

# Are we nearly there yet, Dad?

Supporting young  
dads' journeys  
through fatherhood

Believe in  
children



Barnardo's

**F** FAMILY  
STRATEGIC  
PARTNERSHIP

Supported by:



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## ► Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the expert advice and enthusiastic commitment of our steering group, made up of the following organisations:



The young fathers' journeys in this report are based on case studies provided by these members of our steering group:

- Nick's journey – Working with Men
- Luke's journey – Barnardo's BabyFather Initiative
- Dominic's journey – Timescapes, Young Lives and Times project, University of Leeds
- Ethan's journey – YoungDads.TV
- Darren's journey – Timescapes, Young Lives and Times project, University of Leeds
- Jon's journey – Safe Ground

## ► About the FSP

The Family Strategic Partnership (FSP) is a consortium of four organisations (Barnardo's, Action for Prisoners' Families, Children England and The Family and Parenting Institute) that have come together to share their vision and experience in the family voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSES). The FSP is led by Barnardo's and works in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) and the VCSES across England.

## Introduction

In June 2012, the Family Strategic Partnership convened a group of leading fathers' organisations and academics to highlight the needs and experiences of young fathers aged 16 to 24 in England, and the joint role of statutory and voluntary services in supporting them. This report illustrates six young fathers' journeys through service provision, based on the experiences of the young men that the steering group organisations work with. The journeys reveal the blockages that can occur when insufficient support is available, and the opportunities that arise when services respond to young fathers effectively.

The best practice examples in this report emphasise that the most significant change statutory services can make is an attitudinal shift; from focusing solely on the mother and baby to enquiring about the father and what his needs might be. Research has shown time and again that fathers' engagement with their children, particularly in the early years, significantly improves outcomes for both them and their children.<sup>1</sup> Yet organizations supporting young fathers are often working against a culture where fathers are not valued or even considered by many commissioners and providers. There are key points at which intervention with young fathers in

particular is proven to be most effective, for example as soon as they find out about the pregnancy, or while they are still engaged in education. There are also key points at which intervention with young fathers in particular is proven to be most effective, for example in the period immediately following conception or while they are still engaged in education.<sup>2</sup> The family voluntary sector has an important role to play in working with statutory services to raise awareness of young fathers' needs, and offer referral routes to the additional support that they may require. This report does not seek to place new burdens on statutory services, but looks at how mainstream services can tailor the support they provide, so that it better meets young fathers' needs. It makes the case for an integrated approach to supporting young dads, with support from different agencies brokered through a lead professional within each local authority area.

## Policy context

Both the previous and the current Government have made efforts to promote the role of fathers in children's lives, and consider service provision and policy initiatives in relation to fathers. Initiatives such as the *Think Fathers* campaign<sup>3</sup> have been supported by fathers' organizations that recognise the need for all services working closely with mothers to, at the very least, keep fathers in mind. While the Coalition Government has committed to many initiatives supporting the role of parents, relationships and the early years, there remains a lack of focus on fathers as a distinct policy area. This is reflected at local government level, as lead professionals for young fathers are rare and data on the number of young fathers in each local area is not collected.

Current government policy relating to fathers broadly falls into two categories: parenting and care and parental rights. There have been a number of policies

1 See for example: Sarkadi A; Kristiansson R; Oberklaid F; and Bremberg S (2008) 'Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: a systematic review of longitudinal studies', *Acta Paediatrica* Vol. 97 (2), pp. 153-8; Flouri E and Buchanan A, (2004) Early father's and mother's involvement and child's later educational outcomes, *The British Journal Of Educational Psychology* Vol. 74 (2), pp. 141-53; Carlson, M (2006); Family structure, father involvement, and adolescent behavioral outcomes, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 68 (1), pp. 137-154.  
2 Weinman, M; Buzi, R; and Smith, P (2007) A comparison of three groups of young fathers and program outcomes, *School Social Work Journal* Vol. 32 (1), pp. 1-13.  
3 For more information about the Think Fathers campaign (accessed 19.11.12).  
<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2009/about-the-think-fathers-campaign/> (accessed 22/11/12)



relating to parental care (particularly in the early years) over the past decade. The introduction of children's centres in the early 2000s created a vehicle for continued and focused interaction with young families for the first time. Parenting and family support remains one of the key services underpinning the core purpose of children's centres as revised in 2012.<sup>4</sup> Children's centres have often taken the lead in pioneering ways to engage fathers, such as through Saturday 'dads' clubs' or activity-orientated play days for fathers and children.

Based on evidence from a number of commissioned reviews, the Coalition Government has placed a particular emphasis on early intervention as a means to promote better outcomes later in life.<sup>5</sup> This underpins much of the Government's recent policy-making including:

- the extension of the free early education entitlement from 12.5 to 15 hours, and also to the most disadvantaged two-year-olds
- CANParent pilots launched in May 2012, which offer free universal vouchers to access £100 worth of parenting classes
- relationship support pilots which will offer subsidised counselling and advice services for new parents to help them adjust to family life.

Policy focused on parental rights has also been extensive over the past decade. Paternity leave was introduced in the UK for the first time in 2003, and was later backed up by fathers receiving the right to take up to six months of unpaid leave during their child's first five years. Since April 2011, fathers and mothers have been able to share some of the 52 weeks' existing leave, with the father able to take up to six months, from when the baby is 20 weeks old. The Coalition Government

has recently proposed greater flexibility through legislation to be introduced from 2015, which would allow mothers to return to work two weeks after giving birth and share the remaining 50 weeks of parental leave between parents as they choose.

Despite these policies, too often fathers are still marginalised or ignored by mother-centred services. Even some services which appear to be father-friendly can attempt to make men behave more like mothers rather than encouraging a separate identity and role for fathers in their own right. The most successful family policies recognise that dads are both important and different from mothers. Child outcomes must remain at the centre of initiatives such as parenting and relationship support, and their success depends on the engagement of dads as well as mums.

## Young fathers' journeys

In this section we outline six young fathers' journeys as they make the transition to fatherhood. In each journey, the fathers come into contact with different statutory and voluntary services and encounter both barriers and support along the way.

Common themes throughout the six journeys are that the young fathers:

- are coping with complex identity changes
- often experience significant financial hardship
- require legal advice to maintain contact with their child
- benefit from relationship support to maintain contact with the mother
- need parenting advice as much as mothers, but tailored to a male audience.

These journeys illustrate the points in young fathers' lives at which intervention is most effective in terms of positive outcomes for them and their children, as well as the implications of not intervening, or leaving it too late. They reveal the complex and often challenging relationships between maternal and paternal grandparents, their children and their grandchildren, which can act

as barriers to support for young fathers.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the journeys highlight what previous research has shown: that becoming a father offers opportunities, not just obstacles. Statutory services can facilitate access to the range of available support for young dads, as well as instigating much needed culture change within their services. The voluntary sector is particularly good at helping fathers stay on track with education, employment and training (EET) by addressing the multiple factors that may underlie disengagement. In addition, the voluntary sector often offers informal support to enable young parents to maintain contact for the sake of their children. This encourages them to focus on their individual roles as parents, even when they are no longer in a couple relationship. Previous research<sup>7</sup> and the case studies here show that supporting a positive father-mother relationship where possible has a significant impact on outcomes for children.

