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Strategic Lead for Early Help and Family Hubs
Halton Borough Council



Developing Father-Inclusive Practice Strategy

Stronger Together,
Supporting Dads,
Strengthening Halton



Conception and Pregnancy and Birth

- Expectant mothers in Britain want their partner to be included in antenatal classes (Young, 2008), antenatal care and antenatal screening, including participating 'as a couple' in discussions with health care practitioners (Skirton & Barr, 2010).
- 10% of men questioned said they didn't know whether they would be welcome, whether their attendance was necessary or whether they would make a useful contribution (Newburn & Singh, 2000).
- Almost one-in-five dads in Britain had been taken by surprise by the pregnancy, and a third of these had negative or mixed feelings about it (Fatherhood Institute & Fathers Network Scotland, 2018).
- Stretching back at least 30 years, around 90% of fathers have been present at their babies' births in Britain (Dragonas et al., 1992; Kiernan & Smith, 2003; Redshaw & Henderson, 2013; Alderdice et al., 2016)
- Birthing women rate the support they received from their partner more highly than support received from midwives (Spiby et al., 1999)
- When their partner is present and supportive, the women require less pain relief and evaluate the birth-experience more positively (Chan & Paterson-Brown, 2002).
- Women rate the quality of care they themselves received more negatively if they think maternity staff did not include and encourage their partner (Redshaw & Henderson, 2013)
- One third of all expectant fathers (and many more first-time fathers) independently researched pregnancy and birth (Alderdice et al., 2016)



Mental Wellbeing

- The transition to fatherhood on men's mental health, specifically, the emotional changes, complexities, and demands associated with becoming a new father have been linked to both anxiety and depression (Lemmons et al., 2023b)
- 70% of fathers said their stress levels increased in the 12 months after becoming a father for the first time
- Almost a quarter (23%) of dads said they felt isolated when they first became a father (BBH.FI.2022)
- Many men who do seek services report feeling that professionals are ill-equipped to improve their mental health and lack an understanding of the emotional, physical, interpersonal, and family problems they face (Lemmons et al., 2023b)
- Children whose fathers had been depressed following their birth were almost twice as likely to have a psychiatric disorder, mainly oppositional defiant/conduct disorder at 7 years of age, compared to other children (Ramchandani et al., 2008)
- Many men who do seek services report feeling that professionals are ill-equipped to improve their mental health and lack an understanding of the emotional, physical, interpersonal, and family problems they face (Lemmons et al., 2023b)



Example Of Family Hub Offer



Family Hub Sites



- Kingsway
- Ditton
- Warrington Road
- Brookvale
- Halton Lodge
- Windmill Hill



Family Hub Online



<https://haltonfamilyhubs.co.uk>

Family Hub Community



Engaging with fathers is...

- Hard
- Time consuming
- Important
- Satisfying and worthwhile
- Challenging
- Positive
- Making time to get their views.
- Supporting both parents equally
- Helping to gain a child lived experience.
- The right thing to do.
- Impactful
- Recognising the role they play in shaping and supporting our children
- Vital
- Essential
- Vital – role model influence,
- Essential for better outcomes
- Just as important as engaging mothers
- Giving them a voice and making them equal
- Having a holistic view of the family
- Holistic approach to provide positive outcomes which is vital for the child's life
- Crucial to making and embedding change
- Build stronger families
- As important as engaging with the mothers

What gets in the way?

- Sometimes not documented on our case management system
- Not available or present on home visits
- Dad perceived to be not on the scene
- Child doesn't have a relationship with them
- Don't always attend meetings
- Taking mums perspectives too much
- Workers lack of experiences or confidence
- Working hours
- Not having his details on the system or included on the referral
- No consent from mothers
- Initial contact is generally with mum
- Assessments usually is just with mum
- See them antenatally but not again
- Not contacted during the initial screening / triage at the front door
- Influence from other parent
- Timings
- Staff capacity
- No name on the health records
- Deemed a risk, puts professionals off working with him
- Staff not curious enough

Fathers Voice

34% of participants identified themselves as fathers, co-parents and partners.

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.



Hopelessness

Ideas Alliance and Parents in Mind collaborated on a co production research project

“ 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.”



