

Young fathers and father- inclusion

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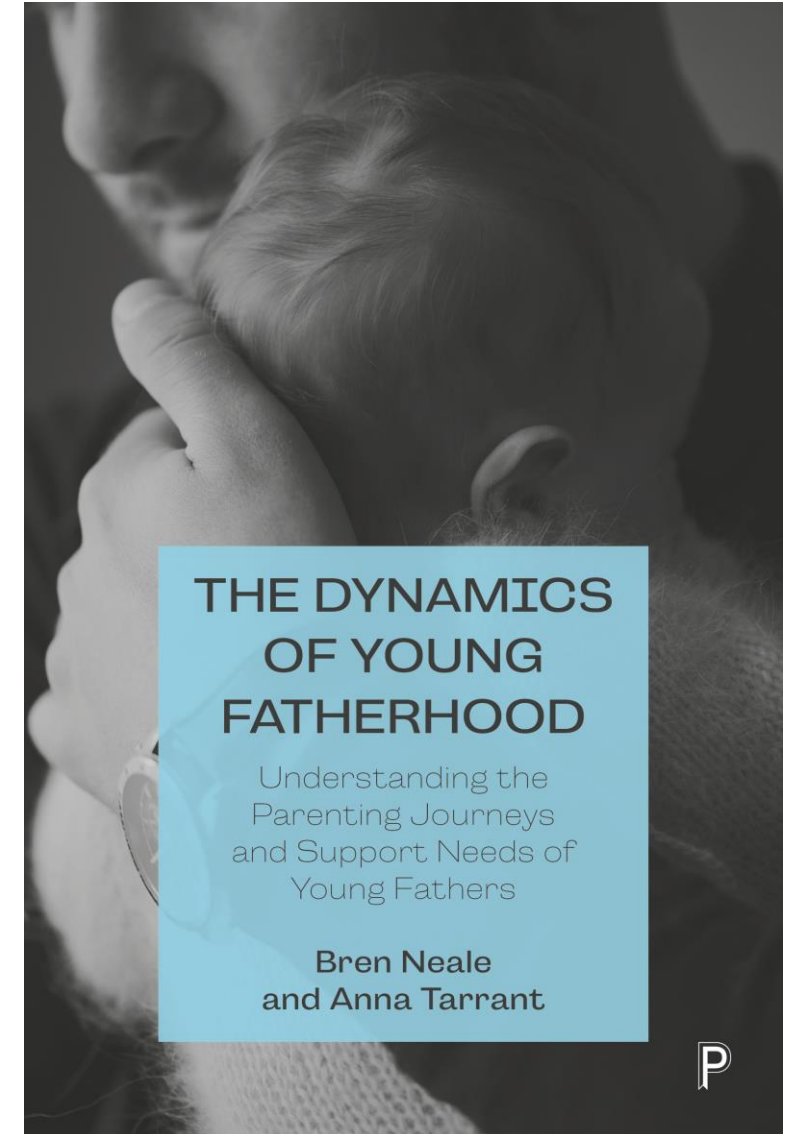
- A UK Research and Innovation funded study (2020-2027),
- Young men aged 25 and under when they conceive a child or become a father,
- The most comprehensive and in-depth programme of research about young fatherhood globally,
- Qualitative longitudinal and participatory design,
- Working with young fathers and professionals
 - *What matters* to fathers as a starting point for *what needs to happen* in practice and policy,
 - ‘Practice-based research to research-based practice’ cycle (Neale, 2021)



What we know about young fathers

Engaged fathers navigating systemic challenges:

- **Young men adhere strongly to an ethos of *engaged fatherhood*** (being involved in a child's life).
- **Unplanned conceptions.** An *unplanned child does not mean an unwanted child*
- **Relationships with child's mother and maternal grandmothers** are important for father involvement or exclusion
- **Young fathers find it more challenging to secure what they need to father; *insecure education and employment experiences, most disadvantaged by housing system, and services sideline dads or consider them as 'risk'.***
- Greater challenges for young dads living in *poverty, fathers who have been or are in prison*, those brought up in the *care system*, and those with *mental health problem*.
- **Social isolation, loneliness and stigma,**
- Where services are available they benefit from compassionate, father-inclusive support. Currently they encounter a mix of approaches ranging from *support* to *surveillance and sidelining*.



