



Establishing the Grimsby Dads Collective

Interim report (2020/2021)

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Overview

This report presents findings that capture the first two years of the establishment of the Grimsby Dads Collective (GDC, 2020 and 2021) and its implementation process. The GDC is a new social intervention for Grimsby, a coastal town in the East of England (see Image 1), that aims to promote father-inclusive and gender transformative support approaches, that are developed and promoted, by and for, young fathers. Existing research suggests that young fathers are more likely to be challenged in fulfilling their intentions to be engaged in the lives of their children. They are also more likely to be subject to suspicion and/or surveillance in professional support contexts (Neale and Davies, 2015) and subject to stigma at policy level.

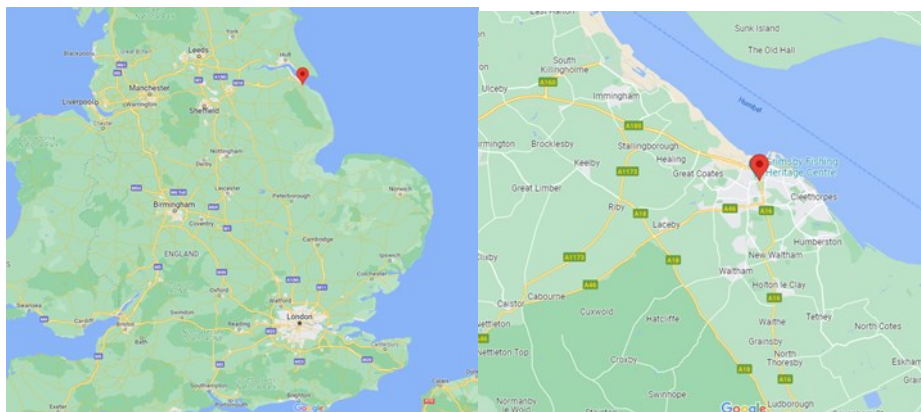


Image 1. Project location, indicated in red

The implementation of the Grimsby Dads Collective, and linked research to capture and evaluate the process, has been funded via the UK Research & Innovation Future Leaders Fellowship scheme (Tarrant, 2020-24; project number: MR/S031723/1) and is being facilitated as part of larger programme of qualitative longitudinal research study called [Following Young Fathers Further](#) (FYFF). Since January 2020, a partnership involving young fathers in Grimsby, national childcare charity [Coram Family and Childcare](#), and Grimsby based charities [Together for Childhood \(NSPCC\)](#) and [YMCA Humber](#) (together referred to as the GDC consortium team), has been established to cocreate the intervention. This means placing community voice and lived experience at the heart of research processes, enabling dialogue between a range of actors who work collaboratively to produce solutions that address social disadvantage. A collective aim of the work is to build on the existing strengths of the support offer for families and fathers in Grimsby, by ensuring that services are accessible and inclusive for all.



What is the GDC? How does it work?

- The GDC is a new iteration of an evidence-based model called the [Young Dads Collective](#), or YDC (originally designed and developed by London-based charity Coram Family and Childcare),
- Following the successful establishment of a YDC North in Leeds (see Tarrant and Neale, 2017), Grimsby represents a new location and practice/policy context for implementing a new iteration of the model,
- Young fathers receive training and mentoring so that they can share their knowledge and experiences of their parenting journeys and support needs with multi-agency practitioners, service providers and policy makers. They can also achieve a level 2 qualification for the induction and training they complete when they become a member of the GDC.

Project Vision

1. The aim of the Grimsby Dads Collective is to improve the lives of young fathers and promote the importance of father involvement, by embedding father-inclusive practice in Grimsby,
2. As 'experts by experience' local young fathers work with professionals to transform how mainstream and specialist services engage with fathers and overcome the barriers that may shut them out,
3. Real systems change is brought out about when young fathers share their knowledge and experience with practitioners, service providers and policy makers.