Objectives

Enhance service accessibility and engagement for fathers



Ensure staff and volunteers understand the importance of engaging fathers in child development



Provide training for staff on father – inclusive practices



Develop policies, and a strategy, to support father – inclusive practice



Promote the recognition of fathers as essential caregivers



Ensure strong leadership commitment to father – inclusive practice



Foster community partnerships to encourage father – friendly environments



Create welcoming physical environments that support and include fathers

Implementation Strategies

Understanding
of research,
evidence and
local father's
voice

Fatherhood
Champions –
Fatherhood
Institute

Father Inclusive
Language &
illustrations

Professionals
Conference

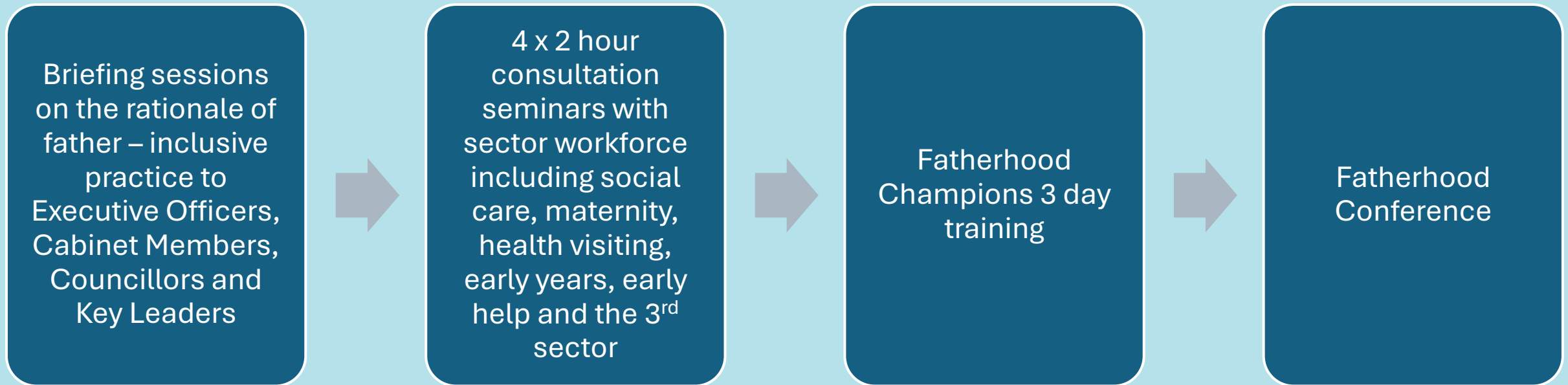
Workforce
Training –
Fatherhood
Institute

Review of
Service Design
and Delivery

Digital
Interventions

Strategy
Development &
Practice Guides

Workforce Training



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. The training offers an in-depth learning experience, supplementing the two-day course with a self-study portfolio and a third training day. Participants who successfully complete the course and portfolio will become 'Fatherhood Champions' within their service, having developed a comprehensive strategy for building, sustaining and promoting and advocating for a father inclusive service.
- You should have an interest in the subject, and willing to build on this interest and training to support others. A champion should be open to learning and translating theory and research into practice. Many Champions become passionate advocates and continue this work for many years.
- 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



Fatherhood Champions

- Having a staff member who is a fatherhood champion has definitely helped us to consider dads at all points and adapt our practice to support this. It has helped improve practitioner confidence across the team to engage with dads. Having a dedicated commissioned service - Dad Matters - who are visible and accessible has also made a difference.
- Having fatherhood champions have increased the general awareness of including fathers
- The whole fatherhood champions training was really good, it helped to promote and start the conversation about what we can do more, challenging the unconscious and known bias' in our service

“

I WANT TO MEET OTHER
NEW DADS IN THE EARLY
PARENTING PERIOD

“

I HAD NO IDEA WHERE
TO GO WITH MY BABY AT
THE WEEKEND AND I
LIKE THE IDEA OF A DADS
SPACE



“

NOTHING YOU HAVE TO SIGN UP TO,
JUST A DROP IN, A CHAT, MAYBE
WHATSAPP, SO YOU CAN MEET
SOME MORE DADS DOING THE
SAME AS

Service Design and Delivery



AWALTON FAMILY HUB SERVICE





Find Out More



Are you a new dad or a dad to be?
Want to be the best dad or partner you can be?

Dad Matters are here to support dads with attachment and bonding, supporting your mental health, and accessing appropriate services at birth, labour and beyond.