- 1 **Nick's journey:** maternity services
- 2 **Luke's journey:** children's centres
- 3 **Dominic's journey:** school support
- 4 **Ethan's journey:** access to information
- 5 **Darren's journey:** housing support
- 6 **Jon's journey:** leaving custody

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education and Department of Health (2012) *Supporting Families in the Foundation Years*.  
<sup>5</sup> Field, F. (2010) *The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults* (HM Government); Allen, G. (2011) *Early Intervention: the next steps* (HM Government); Tickell, C. (2011) *The Early Years: Foundations for life health and learning*.

<sup>6</sup> Lau Clayton, C and Neale, B (2013 forthcoming) 'Young Parenthood and Cross Generational Relationships: The perspectives of young fathers' In Holland, J. and Edwards, R (eds.) *Understanding Families over Time: Research and Policy* London: Palgrave.  
<sup>7</sup> See for example: Dunn J; Cheng H; O'Connor TG; Bridges L (2004) Children's perspectives on their relationships with their non-resident fathers: influences, outcomes and implications, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, Vol. 4 (3), pp. 553-66; Flouri, E and Buchanan, A, (2004) Early father's and mother's involvement and child's later educational outcomes, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 74 (2), pp. 141-53; Carlson, M (2006) Family structure, father involvement, and adolescent behavioral outcomes, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 68 (1), pp. 137-154; Martin, A; Ryan, R; Brooks-Gunn; J, The joint influence of mother and father parenting on child cognitive outcomes at age 5, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* Vol. 22 (4), pp. 423-439.





## ► 1. Young dads and maternity services

*The Fatherhood Institute*<sup>8</sup> highlights many of the issues faced by young expectant fathers, where both gender and age can act as barriers to gaining the support they need from health services. Staff training and development leads to greater support for fathers-to-be and new fathers. However in the context of NHS cuts to maternity services, such training is rare. While local teenage pregnancy teams are often attune to young fathers' needs, universal maternity services may exclude young men due to lack of staff awareness and resources.<sup>9</sup> A review of US and UK research studies found young fathers often have limited or no contact with midwives, health visitors and social workers.<sup>10</sup> GPs, midwives and health visitors naturally prioritise mother and baby health, however by ignoring the role of the father during pregnancy they miss a crucial opportunity to support positive outcomes for the whole family.<sup>11</sup> By assessing young fathers' needs at this early stage, services equip them to support their children in the long term. Midwives and health visitors are also important referrers to voluntary sector support, but they need to be aware of what services are available in the local area.

### Good practice example

Working with Men is a UK charity that provides support, information and advice to professionals, local authorities and Government as well as men and their families. The charity's Expectant Fathers Programme<sup>12</sup> is an evidence based course that is delivered in hospitals and children's centres across England. The programme aims to build new fathers' confidence, particularly in terms of their role, their

skills, and their ability to support their partner and baby. The programme includes an opportunity to ask questions of an experienced midwife, enabling fathers to engage more actively in the pregnancy and understand that they have an important role to play. Young dads have fed back that they appreciate the opportunity to ask questions without their partner present, and focus on the concerns they have about preparing for fatherhood.

### Recommendations for maternity services

- 1a) Maternity services should record the father's details during pregnancy to encourage attitudes and service models that are inclusive of fathers.
- 1b) Maternity services should work with the voluntary sector to provide young dads with better preparation for becoming a father, for example by introducing Expectant Fathers Programmes and peer led ante-natal classes such as the Fatherhood Institute's Hit the Ground Crawling programme.<sup>13</sup>
- 1c) Maternity services should work with their local children's centres to offer a paediatric first aid course to all young dads.
- 1d) Maternity services should record the father's details during pregnancy.
- 1e) Health visiting services should investigate creating a memorandum of understanding with their local children's centres to share their knowledge of local need and ensure new families are always registered by health professionals with a local children's centre.<sup>14</sup> ◀

8 Fatherhood Institute Research Summary: Young Fathers, December 2010, available online <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-young-fathers/> Accessed 22/11/12

9 Pollock, S; Trew, R; and Jones, K (2005) *Young black fathers and maternity services*. Fathers Direct, London.

10 Bunting, L; and McAuley, C (2004b). Teenage pregnancy and parenthood: the role of fathers. *Child and Family Social Work*, 9(3), pp. 295-303.

11 Lloyd, T. (2010) *Young Fathers and Midwives: An Opportunity Missed?*, available online at <http://www.boysdevelopmentproject.org.uk/downloads/reports/999> (accessed 22/11/12)

12 See Expectant Fathers Programme [http://www.workingwithmen.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=72&Itemid=68](http://www.workingwithmen.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=72&Itemid=68) (accessed 22/11/12)

13 For more information see <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/hit-the-ground-crawling> (accessed 22.11.12).

14 For example, Northumberland Sure Start Children's Centres and Northumbria Healthcare NHS foundation Trust Health Visiting Service launched a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in July 2012 to ensure a shared understanding of local community need, enabling them to target their resources effectively to meet these. For more information see [http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=6270&id=2131&utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+nccnews%28Northumberland+News%29](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=6270&id=2131&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+nccnews%28Northumberland+News%29)





# Nick's journey

Nick became a father when he was 17 and still at school. He became isolated and depressed when the baby's mother wouldn't let him see his child, and found it difficult to reason with her or her family. The charity working with Men mediated between the two sets of grandparents, offering Nick one to one support and a place on an Expectant Fathers Course to help him adjust to parenthood.

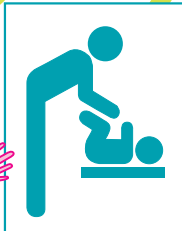
Start

Age 17

Nick and his girlfriend find out they're going to have a baby, and their relationship breaks down during the pregnancy. After his child is born Nick becomes withdrawn because his ex-girlfriend and her family won't let him see his daughter. He is referred to Working with Men (WWM) by his sixth form teacher who sees he needs support.



WWM put Nick on an Expectant Fathers Course which allows him to meet other young fathers, learn about the practicalities of parenting and get advice from a midwife. Nick becomes more determined to see his daughter and develops his confidence to speak up at meetings about his situation.



Nick and his ex-girlfriend get back together. Her mother is angry about this and kicks her out of the family home. She and the baby go to stay with Nick and his mum. This causes further tension between the maternal and paternal grandparents. Nick and his girlfriend approach housing services for support and the mother and baby are placed in a mother and baby unit. As Nick is aged under 18, he is allowed to visit but not live with them.

His support worker carries out an assessment of his needs and realises mediation is needed to enable the two families to talk. The maternal grandparents are resistant but eventually both families agree to attend a meeting supported by WWM. The young parents' families are heavily involved in the situation and become angry and upset with each other during the meeting. Eventually the maternal grandparents agree Nick can see the baby at specified times at their house.

Age 18

Nick is living at home with his parents while his partner is moved to semi-independent housing. She is struggling to cope and begins drinking heavily and having inappropriate relationships with other men. She is under social care supervision and there are concerns for her baby. At this time Nick is seeing his daughter weekly and looks after her at his parents' house.

Social services decide the baby needs to be taken into care after the mother goes missing and is found in a risky situation. The baby becomes a looked after child but stayed with the maternal grandmother, who becomes her primary carer.



