

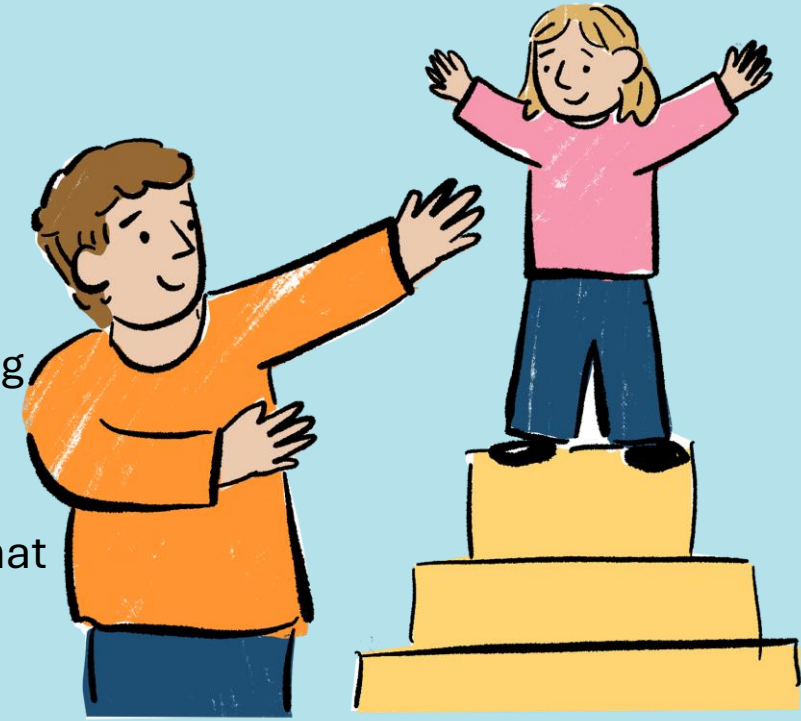
Developing Father-Inclusive Practice Strategy

Stronger Together,
Supporting Dads,
Strengthening Halton



Rationale

- Fathers play a vital role in the well-being and development of children, contributing to emotional stability, social skills, and academic success
- Embedding father-inclusive practice ensures that fathers feel valued and supported to engage fully in their children's lives. It challenges traditional stereotypes, breaks down barriers to participation, and creates a welcoming environment where fathers feel seen and heard
- There is clear evidence that the present support environment in the UK engages fathers ineffectively, in a broader context where there are very significant hurdles to the development and delivery of service assistance that is father inclusive
- There is an increased national focus based on several recent reports and research articles including investigating the death or serious harm of 23 babies (Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2021) which recommended professionals are to provide more support to fathers as there is insufficient attention given to men meaning that support for them to be active and engaged fathers is limited
- Professional support services have either ignored or excluded fathers, or they have taken a risk-based strategy that treats them suspiciously and with close supervision.