DAD MATTERS HALTON

DAD MATTERS CO-ORDINATOR
 TOM BYRNE
 07856 916685
 TOM@HOMESTARTWARRINGTONANDCHESHIRE.ORG.UK

- One to One Support
- Group Support
- New Dad Workshops





Why is my mental health so important for my baby?

When a parent experiences poor mental health it can affect the way they respond to bonding with and caring for their child. This can impact the child's psychological, intellectual, social and emotional development.

Postnatal depression affects 1 in 10 Dads!

The peak time for dads to develop postnatal depression is 3-6 months following the birth, but symptoms can come on anytime in the first few years of being a dad.

"I'm Tom, Dad Matters Co-ordinator for Halton.

As a dad myself, I understand the barriers and issues dads may face.

Dad Matters Halton is here to support you throughout the early stages of parenthood through one-to-one support, group support, new dad workshops and more..."



Referral Form




To find your nearest Family Hub visit
www.haltonfamilyhubs.co.uk
 email: familyhubs@halton.gov.uk


Scan me





Proud to be working in partnership with Halton Family Hubs



AWALTON FAMILY HUB SERVICE



Support for Dads, Partners and Non-birthing Parents

Halton Family Hubs bring lots of services together in one place, making it easier to find information and services for you and your family.

Working with Halton Family Hubs, NCT Parents in Mind offers friendly, non-judgmental, free, low level mental health support for dads, partners, and non-birthing parents during the early stages of parenthood, run by local parents who understand the challenges it can bring.

Come and connect with a community of local dads



- One-to-one phone calls with a local dad volunteer who has had similar experiences
- An open WhatsApp chat to connect when challenges through the week arise
 - A weekly relaxed Zoom chat
- A range of digital support including podcasts

All our services are free to access

"I felt hopeless and angry but having the WhatsApp available gave me the strength I needed to keep going"

 NCT Parents in Mind Warrington & Halton
  @parentsinmind.nw


 To find out more scan the QR code
 Call: 07709 841829
 Email: parentsinmind.nw@nct.org.uk




 To find your nearest Family Hub visit:
www.haltonfamilyhubs.co.uk
 Email: familyhubs@halton.gov.uk