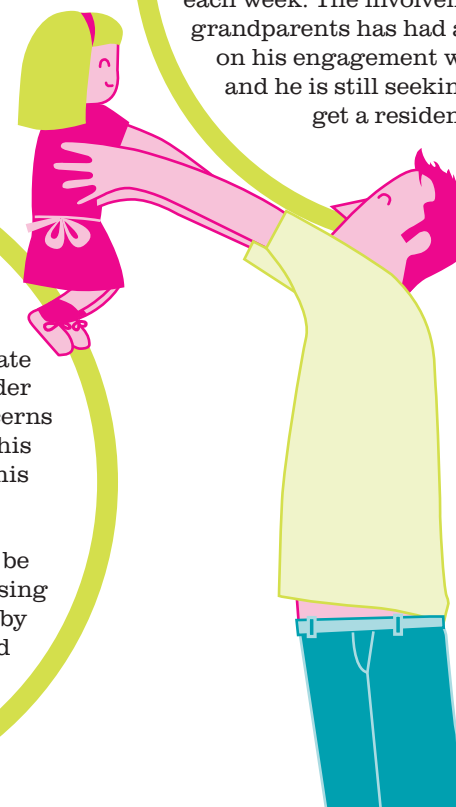
Nick wants his baby to live with him. Social services feel that he is too immature, isn't working regularly and lacks life skills. However he is looking after her for half the week without financial support. He is told that his daughter will stay with the maternal grandmother until she is 18. WWM helps him find a solicitor for advice.



End...

Age 19

Nick's daughter is two-and-a-half. His life has changed dramatically. He attends a young fathers group and has developed a commitment to fathers' rights issues. He didn't finish sixth form but started a training course to become a carpenter and has been employed for over a year. He has legal parental responsibility but only sees his daughter for one overnight stay each week. The involvement of the maternal grandparents has had a significant impact on his engagement with his daughter, and he is still seeking legal advice to get a residence order.





## ► 2. Young dads and children's centres

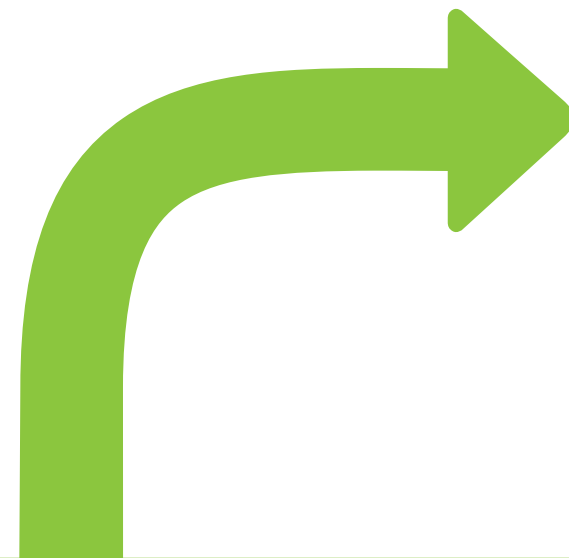
Sure Start children's centres are crucial early years settings that operate at the heart of local communities. Many have targets for engaging with dads, however there is no data on how many young dads they come into contact with. Some children's centres offer specific activities for fathers, such as paediatric first aid, parenting courses, football tournaments, and dad and baby days out. However in many cases, children's centres will only ever come into contact with the mother and child. Children's centres also refer fathers to the BabyFather Initiative's Fatherhood Parenting Programme.<sup>15</sup>

### Good practice example

**Barnardo's BabyFather Initiative** works with children's centres in London to provide training and consultancy services to professionals supporting children, families, men, fathers and male carers. The Fatherhood Training Programme is designed to increase professionals' understanding and confidence, providing practical skills while looking at social policy, legislation and the theory of fatherhood in the community. Children's Centres also refer fathers to the BabyFather Initiative's Fatherhood Parenting Programme. This ten week ASDAN accredited course enables dads to reflect on and evaluate their role and importance as fathers; demonstrate increased confidence to parent; and understand the various stages of child development. By working in partnership with the voluntary sector, children's centres have become more aware of young fathers' needs in their local areas, and have been able to offer them more targeted support in the children's centre setting.

### Recommendations for children's centres

- 2a) Children's centres should adopt a culture of asking about the father whenever they have contact with a mother, and keep a record of the young dads that do attend.
- 2b) Children's centres should refer on to voluntary sector services in the local area that are able to offer specialist support to young dads.
- 2c) Children's centres should not assume that young dads will want to attend the same groups as young mums, but instead introduce targeted activities such as dad and baby days out and sports events.
- 2d) Children's centres should introduce a weekly drop-in clinic for young dads to address parenting concerns. Staff at the clinic could also signpost the dads to additional support, for example with housing or employment.◀



<sup>15</sup> See Barnardo's BabyFather Initiative, <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/babyfather.htm> (accessed 22/11/12)