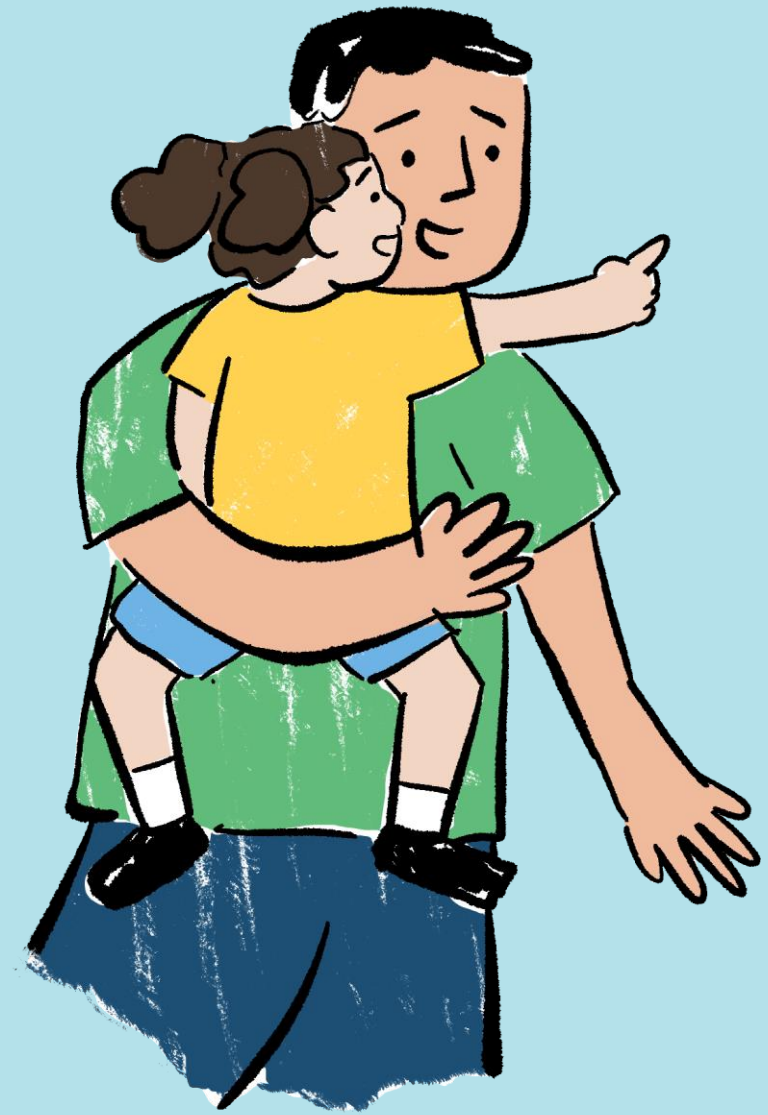


Research

- In the year following the birth, almost all biological fathers in the UK are present in their baby's life and very involved in their care
- Fewer than 4% of fathers in the UK neither live with, nor are regularly present in their newborn's daily life (Kiernan & Smith, 2003); 95% of parents jointly register their baby's birth (ONS, 2020a); and a large survey found only 250 fathers out of 5,717 (4%) 'absent' within 18 months of the birth (Maisey et al., 2013).
- Socio-economic disadvantage is strongly correlated with both poor mental and physical health in fathers (Dex & Ward, 2007). Depressed fathers are more likely to behave negatively, and their early depression is associated with poorer infant development (Wanless et al., 2008) and pre-schooler behaviour (Butler, 2012; Ramchandani et al., 2005)
- When a new father is not supportive of his baby's mother, her mental health is more likely to be poor (Parfitt & Ayers, 2014); and his lack of support for breastfeeding is a risk for full-formula-feeding; (Earle & Hadley, 2018; Shaker et al., 2004)
- Research finds benefits to mothers and infants when Health Care Practitioners (HCPs) engage with fathers in postnatal services: in Neo-Natal Intensive Care Units (Filippa et al., 2021); in breastfeeding information and support (Abbass-Dick et al., 2019; Ayebare et al., 2015; Mahesh et al., 2018); in mental health services for new mothers (Noonan et al., 2021); and in home visiting (Burcher et al., 2021).
- Despite the potential opportunities and benefits of engaging fathers in early home visiting, fathers' participation in home visiting services has been reported as infrequent and inconsistent (Holmberg & Olds, 2015; Thullen et al., 2014).

Objectives

- Promote the recognition of fathers as essential caregivers
- Enhance service accessibility and engagement for fathers
- Provide training for staff on father – inclusive practices
- Ensure staff and volunteers understand the importance of engaging fathers in child development
- Develop policies, and a strategy, to support father – inclusive practice
- Foster community partnerships to encourage father – friendly environments
- Ensure strong leadership commitment to father – inclusive practice
- Create welcoming physical environments that support and include fathers



Fathers Voice

- In April 2024, Halton Family Hubs, Ideas Alliance and Parents in Mind collaborated on a [co production research project](#) with the aim of illuminating the experiences of local families as they navigate the successes and obstacles in finding appropriate support for mild mental health issues during the perinatal period.
- 34% of participants identified themselves as fathers, co-parents and partners.
- A summary of the findings include;
 - Working parents found a barrier to accessing services was due to a lack of evening, online or weekend offers
 - Dads experienced fewer mental health challenges when they were invited to actively participate in both antenatal and postnatal appointments to understand their role in supporting the mother's wellbeing
 - There is a shortage of support services for fathers. This limited support for fathers and male caregivers and makes it challenging for staff to engage in these discussions equally.
 - The most common emotions impacting fathers and partners when expecting or during the first 2 years of parenting were anger and hopelessness



“ As a father I wanted to talk to someone when I felt worried or useless in supporting my wife, I thought id be labelled controlling or would have to hand over lots of information when all I wanted was some advice or a 15 min call on how I could be the best dad by helping her feel like a good mum when I couldn't be around. Nappies and bottles were fine but she got frustrated with me when I didn't understand. It put an extra strain on those early days and I'd never felt I was getting anything right.”