Fathers with complex needs



- Loneliness and social isolation
- Poor mental health
- Neglected physical health
- Loss and bereavement
- Drug and alcohol dependency
- Food, fuel and digital poverty
- Low educational attainment, NEET status, limited job prospects and insecure work (poverty)
- Homelessness and poor housing
- Overlooked or sidelined by professionals
- Relationship breakdown leading to child access issues
- Children's' Social Care proceedings





Why father-inclusion?

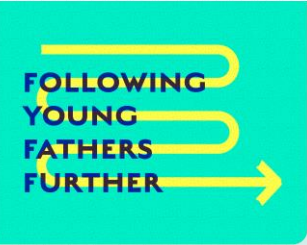
- Extensive evidence base confirming that **father involvement** has positive benefits for men, women and children,
- Practice concerns about low levels of public health and service **engagement** with fathers – with potential to undermine father involvement,
- Problematic dominance of views that fathers are responsible for this lack of engagement (Neale and Tarrant, 2024),
 - E.g. that fathers are ‘hard-to-reach’ and won’t or can’t engage,
 - Dominance of ‘risk’ framing of fathers across services,
- But..... a whole range of systemic factors identified that serve to ‘absent’ men as-fathers from service support and engagement,
 - Interpersonal, cultural, structural and organisational.



Family and welfare in the UK



- Professional support for fathers is hampered by:
 - Men's own perceptions and responses to services (distrust and fear of worsening problems),
 - Gendered ways of thinking about fathers and acceptance of stereotypes that assume disinterest in parenting among men,
 - Limited access to training and reflective supervision for professionals,
 - Constraints on workload capacity,
 - Level of need may be readily translated into deficit assumptions – unconscious bias.
 - Maternal gatekeeping (Ferguson, 2016; Bateson et al. 2017; Phillip et al. 2018), and
 - Access to specialist support services a 'postcode lottery' (Tarrant and Neale, 2017).



Father-inclusion as an agenda for change



- The benefits of promoting father-inclusion in service and support settings are beginning to be recognised (Bateson et al. 2017), but there is limited guidance and resource,
- How do we create a practice and policy ecosystem that is more father-inclusive? (Tarrant, 2023)
- Dialogue, training and buy-in across the service and welfare system
- A sensitising concept (Blumer, 1989),
 - Including all fathers as an idea that multiple actors can work towards and translate for their own practice and contexts.
- A practice and policy framing strategy,

Co-creating the Young Dads Collective



- An evidence-based and co-produced model of support with and for fathers,
- A model that involves young fathers in training an audience of multi-agency professionals who are encouraged to adapt their practice having heard the young men's accounts,
- Affecting social transformation at various levels of the system:
 - **Individual development:** Young fathers as 'experts by experience', which involves them in processes of co-production, confidence and skills building, 3 dads went onto secure employment
 - **Peer support** – young men come together as part of a community with a shared identity,
 - **Professional education and CPD** – professionals encouraged to 'think dad' and make pledges for practice change,
 - **Policy change** – speaking at policy events, changing policies so they include dads, encouraging father-inclusion in service design.