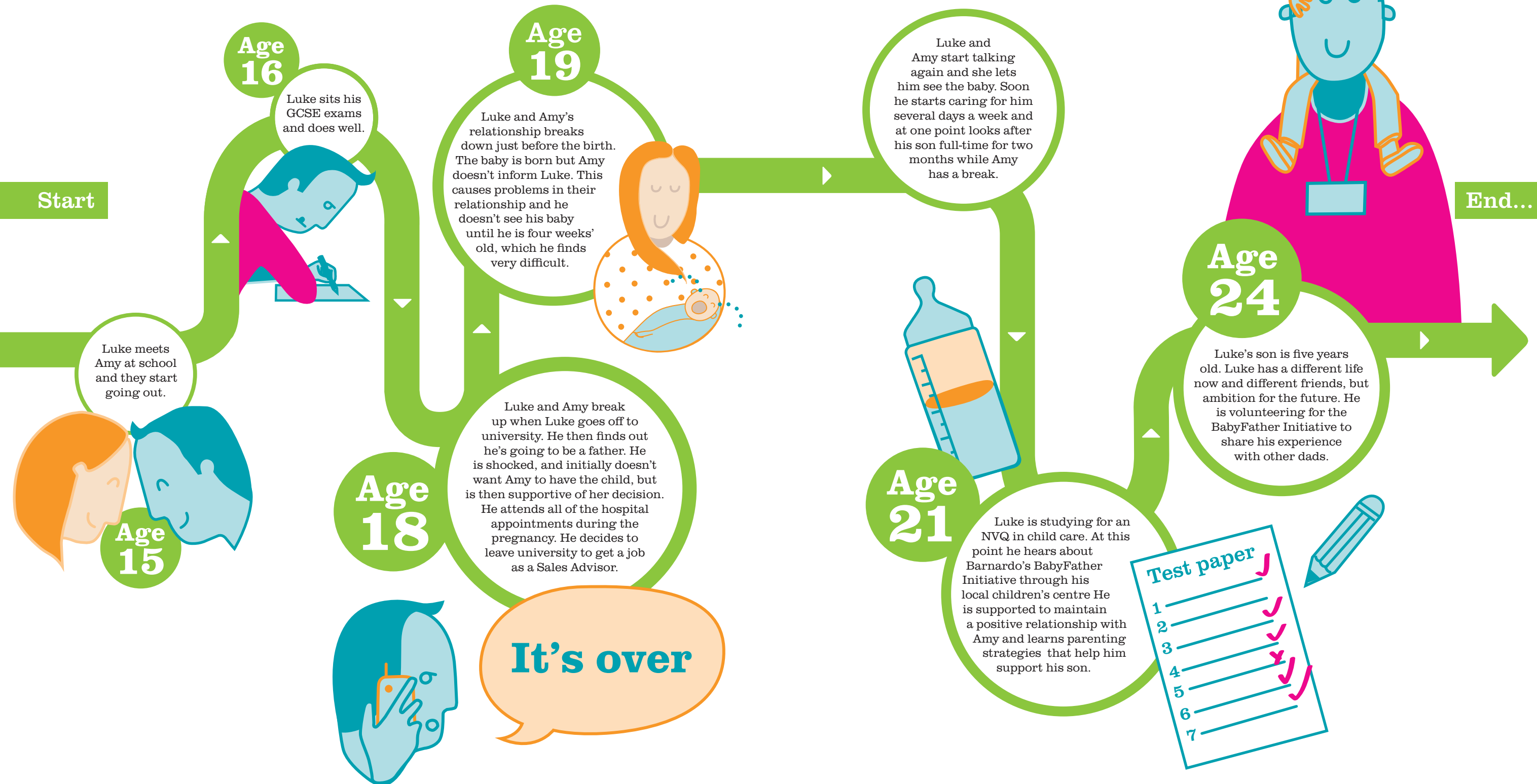


# Luke's journey

Luke was 18 and at university when he found out he was going to be a father. He heard about Barnardo's BabyFather Initiative through his local children's centre. BabyFather encourages responsible parenting amongst males in the UK, in particular those who are separated from their children. Barnardo's assists male carers to have better relationships with their children and significant others in their lives, and develops mediation and reconciliation initiatives.

Start

End...





### ► 3. Young dads in school

The total number of under-18 conceptions in England was 32,552 in 2010.<sup>16</sup> However there are no statistics to show the number of teenage fathers, and local authorities do not collect data on the number of young fathers in school. Boys who become fathers as teenagers have been found to be three times more likely than non-fathers to fail to complete secondary education, and also tend to be far less satisfied with their educational experience.<sup>17</sup> Yet research has also shown that school attendance can act as a protective factor, and the school years may be the optimal time to address a range of risk behaviours in young dads.<sup>18</sup> Teenage fathers are more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) than their peers, therefore school and local authority NEET prevention strategies must consider the specific needs of teenage fathers.

#### Good practice example

**Leeds City Council Children's Services Department** has learning mentors<sup>19</sup> who support teenage fathers in school. Typically a young dad will have an initial meeting with the learning mentor to look at his timetable to see when he might need to be away from class to attend antenatal appointments. Father support includes liaising with the father's family and a range of professionals, and a weekly after school group for young dads to offer peer support and address any education issues. The learning mentor discusses what each young father needs in terms of continuing his education, planning a career, and his role as a parent. Often the learning mentor will work to get young dads back on track where they have not been engaged with education for some time. For these young men becoming a father is a motivating factor for re-engaging, and there is evidence that young fathers benefit greatly from one to one emotional support provided by services such as this.<sup>20</sup>



#### Recommendations for schools

- 3a)** All schools should authorise absence for young dads to attend health appointments and allocate a member of staff to support each young father.
- 3b)** Schools need to intervene early, as soon as a young person finds out he's going to be a dad. The transition to fatherhood is a time when young men experience an increased sense of responsibility, greater ambition to achieve, as well as the need to provide financially. As such the point of entry into fatherhood can be when young men are most likely to engage in education, training or employment.<sup>21</sup>
- 3c)** The Government should introduce parenting education for all secondary school pupils. This would support the Government's aims of normalising support for parents, as well as supporting young parents who are still in school to gain parenting skills. ◀

<sup>16</sup> Office for National Statistics (2010) *Conception Statistics in England and Wales*. London: ONS.

<sup>17</sup> Fatherhood Institute Research Summary: Young Fathers, December 2010, available online <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-young-fathers/> Accessed 22/11/12

<sup>18</sup> Weinman, M; Buzi, R; and Smith, P (2007) 'A comparison of three groups of young fathers and program outcomes', *School Social Work Journal* Vol. 32 (1), pp. 1-13.

<sup>19</sup> Leeds Learning mentors were partners in an ESRC funded tracking study of young fatherhood conducted under the Timescapes research programme led by the University of Leeds, 2010-12. See [www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk) (accessed 22/11/12).

<sup>20</sup> Neale, B and Lau Clayton, C (2011) *Following Fathers: The lived experience of teenage parenting over time*, Timescapes Policy Briefing Paper Series. Timescapes, University of Leeds.

<sup>21</sup> Ross, N; Church, S; Hill, M, Seaman, M; and Roberts, T (2010) *The fathers of children born to teenage mothers: a study of processes within changing family formation practices*. Edinburgh: Children 1ST.





# Dominic's journey



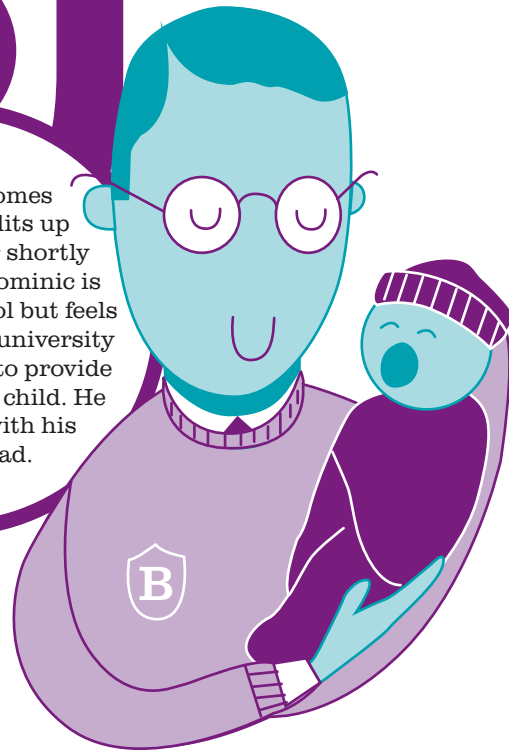
Dominic was 16 and studying for his exams when he found out he was going to be a father. He was supported by a specialist learning mentor at Education Leeds, to enable him to continue studying while making the transition to fatherhood.

Start

End...

Age 16

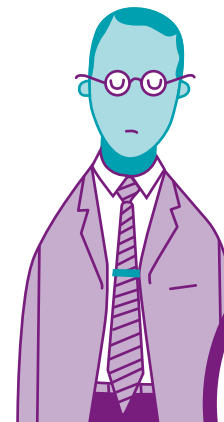
Dominic becomes a father. He splits up with his partner shortly after the birth. Dominic is doing well at school but feels like he can't go to university because he needs to provide financially for his child. He lives at home with his mum and dad.



Age 17

Dominic is introduced to a learning mentor at school, who helps him talk through his concerns about becoming a father. The learning mentor supports Dominic to adjust to being defined as a father as well as a young man, and having less freedom than his peers, which had led to anxiety and depression. Dominic needed guidance in the early stages to stick with the baby and get on with the mother in order to develop a relationship with his child.