“ It was easy to open up to my partner but I think he found it hard to deal with the emotional ups and downs and some other support for him would have been good too. I know he felt like a better father when he could find support, tips or groups for me to use so he didn't feel worried about us when at work.”

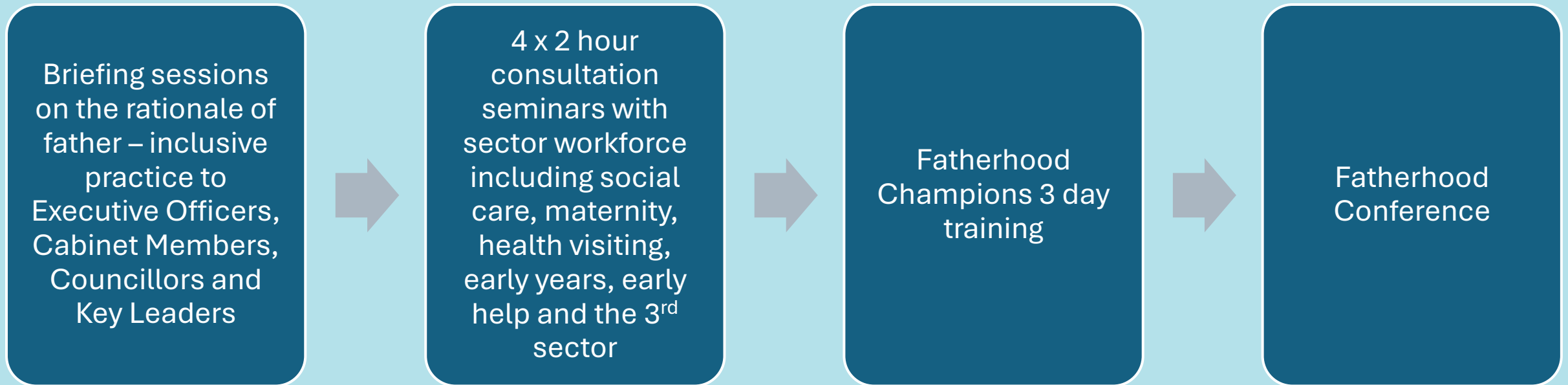
“ My mental health declined most when I felt useless and questioned my every move... I wanted to know, and preferably as early as possible as we had had many losses, if my wife does go through a difficult birth or she does get depression, what am I actually looking out for and how can I understand it better so this doesn't build up to us being so far apart from each other in that first year.”

“ I struggled to find anything at all I could access as a dad, it's even harder when you don't know what support you need too. I went to the GP and just got given medication and told I was depressed. They didn't seem to have any other offers. I noticed the Health Visitor had lots of really useful things for mums, they were great but I didn't feel I could ask 'what about me?' When I knew the priority was for our baby and my partner.”