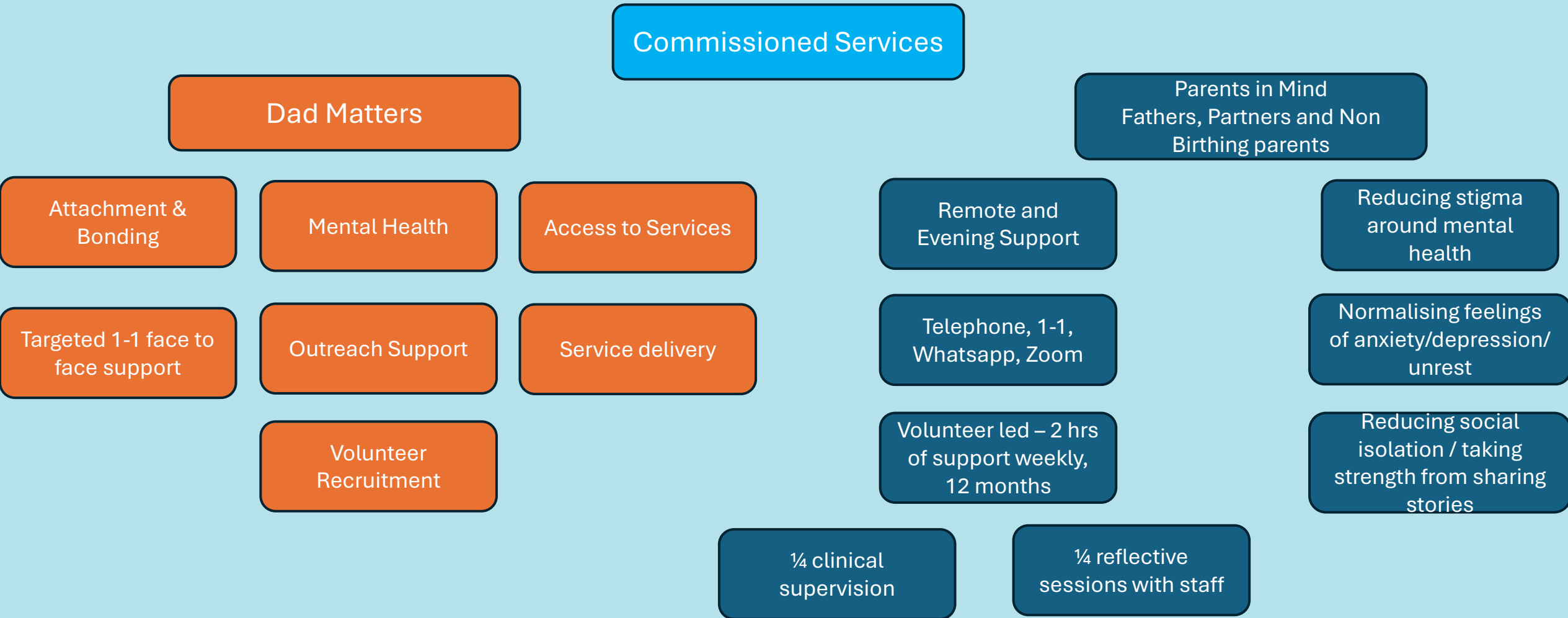


**HEALTHY FAMILIES:
 RIGHT FROM THE
 START**


FOR PARENTS & CARERS

A great start for babies and young children.


Service Design and Delivery



Service Design and Delivery





Over the last 12 months Dad Matters Halton has...



47 referrals for 1:1 peer support
27% of referrals with Early Help/Social Care involvement

85% Improved their mental health and/or understanding of their baby






Engaged with 341 Dads
Representing approx. 40% of all new dads in Halton over the last 12 months

Trained **71** professionals in how to successfully engage fathers in their practice


Delivered Dad Chats to **17** Dads-to-be across **4** antenatal classes

Presented at various events to a total of over **200** professionals, including Halton Fatherhood conference

Delivered **22** Dad and Baby monthly events/groups across Halton



833 Parents total
Across Hospitals, Family Hubs, Clinics, GP Surgeries and Community Events



14 different referral sources including Early Help, Family Nurse Partnership, Community Midwives, 0-19 Team, Specialist Perinatal, Infant feeding and more...

Most referrals - Health Visiting (8)

Feedback from Dads....

"I cannot recommend Dad Matters enough. When things are tough and there's not a lot that can be done to change a situation, having Tom there as a **space to offload** has been so important for me."
1:1 Service User

"It's been such a **huge eye-opener** for me. Knowing what I know now it's **totally changed my approach** to being a dad, how best to prepare and how to support my partner....for the first time I **really feel involved in the process and prepared.**"
Antenatal "Dad Chat" attendee

"It's **amazing** after just an hour with Tom how much better I feel. **It's been so validating** and it's made me realize that it's totally okay to feel how I do about the things I've been worrying about when it comes to becoming a dad again. **It's a real weight lifted.**"
1:1 Service User

Feedback from Professionals....

"I have **nothing but positive things to say** about 'Dad Matters'. They should be part of the referral pathway for depression in new dads from primary care."

"I think Dad Matters is a **very useful and vital service** to have in Halton, providing support and inclusion for dads."

"Working with service users of Dad Matters it's clear to see the benefits it's having. We **regularly see improvements** in Dads' mood, confidence, their engagement with our service and their relationship with their family after having worked with them....**really great offer**"



Fathers are much less likely to receive targeted support, or to be actively recruited or addressed by family-focused support and interventions (see Burgess & Goldman, 2018; Panter-Brick et al, 2014; Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2021)

Service Design and Delivery



Dad Matters 0-2 Stay and Play

Looking for a fun and welcoming way to bond with your little one? Join our Dad Matters 0-2 Stay & Play sessions — designed especially for fathers and male carers with children

📅 15 Nov 25, 10:00 am

£ Standard: Free

📍 Ditton Library



Dad 'Natters' Drop-In

Come along to Halton Family Hubs to catch up with your local Dad Matters co-ordinator for Halton Dad Natters is a chance for dads to meet face-to-face to discuss everything to

📅 17 Nov 25, 1:30 pm

£ Standard: Free

📍 Brookvale Family Hub



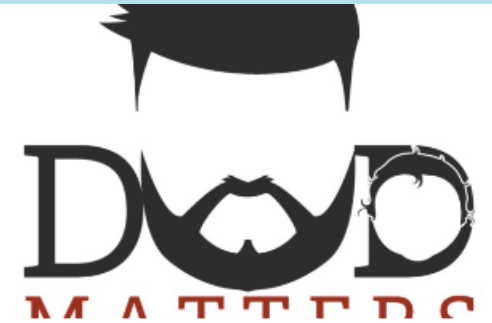
Baby Shower Information Events for mums, dads, parents, partners, grandparents and carers