National Bank



Age 18

Dominic starts working full time for a national bank. He struggles with feeling trapped in a job he doesn't want just to pay the bills. He still has ambitions for his life but doesn't know if he'll ever be able to fulfil them.

Age 19

Dominic had always wanted to go to university but had no knowledge of how to do so while also looking after his son. His learning mentor helped advise him and as a result he enrolled on a full time degree programme with the Open University.





## ► 4. Young dads and access to information

Based on the experience of fathers' organisations, young dads are more likely to access information to support their transition to fatherhood if services are recommended by word of mouth (for example by other fathers). In addition they will respond well to advice from other fathers their own age, who are able to convey their own experiences. In many local areas, young fathers have set up peer support groups which are held in children's centres and facilitated by the voluntary sector.

### Best practice example

**YoungDads.tv**<sup>22</sup> is the place for young fathers below the age of 25 from the UK to find help, watch films, and make friends. YoungDads.tv is run by Media for Development (a multi-award winning non-profit organisation) and funded by The Monument Trust. It brokers the relationship between local young dads peer support groups and children's centres, and set up the Council of Young Dads to advise on all of its activities.

YoungDads.tv's website offers four types of information and guidance specifically aimed at young dads (and developed with the Council of Young Dads):

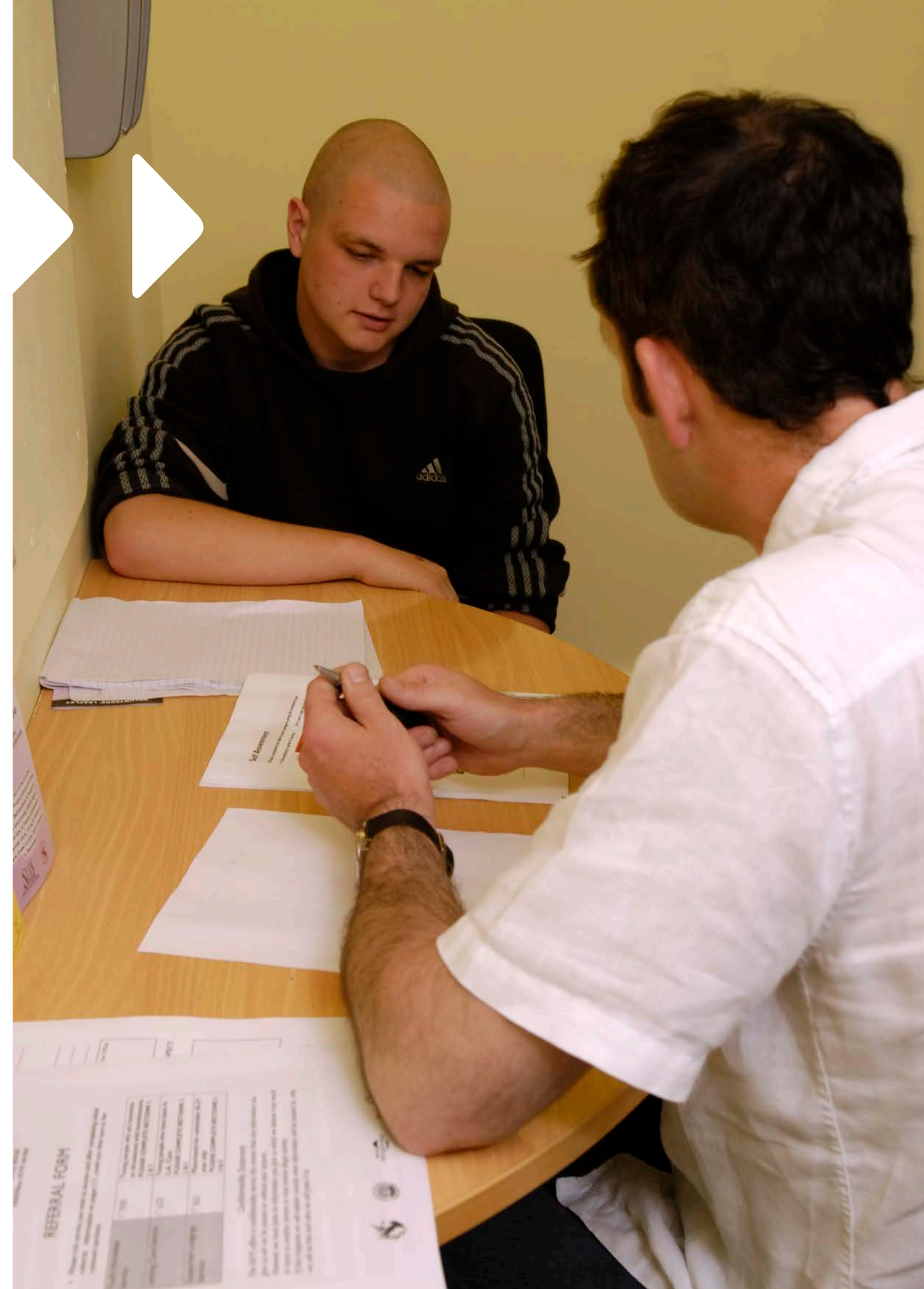
- **Me and My Dad:**  
a drama series about life as a young dad
- **Dads' Map:**  
for dads to enter a postcode and find parent support in their area. Currently the map lists all of the children's centres in the UK, with additional statutory and voluntary services to be added throughout 2013
- **Local Groups:**  
stories about local groups set up and run by young dads themselves

- **Council of Young Dads:**  
stories about the Council of Young Dads, the authentic voice of young dads in the UK.

YoungDads.tv is an example of an information and advice service specifically for young dads, which libraries, Job Centres and other information services can signpost on to.

### Recommendations for sign-posters

- 4a) Information and advice for young dads should be disseminated more widely and through diverse networks, including social media. This applies to Job Centres, libraries, shopping centres and children's centres, as well as to targeted information services such as the Department of Health's information service for parents.
- 4b) YoungDads.TV's directory of local voluntary sector organisations equipped to support young fathers should be promoted through the statutory services that come into contact with young fathers. ◀



22 See <http://youngdads.tv/> (accessed 22.11.12)





# Ethan's journey

Ethan was 19 and living at home with his mum when he found out he was going to be a dad. He didn't know what support was available in his area, and needed help to find flexible employment that allowed him to take care of his child. YoungDads.TV introduced him to his local children's centre and a young dad's support group. He is now 23 and his daughter's primary carer.

Start

Age 19

Ethan finds out he's going to be a dad, while living at home with his Mum. The pregnancy was an accident, but he and his partner decide to keep their child.

Ethan and his partner have a rocky relationship and split up soon after the baby is born. Ethan's partner is angry with him and decides that he shouldn't see his daughter. Ethan is angry about the break-up and about not seeing his child. He starts drinking heavily and finds it difficult to hold down jobs. His Mum is supportive, and continues to let him live with her.



After a few months, Ethan hears that his ex-partner has started seeing a new boyfriend and has become addicted to drugs. The baby is removed from the mother by social services and placed in the care of the maternal grandparents. After a while they meet with Ethan and tell him that they'd like him to start seeing his daughter.



