

Norfolk Fathers in sight

Project Outline

Introduction and Background

The National Child Safeguarding Review Panel report [*The Myth of Invisible Men*](#), published September 2021, outlined the pressing need for all organisations working with children and families to engage with fathers and father figures more effectively.

“It is the recommendation of this review that all local safeguarding partnerships respond comprehensively to these challenges and develop local strategies and action plans to support improved practice and effective service responses.”

This resonates with the repeated learning from local Serious Case Reviews, Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Norfolk report on Non-Accidental Injuries to infants. The NSCP agreed at Partnership Group October meeting to develop a strategic approach with the aim to implement a father inclusive strategy across the whole partnership to improve the engagement of fathers in Universal, Early Help and Specialist Children’s Services. This approach will be led by the Safeguarding Intelligence and Performance Coordinator for the partnership mark.osborn@norfolk.gov.uk and will require engagement and participation from all organisations working to support children, families and adults.

Principles:

Child-centred approach

The work developed within this project will be child centred and focused on improving the health, well-being and safety of the children of Norfolk. All work will be aligned to the eight FLOURISH principles developed by the Norfolk children and Young People’s Strategic Alliance:

- Family and friends - Children and young people are safe, connected and supported through positive relationships and networks
- Learning - Children and young people are achieving their full potential and developing skills which prepare them for life
- Opportunity - Children and young people develop as well-rounded individuals through access to a wide range of opportunities which nurture their interests and talents
- Understood - Children and young people feel listened to, understood and part of decision-making processes
- Resilience - Children and young people have the confidence and skills to make their own decisions and take on life’s challenges
- Individual - Children and young people are respected as individuals, confident in their own identity and appreciate and value their own and others’ uniqueness



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- Safe and secure - Children and young people are supported to understand risk and make safe decisions by the actions that adults and children and young people themselves take to keep them safe and secure
- Healthy - Children and young people have the support, knowledge and opportunity to lead their happiest and healthiest lives.

Equality and diversity

This project will demonstrate commitment to equalities and diversity acknowledging the diverse needs and experience of families and the cultural competence that is necessary to promote inclusivity. There is great diversity in fathers, their roles, their experiences and their needs, and the approach of this work will reflect this.

Work carried out within this project will have a strong focus on achieving and promoting gender equality. This will include working towards the reduction of violence against women and girls as well as the harm to infants as outlined in *The Myth of Invisible Men* report. This work will build on the ethos recognised in the Ofsted 2014 thematic report on Serious Case Reviews that “the father is as important as the mother”¹ and challenge “limitations of approaches that may over-responsibilise mothers and fail to hold fathers’ accountable”². Stakeholder involvement and the voice of parents will prioritise the voices of mothers as well as fathers.

Father inclusive practices

This project will aim to develop and promote father inclusive practices in all organisations and across the partnership. The work will focus on greater appreciation of fathers and their roles and influence within the lives of children in all safeguarding practices and will prioritise this as mainstream and core practice of the whole partnership workforce rather than additional area of work requiring specialist knowledge and expertise. The work to address father inclusivity will take a systemic approach and the objectives below will be addressed using four interconnected tiers as outlined in *The Myth of Invisible Men* report:

1. Focus on the work of front-line staff to better understand men’s histories and contexts.
2. Use that understanding to conduct detailed and specific assessments and set out programmes of work with fathers.
3. Supervisors, first line managers and quality assurance processes to routinely focus on the issues set out in the report.

¹ [Ages of concern: learning lessons from serious case reviews. A thematic report of Ofsted’s evaluation of serious case reviews from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2011](#)

² Philip, G. et al. (2020). *I Had No Hope, I Had No Help at All: Insights from a First Study of Fathers and Recurrent Care Proceedings* Societies.

4. Safeguarding partners and system leaders address a series of challenges to improve local provision and practice responses to men who might present a risk to babies.

Alignment to existing practice

This project will support and augment existing NSCP work and will coordinate with the existing strategic priorities. The work will be structured to support and enhance the family network approach to achieve improved outcomes for children. Improved engagement, challenge and support to fathers will positively impact on parental conflict and significantly contribute to the Every Relationship Matters in Norfolk agenda. The project will seek to work with and enhance existing work with fathers in Norfolk (e.g. Dads Matter). The project will liaise closely with the Communications Safeguarding Group. In line with the conclusions of the national panel report, the project lead will bring a father inclusive focus to Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

Project strategic aims and objectives

Aim: Implement a father inclusive strategy across the whole partnership to raise the visibility of fathers and improve the engagement of fathers in Universal, Early Help and Specialist Children's Services.

Objectives

The objectives below are extracted from the national report and will be approached using the four interconnected tiers as described above:

- 1. Develop ante- and post-natal health provision to fully include fathers and to include extra support to those who need it and increase their ability to early identify risk factors**

Research identifies perinatal period and impending fatherhood as a 'reachable moment' for engaging with fathers. This provides the opportunity to address the inequality which expects women to take a disproportionate responsibility for children and to increase both the involvement of and expectations on men to assume more responsibility. Practice needs to address men's understanding of the emotional and developmental needs of babies and children and to help them explore their views or gaps in their knowledge about what good parenting looks like.