Baby Shower Information Event Are you thinking of having a baby? Are you or your partner currently pregnant? Do you have a baby aged 6 months old or under? If you

Dads & Partners

Weekly Zoom

Wednesday's 8-9pm



Dad Matters Online Drop-In Session

This free online drop-in session is a safe space for new and expecting dads to chat to Dad Matters co-ordinators, volunteers and other dads about whatever questions or



Family First Aid

This Family First Aid Course is designed to equip parents and carers with essential first aid skills applicable to both children and adults. The course covers a broad range of

just having the time to talk about things helps me get things organised in my head

This is probably the first time I've been asked about this stuff since finding out we were pregnant

but its just good to talk to someone who's been there and get's it

I think we're really lucky in Halton to have the support that we have. I have lads I work with from other areas and they don't have the option

"I'm ADHD as well so I'm properly struggling coming to terms with it and I don't really know how I'm going to react when they're here but this information will be really useful, thanks

These last few weeks have been really useful in my situation and have been a great outlet to offload what's been going on so thank you so much for that" - 1:1 dad with newborn who has had multiple admissions to hospital

I like having that safety net there. I've struggled with substances in the past and I'm ADHD so struggle to keep organised and my priorities straight and I'm determined not to get back there, especially now I'm a dad, and I think having someone to talk to really helps keep me going

**LAUNCHING
FRIDAY 10TH
OCTOBER!**



Providing single dads with support, friendship and somewhere to turn when life feels tough. We want every dad to know they are not alone.

Friendly meet- ups and peer support

Be part of a community that's here for you

Activities for dads and kids

Signposting to useful services

Parenting tips and advice

Meet other dads who know what you're going through

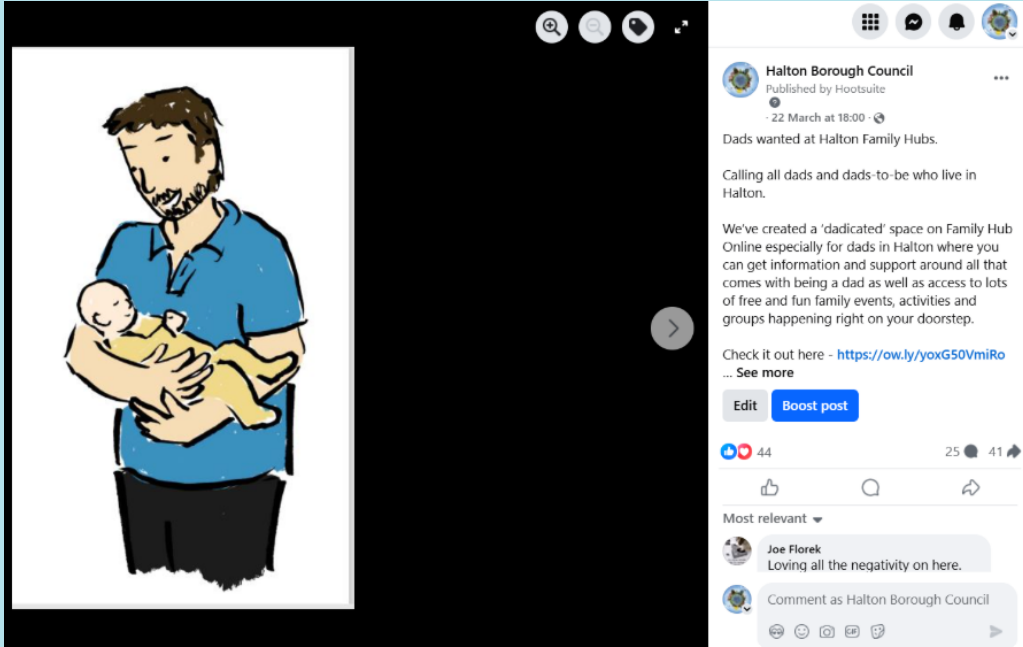
EVERY FRIDAY 10AM - 12PM
HALTON BROOK COMMUNITY CENTRE, WA7 2DX

ENQUIRIES:
07762 143 536 OR 01928 568 536

"It's not about doing it alone - its about doing it together"