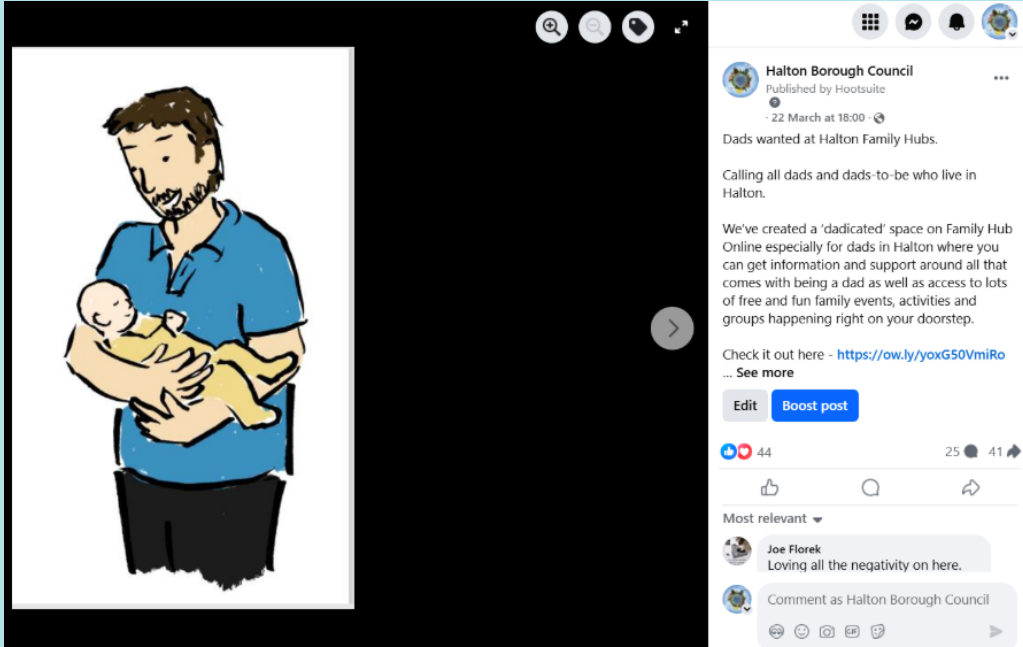
Implementation Strategies

- Workforce Training – Fatherhood Institute
- Father Inclusive Language & illustrations
- Fatherhood Champions – Fatherhood Institute
- Professionals Conference
- Service Design and Delivery
- Digital Interventions
- Impact

