (North East)

“ It’s important to fish in different ponds, rivers or streams.

Youth Support Service Worker for minoritised communities (North East)

POLICY AND PRACTICE RELEVANCE

1. Minoritised young fathers are the least visible to support services and organisations and subject to the stigma of assumptions that communities are ‘hard-to reach’ (Neale and Davies, 2015). Yet, wider social concerns and inequalities including institutional racism, health disparities in maternal outcomes, and poorer access to education and employment among minoritised communities may only be properly addressed when fathers are also included and supported in the local offer.
2. Detailed and up-to-date knowledge of local demographics including minority ethnic populations are essential knowledge for improving outreach and support, challenging the idea that localities may be lacking in diversity and/or for underpinning a more strategic, evidence-based approach to outreach.
3. Peer research with young fathers has the capacity to produce robust, practice relevant knowledge while also expanding the skill set and confidence of young men who are fathers.
4. Training for professionals in cultural competency and father-inclusive practice are essential to professional development yet are often overlooked. Based on principles of inclusivity, both may be effectively implemented as part of a strategy of authentic engagement with fathers, including those from minoritised communities.



POLICY BRIEFINGS IN THIS SERIES

→ Policy briefing 1: Key principles of father-inclusive practice

→ Policy briefing 3: Models of good practice in work with young fathers: the Grimsby Dads Collective case study

REFERENCES

Neale, B. and Davies, L. (2015) Hard to Reach? Rethinking Support for Young Fathers, Briefing Paper No. 6, <https://followingfathers.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/79/2015/10/Briefing-Paper-6-V7.pdf>

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.

Way, L., Tarrant, A., Ladlow, L., York, J., Gorzelanczyk, A., Brown, D. and Patterson, W. (2022) Co-creating with young fathers: producing community informed training videos to foster more inclusive support environments, Sociological Research Online.

DIVERSE DADS PROJECT REPORTS

The Diverse Dads Collaborative (2021)

[Diverse Dads – Researching inclusive support for \(young\) fathers, A community-led study](https://fyff.co.uk/files/a1cc7f6026608e57385f20c4cf159e74c4f5a840.pdf)

<https://fyff.co.uk/files/a1cc7f6026608e57385f20c4cf159e74c4f5a840.pdf>

Full Project Report

The Diverse Dads Collaborative (2021)

[Diverse Dads – Researching inclusive support for \(young\) fathers – Recommendations for Services](https://fyff.co.uk/files/1e8d9e0bf92d1a5206d2b32b1693117e1dfa6d17.pdf)

<https://fyff.co.uk/files/1e8d9e0bf92d1a5206d2b32b1693117e1dfa6d17.pdf>

4 page summary



STUDY DIRECTOR:

Professor Anna Tarrant
atarrant@lincoln.ac.uk

RESEARCH FELLOWS:

Dr Linzi Ladlow
lladlow@lincoln.ac.uk

Dr Laura Way
lway@lincoln.ac.uk



@FollowingYFF

<https://followingyoungfathersfurther.org/>