Father Inclusive Language and Illustrations



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



Digital Interventions

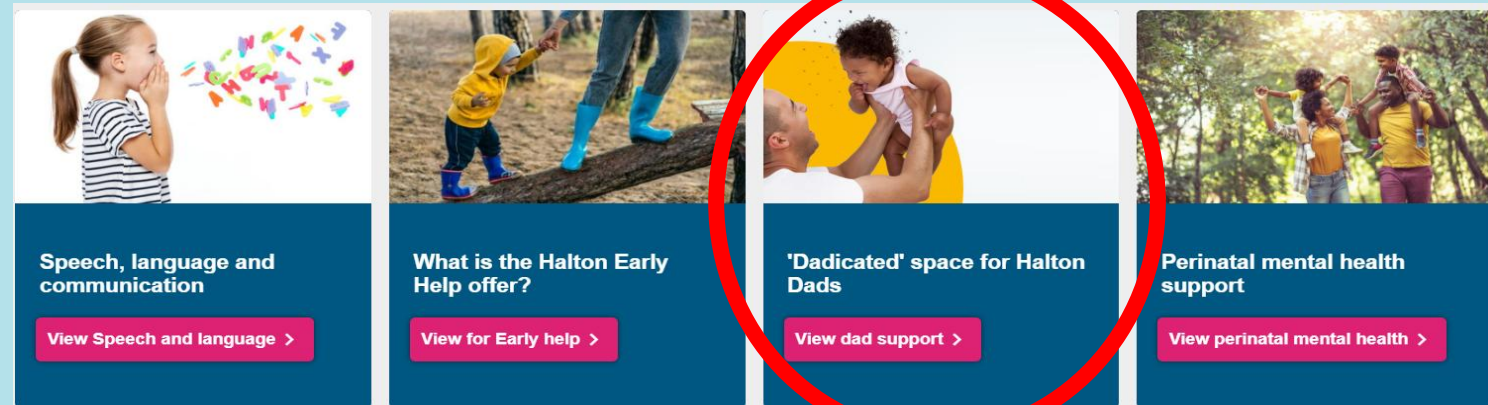


Digital Interventions

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

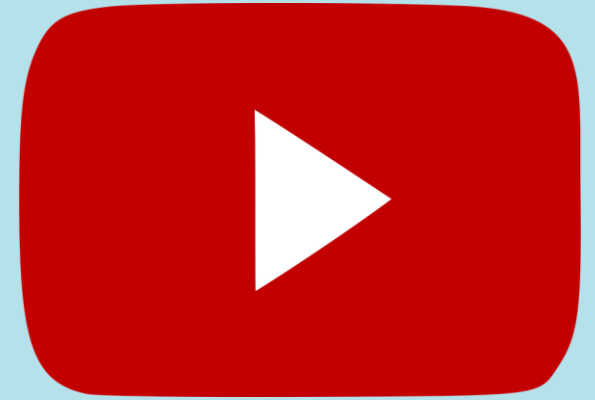
fathers showing a strong interest in using internet-delivered strategies for mental health and parenting supports during the transition to fatherhood (Da Costa et.al, 2010)



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

Are you interested in enhancing Father inclusive practice in your setting?

Do you want to find out more about how you can access **FREE** training to support Fathers / male carers to read with their child?



Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) is a simple, effective and sustainable, home-based reading programme that supports dads reading to their children and improves children's outcomes.

Research shows that children in families where fathers as well as mothers are actively and positively involved in supporting their children's education, and where reading and other literacy-based activities are valued, tend to do the best.

To find out more or to express an interest in getting involved in this exciting opportunity, email familyhubs@halton.gov.uk

www.haltonfamilyhubs.co.uk

Improve children's literacy and language development

Increase fathers' confidence and involvement in their children's learning.

Strengthen parent-child relationships

The standard model runs over **4 weeks**:

1. Fathers read with their children **15 minutes a day** for the first two weeks.
2. Then **30 minutes a day** for the next two weeks.
3. Fathers complete a **reading log** and sometimes take part in **group sessions or events** (like story time, certificates, or book giveaways).

My Dad loved it!

He said he 'really enjoyed taking part in it' he found that '15 minutes per day was a good target' given the age of his child (child was 2 at the end of August).