Workforce Training



Father Inclusive Language and Illustrations

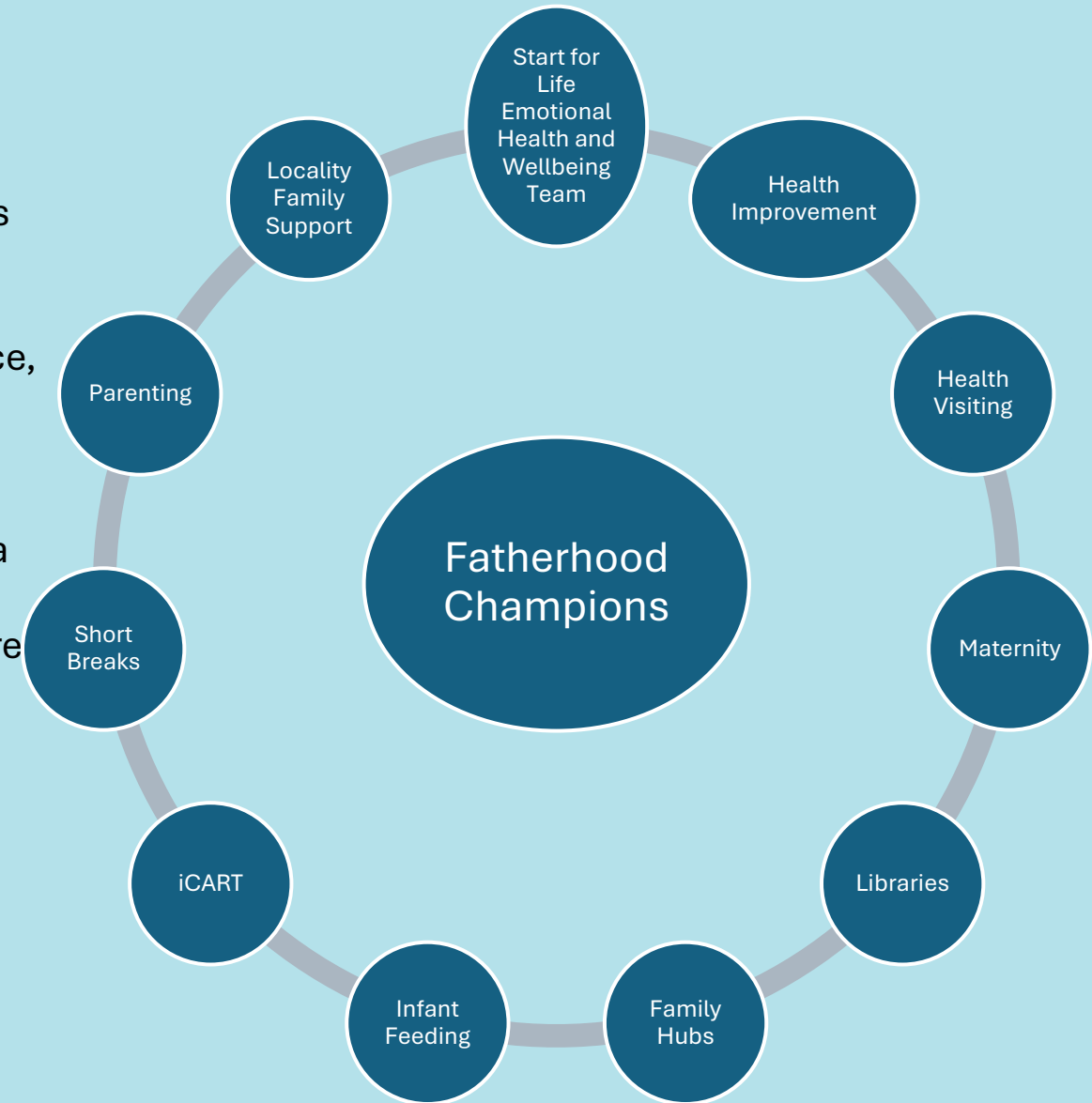


38,251 views, 23,457 reach, 111 interactions and 74 link clicks



Fatherhood Champions

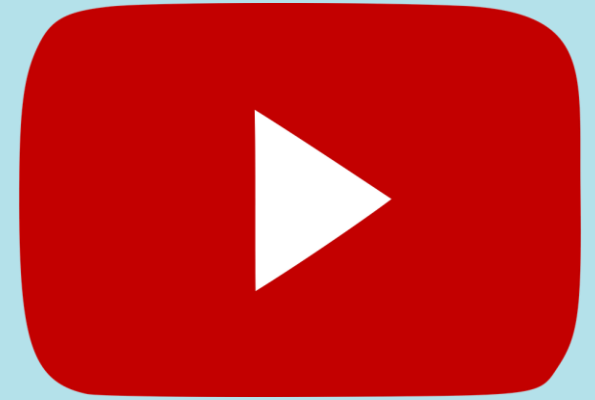
- Fatherhood Champions are equipped with the knowledge and skills to cascade their learning to colleagues and lead on key issues in their locality.
- They underwent training that offered an in-depth learning experience, supplementing the two-day course with a self-study portfolio and a third training day.
- Following the successful completion of the training, they became 'Fatherhood Champions' within their service, and have developed a comprehensive strategy for building, sustaining and promoting and advocating for a father inclusive service. Fatherhood Champions are expected to identify methods to cascade learning and support practice within their own service and beyond.
- They will use their local and professional experience, and the knowledge gained through the training, to influence the design and delivery of services to families under Family Hubs, and beyond into targeted and universal services
- The above was delivered by the Fatherhood Institute



Professionals Conference



- The Science of Dad
- Understanding Autism through a father's eyes
- Fatherhood, Mental Health and better outcomes
- Navigating the Neonatal Journey
- A Dad's role in breastfeeding and baby care



Halton Family Hubs on YouTube

97.7% of professionals felt the conference improved their understanding of the importance of father-inclusive practices in supporting families

90.9% of professionals felt the conference made them feel at least confident in applying father-inclusive strategies with their professional practice

100% of professionals felt they were at least likely to advocate for and implement father-inclusive strategies in the workplace or community

Service Design and Delivery



“When you are able to be there when the Health Visitor comes round if she could just say ‘if you ever want to call me, you are important too in your job’, or give me some tips on how I can give mum a break? This could be on a piece of paper that says ‘ways to give mum a break....read to the baby before last feed so she can shower. It sounds so small but it really helps make you feel like you are both contributing to your family when you miss so much at work all day’”

‘Informal support that’s wrapped up with doing activities for the first time. I had no idea where to go with my baby on the weekend and I like the idea of a dads space but nothing you have to sign up for just drop in, chat, maybe WhatsApp, so you can meet some more dads doing the same as you and your confidence grows spending more time with your kid’”

Dads want to meet other new dads in the early parenting period as it is viewed as an opportunity to seek social connections with other men