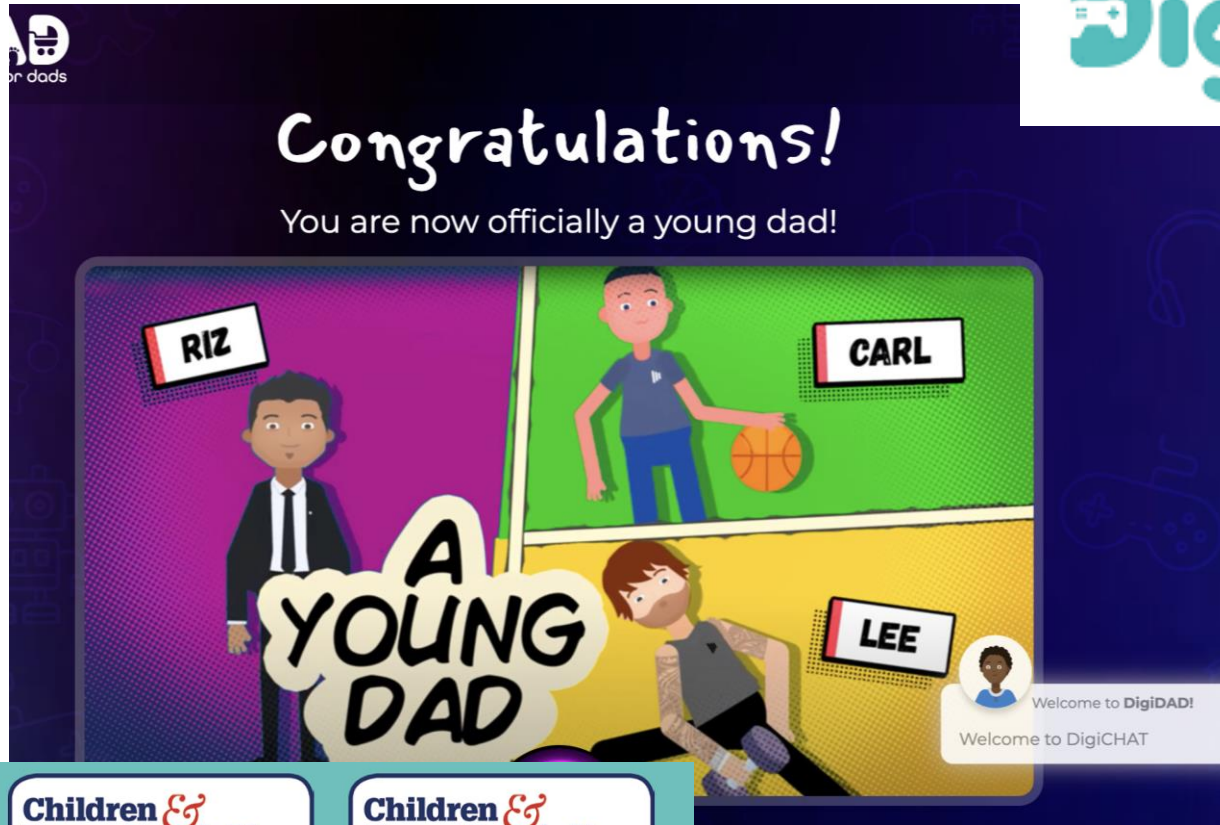
The seeds of ecosystemic change?



The YDC model recognises the importance of fathers in keeping children safe and has provided an opportunity to include men and dads in local conversations, both strategically and operationally. The credibility of the YDC, FYFF research, and its preceding studies have enabled us to advocate for a more equitable policy and practice environment. Since the project was launched, there has been a shift in the number and accessibility of advice, activities, and services for dads of all ages. The training for professionals, and the process of promoting and championing the project, have contributed to improvements in the strategic and operational environment in Grimsby that have had a positive impact on families' lives.

Professional feedback from events

Resources made by young dads for young dads



Think Dad!

A father-inclusive toolkit for professionals



Children & Young People Now Awards 2023

Winner

THE YOUTH WORK AWARD

Children & Young People Now Awards 2023

Winner

THE ADVICE AND GUIDANCE AWARD

What Works?

- Meeting fathers where they are at,
- A multi-level approach;
 - Championing father-inclusion at the levels of service commissioning, design and delivery, and policy,
 - A mix of funding and delivery for *public health* and *social support*,
- Attention to the process of ‘getting, engaging and keeping,’ to inform service design (Pfitzner et al. 2020),
 - Use of fathers in marketing and outreach material and service offers,
 - Collecting data: ask men if they are dads
 - Use of positive and inclusive imagery that represents diversity in fatherhood,
 - Service audit and evaluation
- Effective relational work,
 - Professional reflection on unconscious biases and ‘parking’ judgements.
 - Access to training for CPD,
- Recognise, believe in, and celebrate (young) fatherhood.

SECRET
SAUCE

RESOURCES

<https://followingyoungfathersfurther.org/>

Centre for Innovation in Fatherhood and Family Research

- Evaluations,
- Consultancy around father-inclusive strategy,
- Training.