'They have made their own little library at home in the living room packed with books' they no longer 'waste money on odd plastic toys or sweets as treats but buy new books for their library instead'

Impact - Service

Stay and Play Sessions now available once a month on a Saturday Morning for dads	HENRY Course now delivered exclusively to dads	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	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	Baby Massage Sessions available 1-1 for dads	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.

Impact - 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 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.

I have delivered training to my team across Family Support to offer advice and guidance on how to break down barriers to engagement

Fathers receive a universal antenatal contact via text message and offered a targeted visit if required

One of the maternity trusts now record dads details on Badgernet and with consent, this gets shared with Family Hubs

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.

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.

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 introduced an inclusion checklist for the Short Breaks Service to ensure dads are recognised, supported and included at every point

What challenges have you faced in engaging fathers or promoting father inclusive practice

- Challenging societal culture - often Dads think that parenting programmes/support are for mums as they are generally the main care giver. We have worked hard to challenge this thinking and promote the benefits to them. As a result of this we have seen an obvious increase in the number of dads attended face to face parenting support groups.
- Flexibility of services, trying to ensure fathers are able to attend appointments around work commitments.
- Fathers can feel like you are there for the mother/children. Fathers can be reluctant to talk about their feelings (I sometimes leave the scoring tools with mum and then get back to me). Practitioners can be reluctant to open records for fathers as it increases documentation responsibilities.
- This is new to them. When we meet with families they are often thinking about their partners needs and not their own, perhaps because they haven't been asked before. They may not consider that it is an option for them to access support.
- Not all teams / services / organisations truly embraced it..... Until now 😊

I think the best part of it is that you're independent, so things like frustration with social care and the NHS I feel I can talk about it" – Service User, 25-35yrs

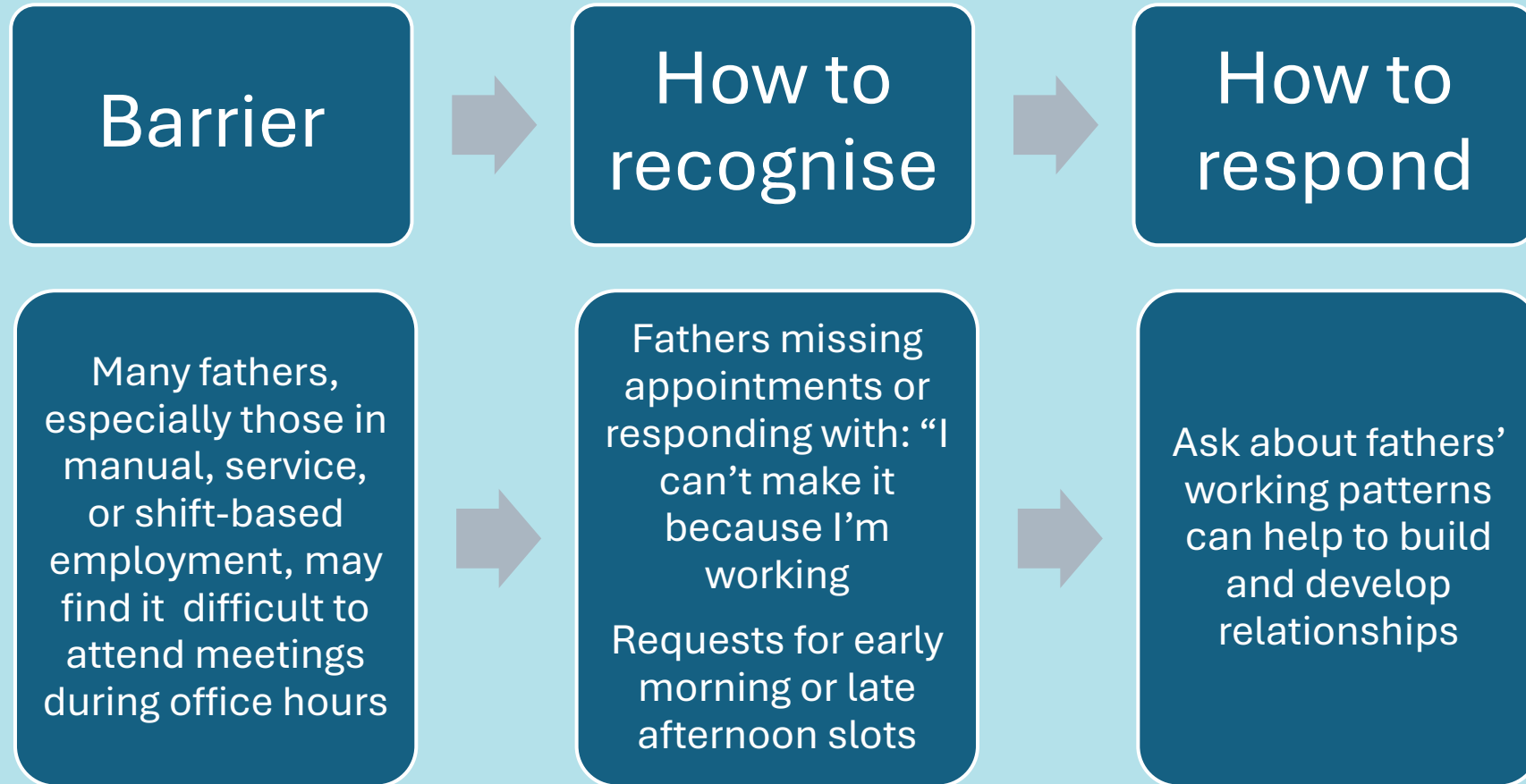
Sounds fantastic. I think my partner is struggling to be honest but he wouldn't say anything so I'll make sure to pass your information on" – Mum, Family Hubs Stay and Play