- 2. Ensure a greater integration of children's and adult service provision, especially adult mental health and substance misuse services**

The DfE Family Safeguarding Evaluation report July 2020 (Rodger et. al. 2020) notes that "multi-disciplinary working – and specifically the integration of specialist adult workers within social work teams – is the foremost success factor of Family

Safeguarding”. Facilitating better linkage through this work will strengthen our family networking approach

3. Integrate response to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, how they will ensure a focus on the risks to babies and children and how they will work with perpetrators

The Myth of invisible men report notes that more needs to be done in work with perpetrators when they are fathers: “The need to challenge men about their behaviour and the risk they pose to adults, which underpins domestic abuse perpetrator programmes, is not consistently replicated in challenging them as fathers. Equally, we found little evidence across the system that mothers were proactively supported to keep both themselves and their children safe, although it is clear they are expected to do so.”

4. Ensure that children’s social care lead on the development of practice that improves the engagement and assessment of men involved in children in need, child protection and children in care services

“It is one of the recurrent themes of this review that engagement with fathers is characterised by shallow assessments and weak engagement – services do not know who they are nor the risks they present with nearly enough regularity.”

5. Develop leaving care services to ensure they address the need for preparation and support for parenthood

The Panel sees too many care leavers having difficulties as (often very young) parents and there is a national need for the care system to focus on preparing young people for parenthood in the same way as it is charged to prepare them for adulthood.

6. Promote father inclusive practices in all partner agencies and across the partnership

- Review and “father-proof” local priority action plans and relevant policies
- Develop and promote guidance notes with clear instruction of what to consider and how to promote father inclusive practice. This will enable clarity about teams’ and individuals’ role and purpose.
- Support the development of effective performance management approach to inclusive practice including improved data collection and management.

7. Investment in the voice of the father

Consult with local fathers to inform the development of practice in Norfolk and produce primary source material for training staff.

8. Increase visibility of positive and inclusive messages and information to fathers

Nearly 50% of the non-accidental injury cases considered as part of the review were only ever known to universal services and it is therefore essential to promote public health messages to fathers, increase the visibility of fatherhood within communities and ensure that access to support is increased.

9. Evaluate impact, evidence and promote good practice

This project will include both formative and summative to help to develop the path of the work and measure impact. This will facilitate the development of a sustainable approach to creating greater inclusion of fathers in multi-agency safeguarding practices.

Leadership and Governance

The development and delivery of this project will be led by the NSCP Business Unit. The project lead is a member of the three strategic priority groups (Neglect Steering Implementation Group, Vulnerable Adolescent Group, Protecting Babies Steering Group) and will ensure alignment and coordinated activity with all of these. Project progress will be reported on a four monthly cycle to the NSCP Partnership Group.

Governance of the work will be managed through reporting to NSCP Partnership Group but the development and progress will be supported and guided by:

1. an advisory group utilising local and national expertise and a stakeholder group of fathers. The former group will meet virtually twice a year and membership of this group includes:
 - **Mark Gurrey**, author of the Myth of Invisible Men report
 - **Jeremy Davies**, from Fatherhood Institute and author of the literature review for the report
 - **Prof Eileen Munro**, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy in the Department of Social Policy and author of 2011 Munro Review of Child Protection
 - **Prof Jonathan Scourfield**, Cardiff University Professor of Social Work and Deputy Director of CASCADE, the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre.
 - **Prof Marian Brandon**, Emeritus Professor of School of Social Work with expertise in Child and family social work; child abuse and inter-agency working.
 - **Dr Gavin Swann**, Integrated Service Manager for Kent County Council Children Social Work Services, PhD thesis 'Breaking down Barriers; Developing an Approach to Include Fathers within Children's Social Care'
 - **Owen Thomas** Head of Programmes (Fathers)/ Interim CEO of Future Men. Future Men currently acts as secretariat for the APPG for Fatherhood
 - A representative from each of the three statutory partners in Norfolk
2. A stakeholder group made up of Norfolk fathers meeting on a quarterly basis
3. Organisational father inclusive practice advocates. This role will be a link for the organisation to learn from others, share good practice across the partnership and within their organisation. The amount of capacity required to make necessary change within organisations will depend upon different the roles and practices of those agencies, but this is not developing a new area of work, it is looking at how we can effectively facilitate good practice when



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working with children and families. Advocates will take on a role of promoting positive changes within their organisation, identifying and exploring barriers to inclusion and to change, as well as sharing knowledge and good practice with other organisations. Advocates will be expected to attend a one hour briefing session and then will be offered a range of additional optional sessions on specific themes. Regular practice sharing sessions will be arranged for partners to opt into.

Project delivery

Project plan	
Stage 1 Preparation	Understanding the issue including briefing sessions exploration of barriers, establishing stakeholders (including Fathers, Organisation advocates, Advisory group) to guide and support the project
Stage 2 Building strong foundations	Clarifying and measuring baseline data, father proofing policies and procedures, Good practice guidance documents
Stage 3 Delivery	Range of learning opportunities, regular comms to professionals and public
Stage 4 Evaluation	Evaluate progress and adapt according to findings
Stage 5 Delivery	Refresh comms and learning opportunities
Stage 6 Closure	Evaluation and sustainability strategy

Measuring Impact

This project will seek to develop evidence of impact and positive outcomes including statistical data to evidence father inclusive practices.

Anticipated outcomes will include:

- Fathers are present and positively active in conferences, meetings and reviews
- Fathers and mothers report positive experience of paternal perinatal experience
- Service provision evidences the voice of fathers in feedback, design and evaluation
- Care leavers understand the impact of parenthood and are confident about options and support
- Evidence of improved linkage between Adult Services and Childrens Social Care