<https://www.lincoln.ac.uk/socialsciences/research/innovationinfatherhoodandfamilyresearch/>



COMMUNITY



SUPPORTING YOUNG FATHERS

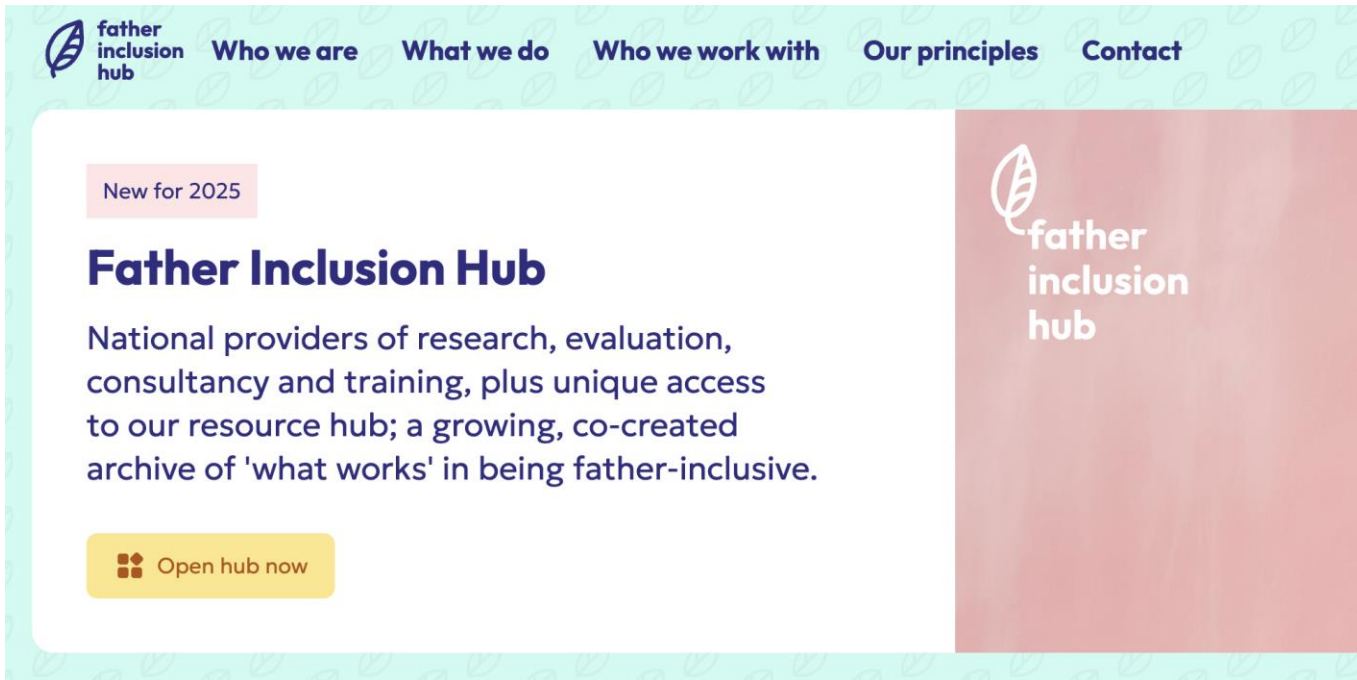
You might have spotted our community stamp dotted around the website. This stamp has been created to represent our diverse and vibrant community of young fathers, professionals, researchers, and advocates. We share a vision of creating a more supportive environment for young fathers and their families.

THE DYNAMICS OF YOUNG FATHERHOOD

Understanding the Parenting Journeys and Support Needs of Young Fathers

**Bren Neale
and Anna Tarrant**

The Father-inclusion Hub



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Father Inclusion Hub website. The navigation menu includes: father inclusion hub (with logo), Who we are, What we do, Who we work with, Our principles, and Contact. Below the navigation, there is a pink box that says "New for 2025". The main heading is "Father Inclusion Hub". The text below reads: "National providers of research, evaluation, consultancy and training, plus unique access to our resource hub; a growing, co-created archive of 'what works' in being father-inclusive." At the bottom of this section is a yellow button with a grid icon and the text "Open hub now". To the right of this text is a vertical pink bar with the "father inclusion hub" logo and text.



Small Steps Big Changes

Based in Nottingham, UK, Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) is one of five 'A Better Start Partnerships', a ten-year (2015-2025), £215 million programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF). Father Inclusive Practice was one of SSBC's core system change objectives. SSBC's resource hub brings together a pack of info for dads, a father-inclusive campaign toolkit and strategy poster, and a service standards and audit tool for services.

Developed by



<https://fatherinclusion.org/>