Age 20

Social services refer Ethan to anger management support, which helps him a lot. Ethan starts to see his daughter every week. Ethan realises that his lifestyle has to change. His friends are still drinking and fighting, and several of them are in custody. Ethan decides to leave his friendship group for the sake of his child. This leaves him feeling isolated, but pleased that he is changing his life to be a better dad.

Ethan wants to become his daughter's primary carer, looking after her full time. Social services will only allow this if Ethan moves out of his Mum's house and gets a job (demonstrating that he can live independently and be responsible enough to look after his daughter). Ethan wants to preserve his time with his daughter, but is under pressure to find work.

Age 22

It takes a long year of juggling the needs of social services, the job centre, and employers, but Ethan finally manages to get his own place and secure full-time work as a security guard. With the help of his social worker, he is awarded full-custody of his daughter, who is now approaching her second birthday.

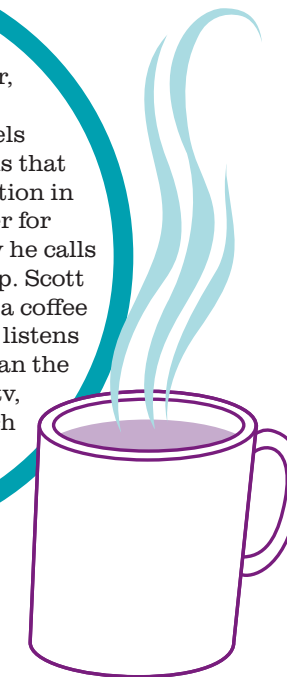
Age 21

Ethan begins to see more of his daughter, and within a few months is seeing her for three days a week. This is great, but he finds it difficult to find work to fit around child care. His Jobseeker's Allowance is small, and he's not his daughter's primary carer so cannot receive child support. It's difficult to meet the costs of looking after her.



Age 23

Life is complicated for Ethan and his daughter, but they are a happy and supportive family. Ethan feels increasingly isolated and thinks that he is the only father in his situation in the area, so when he sees a poster for 'YoungDads.tv' at the local library he calls the number to see if they can help. Scott at YoungDads.tv takes Ethan for a coffee to find out how he can help, and listens to his story. He then shows Ethan the 'Dads Map' on YoungDads.tv, which shows just how much support is available in the area.



End...

Scott walks Ethan round to the nearest children's centre, and Ethan finds out about stay-and-play sessions where he and his daughter can meet other parents and children from the area. Scott also connects Ethan with an informal peer support group run by and for young dads in the area.

Ethan realises that his experiences are really valuable for other dads who are going through the same thing, and that the other dads have great tips for free and cheap things to do in the area with their kids. Money is still tight for Ethan and his daughter, but now they feel as though they are valued members of their community.





## ► 5. Young dads and housing support

Many young fathers present to their local authority as homeless when they are no longer able to stay with their parents, or no longer able to afford to live independently. Homelessness legislation in England states that councils should consider anyone to be in priority need if they are responsible for dependent children who normally live with them (or would do were accommodation available).<sup>23</sup>

When young fathers have their children living with them on a part-time basis, decisions can become complicated, and the child's best interests are not necessarily considered. Furthermore, under Local Housing Allowance rules, single people aged under 35 who either do not have children or are not primary carers are normally assumed to be living in shared accommodation.<sup>24</sup> Children visiting or staying with young fathers in this situation could be put at risk, and many young fathers will be forced to find an alternative location at which to see their children. The young fathers' journeys in this report show that housing is central to their ability to look after and build a relationship with their children. When Nick and his partner approached housing services for support he was unable to stay with his partner and their baby. Luke looked after his baby in his home full-time for a period of three months, while Dominic lives with his parents and has his child for overnight stays. Ethan's baby lived with the maternal grandparents until he became the primary carer, and Darren, his partner and his baby shared temporary accommodation with a friend.

Councils must take a whole family approach to enable young parents to establish their own households. Young parents are often forced to live separately and decisions about where the baby stays are made by the maternal household in particular.

### Good practice example

**Leeds Housing Concern**<sup>25</sup> is a charity which responds to the needs of vulnerable homeless and disadvantaged young people and seeks to promote their greater social inclusion. Its specialist young person's project (YPP) provides fully furnished single bed accommodation and shared housing in one and two-bedroomed houses for young people aged between 16 and 25. All young people are allocated a key worker who will agree and coordinate a tailored support package. The key worker meets regularly with them on an individual basis and makes referrals as required to other agencies such as health, counselling, psychiatric, detox and advocacy services. The YPP also offers young people advice on benefit entitlement, job seeking, pregnancy and parenting. Referrals to the YPP are made by a wide range of voluntary and statutory organisations, and young people may use the service for up to six months.



### Recommendations for local authority housing services

- 5a) Housing should not be a barrier to a young father's ability to take care of his child. Local authorities should ensure that young fathers are classified as 'priority need' and allocated appropriate housing accordingly. In particular they should consider the best interests of the child when allocating housing to young fathers, and recognise the safeguarding implications of placing a young father in shared accommodation.
- 5b) Housing officers should record and identify young fathers, referring them on to voluntary sector support where available. ◀

<sup>23</sup> For more information see Shelter - Definition of Homelessness [http://england.shelter.org.uk/get\\_advice/homelessness/legal\\_definition\\_of\\_homelessness](http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/homelessness/legal_definition_of_homelessness) (accessed 22/11/12)

<sup>24</sup> For more information see DWP Local Housing Allowance Guidance <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/local-housing-allowance/> (accessed 22/11/12)

<sup>25</sup> For information see Leeds Housing Concern <http://www.leedshc.org.uk/en/scheme/lhc-ypp.aspx> (accessed 22.11.12).





# Darren's journey

Darren was 15 when he became a father and had been with his partner for a year. Darren is now 21 and has lived with his son and partner for the last four years. His story highlights the positive impact becoming a father can have on young men, as well as the pressures faced when young families cannot access independent housing.

Start

End...



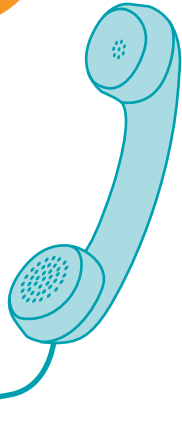
Age 14

Darren meets Emily at school.



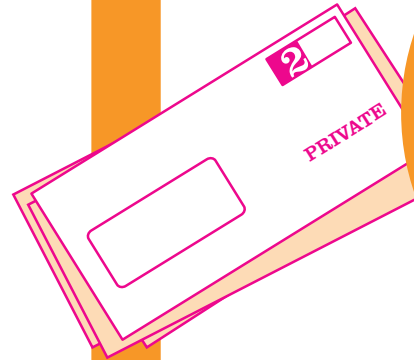
Age 15

Darren finds out he's going to be a dad.