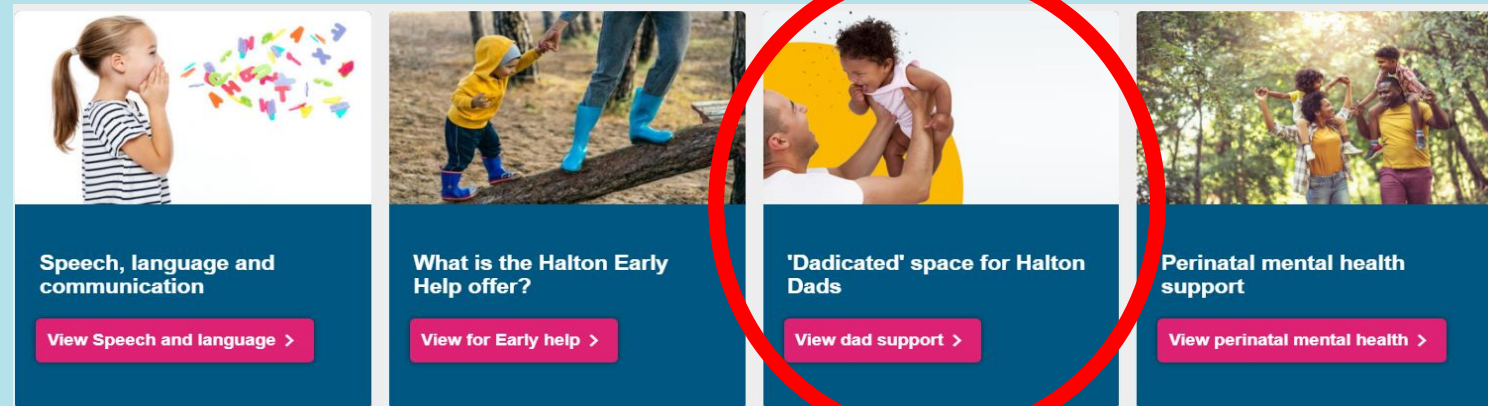
The majority of dads were interested in male only stay and play and walk and talk sessions

Digital Interventions

Digital interventions help address barriers to traditional health care services

Research has demonstrated that new and expecting fathers use digital technologies, which could be used to help address father-specific barriers to traditional health care services

fathers showing a strong interest in using internet-delivered strategies for mental health and parenting supports during the transition to fatherhood (Da Costa et.al, 2010)



Impact

Service

- Triple P intervention offered online via Teams or over the telephone so dads can join in too
- HENRY Course now delivered exclusively to dads
- Evidence based parenting programmes offered out of hours
- Dads offered to attend ALL parenting programmes during initial contact
- Male only Gateway Programme for male victims of Domestic Abuse
- Dad part of interview panel for Dad Matters Co-Ordinator post
- Learning about how male hormones have a huge impact on how he feels/behaves during pregnancy and the first 2 years is something I never realised before and something I think is extremely important for parents to know. This means I can help educate the men I encounter. Due to this I have updated the dads section on www.Calmyourmind.co.uk and am looking to make specific marketing material such as posters and business cards that highlight what I have learned eg. Lowering of testosterone why it happens and what it means.
- I am also more mindful of advertising and fed back to HENRY that their flyers could be more father friendly as each workshop only has one image. They hadn't seen it in that light and thanked me for the insight and were going to look at their flyers

Change of Approach

- Referrals into our service have predominately always been for mums - as standard we now ask if dad/male caregiver will be coming along too. We offer out of hours groups to ensure there are flexible options for dads to attend.
- Knowledge of how important the role of the father is in pregnancy, labour and postnatal period. How to engage fathers and how to adopt practice to include fathers.
- I am more aware of the need to engage with Fathers
I am more aware of the look of the spaces I work in to ensure good father inclusive practice
I am more aware of my wording on promotional materials etc
- Our team considers dads equally in their role in caring for and being involved in a baby's feeding journey. We're more conscious of wording and images on materials and online content. We are also now capturing case studies from a dad's perspective. We recognise now that dad's need calls to action to be specifically for them, and are being mindful of this in promotional materials and content for them.
- I have implemented a whole system change, altering wording in the 0-19 service IT system, provided training and policy change to incorporate the assessment of mental health for fathers at HV KPI visits, opening of a 'fathers record' when indicated and the signposting to support when required.
- More evidence that we can quote and use. The training has added the push and collective effort that has been needed to focus on fathers more and how to look at ways to engage and support them in the ways they would like. I had done some work before covid and was keen to do more and this has given that more back up and empowered us to think dad more
- I have considered the barriers that fathers face. I have thought more about systems, and how these get in the way of dad accessing support for themselves, and/or having access to information/influencing their children's care. I have considered how our team is structured, and what advertising methods we use, to ensure we are father inclusive and meet the needs of the population in Halton.
- I find myself thinking more about how I can support fathers and am making an effort to include them and I feel like I have a stronger knowledge in what questions to ask and how to engage...also I have more information on signposting to fatherhood aimed programs

What next?