I'd be really interested in getting involved with the walk and talks when baby is here, I was quite isolated after my first one so sounds really good" – Expecting Dad, Antenatal Clinic, Warrington Hospital

I've got a lot going on at the moment, had a terrible 12 months with my own health and now with baby on the way I'll definitely be in touch if I need it" – Expecting Dad, Antenatal Consultant Clinic, Halton Hospital

It's a bit frustrating really, since I went back to work my wife has been going to the hub stuff but I've not been able to so I've been a bit worried about it so I'll keep an eye out for anything I can get involved in" – Dad, 1yo, Health Visitor Clinic Runcorn

Practice Guides





SHORT BREAK FATHER'S INCLUSION CHECKLIST

When fathers are fully involved, children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) experience better behavioural, emotional, and social outcomes. Research shows that dads' participation reduces stress, strengthens family resilience, and improves children's wellbeing. This checklist helps ensure dads are recognised, supported, and included at every key point in the child's journey.

Developing Father-Inclusive Practice in Halton: Halton Borough Council

Halton Borough Council has developed a comprehensive strategy to embed father-inclusive practice across its Family Hubs and partner services. Recognising fathers as vital caregivers, the initiative promotes inclusive language, tailored service design, staff training, and community collaboration. The strategy includes flexible programming, digital engagement, and policy reform to improve access and outcomes.

Developing Father-Inclusive Practice in Halton: Halton Borough Council | Local Government Association

**"Can you tell me about your relationship
with your child and what being a dad
means to you?"**

*This helps understand the father's role, his perspective,
and how he sees himself in the
child's life.*

**"What kind of father do you want to be?
What support do you feel you need to be
the parent you want to be?"**

*This invites fathers to express any challenges or unmet
needs, acknowledging their
aspirations, strengths and areas for support.*

"How are you doing at the moment,?"

*This checks in on their emotional well-being and
explores any barriers, such as mental
health, work, or relationship issues.*

**"Who are the most
important men in your
life?"**

What's next?

The screenshot shows a checklist from 'dads included' (a Fatherhood Institute initiative). The title is 'Unit 3: Environment'. The text states: 'Your agency's services are delivered in physical settings which give a strong impression of being shared male/female spaces and help local fathers feel welcome and valued'. Below this is a table with four columns: 'Not Met', 'Just Started', 'Making Good Progress', and 'Confidently Met'. There is one row for 'Requirements' with a checkbox in the 'Not Met' column. The text below the table says: 'All your agency's service settings have a prominently displayed charter describing your commitment to father inclusiveness, within the context of a safe and confidential service.' There are also fields for 'Summary of Evidence' and 'Date'.

	Not Met	Just Started	Making Good Progress	Confidently Met
Requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Review the outcome of the Children's Services thematic review, implement the recommendations

Train the next cohort of Fatherhood Champions, with an emphasis on Children's Social Care

Strengthen data capture to monitor effectiveness of engagement i.e. system currently doesn't generate reports by gender

Capture the voice of fathers through film

Publish our podcasts