Establishing the GDC (2020/2021)

The first two-year phase of the process has focused on establishing the new model in Grimsby. This has involved identifying young fathers on a voluntary basis, supporting them with training and the delivery of father-inclusive education for professionals, and refining a vision and an offer. In the remaining two-years of the funding period, the model will shift from a voluntary model to a paid model, although both models will run concurrently.

Key milestones in this two-year phase include:

January 2020: Funding for FYFF commences and planning for the collaborative process for establishing the GDC begins.

May 2020: Engagement begins with services/practitioners in Grimsby to promote the project and support the recruitment of young dads as volunteers.

August 2020: A Young Dad's Worker is recruited to identify and support the volunteers (based at the YMCA Humber).

October 2020: The consortium team deliver a webinar introducing the GDC to local professionals and practitioner.

December 2020 – July 2021: GDC recruits dads into the model.

November 2021: Delivery of the first 'Ask a Dad' workshop (online).

Method for researching the process

A qualitative longitudinal methodology is being employed to capture the implementation process and to evaluate the extent to which the GDC is achieving its vision and aims. The research involves the capture of how the intervention is being established and sustained, based on the views of young fathers and the key practitioners involved. Feedback is also being captured by those who engage with the intervention in the locality to assess the extent to which the GDC is affecting systems change in Grimsby. The FYFF research team are also exploring the role of creative, participatory methods with the GDC dads and have so far facilitated one 'zine making workshop with two of the volunteers which sought to capture the views of young fathers about parenting.



The value of the GDC for fathers

A total of seven fathers living in Grimsby have demonstrated an interest in participating since the project commenced. Of those seven, three continue to be involved at the time of writing (January 2022).

The dads learned about the GDC via referrals from professionals or via adverts on social media. Professionals and practitioners have acted as important gatekeepers for the project, both sharing information about it and identifying possible volunteers. 'Being heard' was the key motivator for becoming involved in the project for the young men. Some felt they had never had the opportunity to tell their story about being a young father. They were motivated by the opportunity to engage in advocacy, to support other dads, and to learn from other dads' experiences:

"I want more understanding of everyone else's experience and what they've gone through. And I just want for there to be more support for dads, like to be, feel more involved instead of just...just being the bit on the side"

Another dad said that the prospect of being paid for his involvement was a key motivation. In the first two years, a voluntary version of the model has been tested. In the second two years, this will shift to a paid model. The effectiveness of both models will be compared.

The young fathers valued working with an associate trainer with previous **experience of being a young dad**. The associate trainer, who acts on a consultancy basis for Coram Family and Childcare, worked with the dads to develop their stories and helped prepare them to communicate these effectively to professionals and practitioners.

Overall, the dads recognised the value of the GDC and the **support** it provides and all said that **they enjoy being involved**. For those who did not remain involved with the project, employment and job centre pressures meant that the **need to take up full-time employment** was identified as the main reason for disengaging from the model.



The first 'Ask a Dad' workshop

One of the major activities associated with the delivery of the model are the 'Ask a Dad' workshops. These workshops are a unique 'dad engagement MOT' for professionals, that are designed and delivered by the dads involved in the collective. They are delivered to anyone who designs, commissions or delivers services or that work with families and/or young dads directly. The dads share their personal experiences or 'stories' in order to encourage attendees to reflect on the ways in which they engage with young dads in their everyday practices

- Coram Family and Childcare.

The first 'Ask a Dad' workshop took place on Thursday 11th November 2021 online using Zoom. Nine attendees signed up to workshop and represented a diverse set of agencies and organisations in Grimsby. This included a support charity for mental health, Humberside Police, nursery management, midwifery, CCG (safeguarding), Maternity Partnership Voices, social services, and education. Two of the young fathers presented at the workshop on the day.