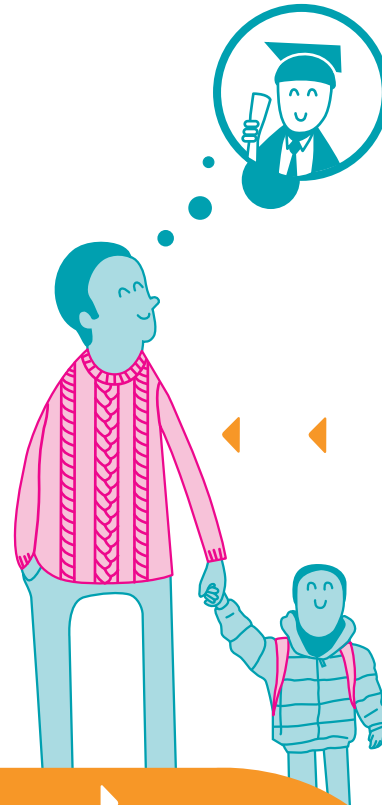
Age 17

A friend tells Darren about the Young Person's Housing Project run by a local charity. Darren moves in with his friend and redecorates to prepare for Emily and the baby. Darren has to learn how to live independently for the first time and sort out his rent and bills. The charity also helps Darren to access other services like the Job Centre.



Age 16

Darren, Emily and the baby are living with Darren's parents. Darren and his mum argue about how to look after the baby, and Darren and Emily's relationship suffers due to the lack of space.



Age 18

After 18 months sharing with a friend, Darren, Emily and the baby move into a two bedroom council house of their own. The house needs redecorating and refurnishing, so Darren uses his benefit payments and a loan from his dad to do this. Refurnishing was required by social services and leaves them in financial difficulty as they are already in debt. Having to use their benefits on furnishings meant going without food and electricity for a short period.



Age 21

Darren's son is now six years old and doing well at school. Darren is unemployed due to ill health but feels his role as provider is highly important and a part of responsible fatherhood duties. Darren views fatherhood as a wholly rewarding experience and identifies many positive aspects to being a young parent. Darren has high aspirations for his son's future. Despite not going to university himself, he hopes that his son will enter higher education one day.



## ► 6. Young dads in custody

There is no data to show the number of young fathers in custody in England, however the Ministry of Justice estimates that 53% of men in prison have a child, and that there are approximately 200,000 children of prisoners in England and Wales.<sup>26</sup> Last year there were 8,089 young men in custody aged 18 to 20, and a further 1,523 young men under the age of 18.<sup>27</sup> The Prison Reform Trust notes that:

► **No-one routinely monitors the parental status of prisoners in the UK or systematically identifies children of prisoners, where they live, or which services they are accessing; where this information is collected, it is patchy and not always shared. Prison governors receive no specific funding to meet the costs of family support work, parenting courses, family visitor centres or supervised play areas. This means any family provision must come from a governor's already stretched and shrinking general prison budget.**<sup>28</sup>

Many of the services available to young fathers in the community are not accessible for fathers in prison, including online information. Instead practitioners must visit them where they are. Cuts to family liaison and social work provision in young offenders' institutions have made this increasingly challenging. Research has shown that young offenders who are fathers are more likely to engage in parenting programmes while in prison than following release.<sup>29</sup> In addition, interventions that link young fathers to employment and community services as part of resettlement plans have been shown to prevent reoffending.<sup>30</sup>

### Good practice example

**Safe Ground**<sup>31</sup> works to reduce the risk of offending and reoffending based on a continually developing understanding of the origins and impact of crime and a commitment to empowering people to change, whether in prison or the community. Their prison programmes, Family Man and Fathers Inside, use drama, group work and communication skills to strengthen family ties, develop critical thinking and engage reluctant learners. Since 2003, Fathers Inside has been delivered in 37 prisons with over 2,000 men graduating from the programme and almost 5,000 qualifications awarded. The fundamental aim of Fathers Inside is to help prisoners contribute to society by teaching them how to support their children's education and upbringing, while they are in custody and after release.

### Recommendations for the Ministry of Justice, the Youth Justice Board and the National Offender Management Service

- 6a)** Systematic collection of data on the number of fathers in custody should be carried out routinely and that data made available to services seeking to support fathers in custody.
- 6b)** Tailored parenting programmes should be available to all fathers in the secure estate, taking a holistic family support approach.
- 6c)** Resettlement plans should include signposting to relevant support services for fathers including at children's centres.
- 6d)** Currently mothers under the age of 18 are not allowed to visit a partner in prison without an adult present. This restricts the amount of contact a young father has with both his partner and his child and should be reviewed.
- 6e)** Information for prisoners about how to make contact and arrange visits with the mother and their child should include advice on the impact of not maintaining contact on future relationships, and their children's outcomes. ◀



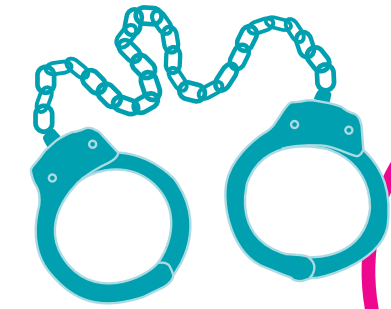
<sup>26</sup> Prison Reform Trust (2012) *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile* – July 2012, Prison Reform Trust <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/FactfileJune2012.pdf> (accessed 22/11/12)  
<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Justice (2012) *Monthly data and analysis custody report September 2012*, available at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/statistics/mojstats/omsq-2001/omsq-q3-2011-prison-population-tables.xls> (accessed 19.11.12).  
<sup>28</sup> Prison Reform Trust (2012) *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile* – July 2012, Prison Reform Trust <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/FactfileJune2012.pdf> (accessed 22/11/12)  
<sup>29</sup> Meek, R. (2007) Parenting education for young fathers in prison, *Child and Family Social Work*, Vol. 12, pp. 239–247.  
<sup>30</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending in ex-prisoners*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.  
<sup>31</sup> For more information about Safe Ground <http://www.safeground.org.uk/gallery/family-man-and-fathers-inside/> (accessed 22/11/12)





# Jon's journey

Jon was 17 when he found out he was going to be a dad. He had left school without qualifications and was unable to find work. After getting in with the wrong crowd, he ended up in a young offenders' institution and needed help. Safe Ground's Fathers Inside Programme supported him to find a way through his struggles and plan for his future as a father.



Start

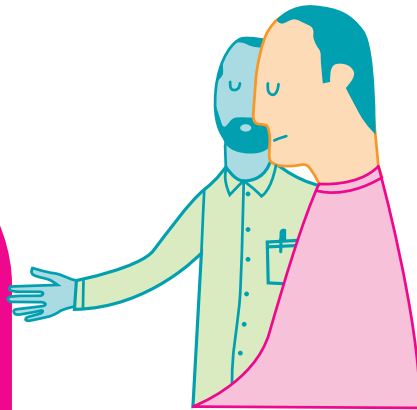
Age 17

Jon finds out he's going to become a dad. He's no longer in a relationship with the mother of the baby. Although he would like to support the mother during her pregnancy, he has become demotivated by being unsure what support he can provide and by his poor relationship with her family. He withdraws and she is frustrated. He has left school but, like most of his peer group, is unable to find employment. He is serving a community order for Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) and criminal damage. The mother of his baby is angry with him for being 'irresponsible' and having 'anger management' issues.



Age 18

Jon is in a young offenders' institution. He has not made contact with his child's mother since her initial refusal to visit him and is struggling with conflict around wanting to maintain any contact with his child and feeling unable to adjust to being a 'father'.