- Undertaking a Thematic Review across Children's Social Care of Father Engagement to identify any current strengths, areas of best practice and areas for development
- Launching our Developing Father Inclusive Practice Strategy
- Secured National Lottery Community Funding with Fatherhood Institute to roll out the FRED intervention– Fathers Reading Every Day
- To roll out the Halton Family Hubs Dads Included Self Assessment to Early Years Settings, Schools and other organisations to help all agencies working directly with children and families to identify how father inclusive their own services are, and what changes they can make to ensure they provide the best possible services to improve children's wellbeing and safety.

Halton Baby Showers



What are Baby Showers?

- Halton Family Hubs are excited to launch a new offer to families called Baby Showers.
- Held monthly, these informal and relaxed drop in events provide parents and families with valuable and up to date information and resources about pregnancy, childbirth, and early parenthood.
- We want families to come along to talk to a range of different professionals, including midwives, to hear about topics such as prenatal care, labour and delivery, newborn care, breastfeeding, and postpartum support.
- We are also going to be providing opportunities for hands on practical support such as,
 - Dealing with an unsettled baby
 - Bathing a baby
 - Feeding a baby
 - Holding a baby
 - Safe sleep
 - Support for fathers

Why Baby Showers?

- Families have access to a clear Start for Life offer which sets out the services available to them locally
- Families know where to go and who to ask if they need anything explaining or further information
- All the information and support is available in one place
- They create a welcoming environment for families to access a range of help and support
- Families receive the practical information early on that prepares them for the transition into parenthood and the common challenges they may face
- Families will get to know about early child experiences and how they can impact on their development
- Families get to know about the importance of bonding, attachment and responding sensitively to their baby's needs
- The importance of breastfeeding is championed as well as allowing families to make informed choices about infant feeding
- Provides an opportunity for families to be able to shape services in their local family hub network and provide feedback on the services they access



Halton Baby Showers – Feedback from Families



- I plucked up the courage to attend the baby shower on my own at 33 weeks pregnant. 3 weeks later at 36 weeks pregnant the Start for Life Emotional Wellbeing Team who I met at the baby shower then helped me to get temporary accommodation to get me out of an uncomfortable situation at my family home. The team subsequently checked up on me every few days and I had 2 lady's coming out to my hostel to check I was bringing my baby into a safe environment; they reassured me everyday that I was doing great and that I created a safe space for my baby to come home too.
- I went to another baby shower in Widnes when my baby was born and me and my son felt like royalty; everyone knew who we were it was so strange but it just goes to show they really cared about us and we were being thought about it was so lovely. I needed to feed my son and they provided me a quiet space to breastfeed
- Last year I attended one of the baby showers at Brookvale Family Hub. I arrived early because I was able to get my baby's weight checked. I met Clare, who I had met a few times before, including a home visit because I was under perinatal services from 8 weeks pregnant, and she referred me to Parents in Mind Peer Support Offer. I opened up to Clare at the baby shower about my feelings as I felt i wasn't in a good place, struggling with crippling anxiety, low mood and feeling the bond with my baby didn't feel normal after a very traumatic induction, very long labour which resulted in an emergency c section that I had to be put to sleep for.
- From that day I feel like Clare and the team have been amazing. I've been attending lighthouse, a 20 week parenting programme, 6 weeks creative writing course, and nearly finished 6 weeks at Time for me, which is all really helping with my mental heath so much I'm also doing creative things at home, and finally found something that helps me relax.
- Clare has also contacted my GP to help with my medication and they have now prescribed a medication to help with the anxiety, I feel collectively with all the support, the groups and the special wellbeing health visitors I'm in such a better head space, more energy, and a better positive outlook on life, looking back at that day at the baby shower event I'm so thankful for Clare so thankful that I could open up and offload without any judgement it felt wonderful to feel seen and heard in that moment, reassured, checked in on regularly, meeting some of the team they just want the best for you, your baby and your journey into motherhood, thank you for all your help and support each and every one of you!