Engagement on the day was positive and evidence about the learning for professionals was captured via a post-attendance feedback form. These findings suggested that the professionals intended to make changes to their practice, as informed by the insights provided by the young fathers:

- "Really informative and inspiring for the work with dads in the area"
- "Loved the passion of the professionals and dads involved, feeling inspired!"
- "Really thought provoking"
- "Session has generated lots of interesting discussions and feedback from dads that I can use"
- "Useful to hear from dads about their experiences and views"



Insights from the GDC Consortium Team

Cocreating a new social intervention and establishing a new support service for young fathers are challenging tasks, requiring flexibility, problem solving, and due attention and responsiveness to those in the locality and relevant stakeholders. Interviews with the GDC Consortium team members have highlighted various challenges and points of learning in the implementation process so far:

- The importance of refining and returning to the aims of the project and its vision on a regular basis,
- The need for detailed knowledge capture, in a context of high turnover of staff and project members. This ensures that staff transitions do not undermine the success of the process and its implementation,
- Establishing buy-in from multiple organisations and local agencies from the outset is a time-consuming process, especially in the context of the pandemic. Effective communication about the model and its vision is essential to community buy-in,
- Relatedly, in the early days of the implementation, lack of clarity locally about what the Grimsby Dads Collective does, persisted. Clearer messages about what the project was about were developed to ameliorate this. The delivery of the 'Ask a Dad' workshops is also an opportunity to promote clearer understandings both through experience and word of mouth,
- The first two years of the project have benefitted from retaining the expertise of the London-based consultancy team who delivered the original Young Dads Collective model. Following the delivery of the first 'Ask a Dad' workshop in Phase One, there is scope to identify a local trainer in Grimsby who can bring their localised expertise to the project,
- With an established, core group of young fathers, one will become a representative of the consortium group so that they can inform decision-making. This provides further opportunity for skills development,
- With this core group established this also means it will now be possible to look at other opportunities for cocreation e.g. dads being involved in the design/development of the Train the Trainer sessions and Ask a Dad workshops,
- A local need for parenting courses and 'hands on' support for dads has been identified as local organisations and professionals have reached out to the Young Dads Worker for support,
- Questions have been raised by local professionals about the sustainability and longevity of the model. These issues are explored by the consortium team and should continue to be embedded in discussions in the remaining two years.



Recommendations

Building on the foundational two years, we recommend a consolidation of the offer and a strategic expansion of the promotion of the model to enhance its reach in the locality and to embed it further within the existing practice and policy landscape for the purposes of ensuring sustainability and affecting change. Core activities should include:

- Investment in additional training for the young fathers and the Young Dads Worker to build confidence in promoting the model,
- Investment in building up relationships with and between young fathers who demonstrate an interest in the model and sustaining their involvement in the project either on a voluntary or a paid basis. In a post-pandemic context, opportunities for bringing the young men together around shared activities and the cocreation of training are more possible and should facilitate new relationships of trust and support,
- Employing and training a ‘Lead Trainer’ who is based in Grimsby, who can take the vision of the model forwards alongside the Young Dads Worker, and engage in outreach and training young fathers who wish to participate in the work,
- Identifying and securing opportunities for young fathers to promote their stories to key agencies and organisations and increasing their engagements with the local workforce for the purposes of promoting father-inclusive practice in the locality,
- We recommend that a steering group is established comprising key decision makers in key agencies, organisations and local government to develop a strategic plan for promoting the work, embedding its ethos in local decision-making and exploring project sustainability,
- Ongoing research with young fathers and the consortium team will enable reflection on the value of the voluntary and paid models to establish which are most effective for supporting and engaging young fathers. Continued capture of responses to the GDC in the locality by professionals will also establish a sustained picture of the extent to which it is delivering on the vision.



Key Resources

Websites

Following Young Fathers Further

Coram Family and Childcare | Young Dads Collective | Family and Childcare Trust

YMCA Humber: | Grimsby Dads Collective

Together for Childhood | NSPCC

Project Reports and Recordings

Can be found here:

<https://followingyoungfathersfurther.org/asset/grimsby-dads-collective/>

References

- Neale, B. and Davies, L. (2015) Hard to Reach? Re-thinking 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) (Eds.) Learning to Support Young Dads, Responding to Young Fathers in a Different Way: Project Report, <https://followingfathers.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/79/2017/04/SYD-final-report.pdf>