Job Centre

Age 19

Jon is referred to Safe Ground's Fathers Inside programme by his offender supervisor, who thinks it would help to meet Jon's needs and enable him to progress through his sentence plan.

Age 20

Jon takes part in Fathers Inside, reluctantly. He is not convinced it will be of any use at all. Despite his initial resistance, Jon meets other guys he relates well to and starts to develop new skills through participating in the course's drama-based activities. Jon attends the What Next session as part of the Fathers Inside course. What Next gives Jon an opportunity to access services that can provide support to him and his family.



Age 21

Jon is approaching the end of his time in prison. The Fathers Inside family support worker was able to follow up referrals made for Jon at the What Next session, and as a result he has made contact with a parenting advisory agency in his local area. He has begun to build a friendly relationship with the mother of his child, who now says she is willing to bring the child along to the prison's next family visit with a view to Jon keeping in contact upon release.



Jon also identifies organisations that can help him to become a more engaged parent. A structured action plan encourages Jon to plan for his future, both while he is in prison and upon release. Through the letter writing exercises, Jon re-establishes contact with his child's mother. At the end of the Fathers Inside course, Jon performs in a presentation to family members and prison staff. Although the mother of his baby doesn't come to the presentation, she does send him a letter of encouragement and a photo of the baby for the first time.

Jon's prison officer and offender supervisor are really keen to support him as he has made so much progress. He has passed 5 GCSEs as well as making plans to attend college to do a catering course on release.

End...



## Conclusion

The young fathers' journeys presented in this report show young men adjusting to the reality of fatherhood at an age when they would otherwise be making critical choices about what to do with their lives as individuals.

The journeys demonstrate the role of the family voluntary sector in supporting young fathers at key points to help them make a successful transition to fatherhood. They also highlight the added pressure on young fathers to navigate family, partner and peer relationships, while facing tensions between their ambitions and their new responsibilities. The best practice examples outlined in this report show how services can tailor the support they offer,

and partner with each other, to meet young fathers' support needs. A lead professional in each local authority with an overview of the young fathers in the area, and the support available to them, would enable a targeted approach. Commissioners and service providers alike must recognise that supporting positive child outcomes must include supporting young fathers to take an active role in their children's lives. The most effective time to engage a young father is during the pregnancy, therefore early intervention strategies to engage young mothers must also engage young fathers. This encourages a life long commitment to fatherhood and better outcomes for both young fathers and their children.

Statutory and voluntary services do not work with families in isolation. Schools, health professionals, children's centres, housing services, prisons and the voluntary sector must share information and refer on to each other to ensure that all young fathers access the support they need. However in order for this to be possible, those services must challenge negative assumptions about the role of young fathers consistently and emphatically.

# Young Father



- ▶ he thinks he's not important to, or needed by, his child
- ▶ he is isolated from his peers
- ▶ he doesn't know any other young dads
- ▶ he doesn't know how to support his partner
- ▶ he doesn't know how to maintain contact with his child
- ▶ he doesn't know where to get parenting advice
- ▶ he is ignored by health professionals
- ▶ he has never heard of children's centres
- ▶ he is unsupported to find flexible employment to fit around childcare
- ▶ he feels anxious and depressed



- ▶ midwives and health visitors know who he is and offer him advice
- ▶ he attends a paediatric first aid course
- ▶ he attends an expectant fathers course which teaches him parenting strategies
- ▶ he meets other young dads at a local support group and is motivated to start one himself
- ▶ he is signposted to voluntary sector support by the Job Centre
- ▶ he is offered housing support so that he can care for his child at home
- ▶ he feels confident and supported



## ► 7. Overarching recommendations

### 7. Every local authority should appoint a lead professional for young fathers

**7a)** In order for health, education, criminal justice, social care, and the voluntary sector to work together to provide holistic support for young fathers, there needs to be an assigned lead professional within the local authority.

**7b)** A lead professional with an overview of the number of young fathers in the area and the statutory and voluntary sector services available to support them would aid commissioning decisions, and lead to better outcomes for young dads and their children.

**7c)** Local authorities should see support for young fathers as part of their statutory duties to children, and partner with the voluntary sector to address their specific needs.

### 8. A systematic approach to data collection on fathers should be developed by central Government

**8a)** There is no national data on young fathers in England. This makes it difficult to assess the scale of need and where support should be targeted.

**8b)** Better data collection leads to greater support for fathers, as systems which require information about fathers to be inputted lead to practitioners considering fathers' needs more generally. Once an effective data collection system is in place fathers may be contacted proactively: forms and databases are a stepping stone to culture change, prompting practitioners to ask about fathers and their needs.

**8c)** Central Government should provide support to enable schools, prisons, housing and maternity services and Children's Centres to record data in a way that can be collated nationally.

### 9. Relationship support should include provision to help young parents maintain contact and value the father-child relationship

**9a)** Too often services see the father through the prism of his relationship with the mother and not his relationship with the child. Fathers need to be encouraged to see their relationship with their baby as something to nurture, separate to their relationship with the mother.

## Annex A – Steering group members

► Name	► Organisation	► Website
Matt Buttery	Family Matters Institute	<a href="http://www.familymatters.org.uk">www.familymatters.org.uk</a>
Yan-Shing Chang	Family & Parenting Institute	<a href="http://www.familyandparenting.org">www.familyandparenting.org</a>
Carmen Clayton	Timescapes, Young Lives and Times project, University of Leeds	<a href="http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk">www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk</a>
Scott Colfer	YoungDads.TV	<a href="http://youngdads.tv">http.youngdads.tv</a>
Jessica Cundy	Barnardo's Strategy Unit	<a href="http://www.barnardos.org.uk">www.barnardos.org.uk</a>
Jane Evans	Barnardo's Strategy Unit	<a href="http://www.barnardos.org.uk">www.barnardos.org.uk</a>
Jeszemma Garratt	The Fatherhood Institute	<a href="http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org">www.fatherhoodinstitute.org</a>
Sam Manners	Department for Education	<a href="http://www.education.gov.uk">www.education.gov.uk</a>
Sally Mheta	Working with Men	<a href="http://www.workingwithmen.org">www.workingwithmen.org</a>
Adam Moll	Safe Ground	<a href="http://www.safeground.org.uk">www.safeground.org.uk</a>
Bren Neale	Timescapes, Young Lives and Times project, University of Leeds	<a href="http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk">www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk</a>
Jonathan Rallings	Barnardo's Strategy Unit	<a href="http://www.barnardos.org.uk">www.barnardos.org.uk</a>
Sarah Salmon	Action for Prisoners' Families	<a href="http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk">www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk</a>
Ken Sanderson	Families Need Fathers	<a href="http://www.fnf.org.uk">www.fnf.org.uk</a>
Neil Solo	Barnardo's BabyFather Initiative	<a href="http://www.barnardos.org.uk/babyfather.htm">www.barnardos.org.uk/babyfather.htm</a>
Owen Thomas	Working with Men	<a href="http://www.workingwithmen.org">www.workingwithmen.org</a>



***Are we nearly there yet, Dad?**  
Supporting young dads'  
journeys through fatherhood*

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This report was  
written by Jessica Cundy.

Some images posed by models. Names  
have been changed to protect identities.



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