



DADLY DOES IT

The Impact of Positive Fatherhood



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1. Challenge

The health, well-being and life opportunities of children and young people in disadvantaged communities are much worse than of their peers in wealthier communities.

This was true even before substantial cuts in resources available for public and voluntary services, on which their families tend to disproportionately rely, took place from 2011 onwards.

Despite all the work by statutory and social organisations over many years, a significant proportion of children and young people in disadvantaged areas are still unlikely to fulfil their potential. They therefore face the risk of severe and multiple disadvantage.

“Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives.”

(Fair Society, Healthy Lives. The Marmot Review, 2010)



2. Idea

The greatest underused asset in the lives of children and young people is fathers. Communities and child-related services and organisations tend to focus - and put most pressure - on mothers. Some largely ignore fathers.

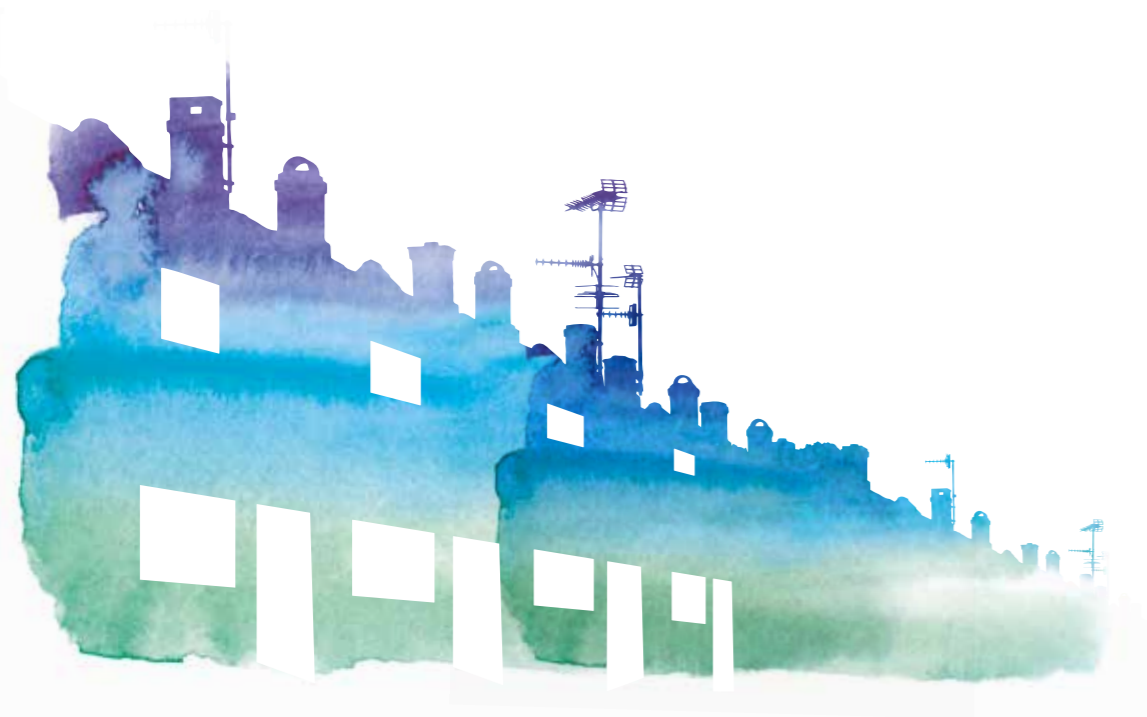
The aims of Dadly Does It were:

- to find new ways to improve the well-being of fathers from backgrounds of severe and multiple disadvantage, and
- to understand whether or not this can improve the well-being of their children

Complementing others' work with mothers, the project sought to reduce the proportion of children and young people experiencing things that are at the root of severe and multiple disadvantage.

"Lots of services say 'oh, we have tried to engage fathers', but I'm sure if we go back and look, we'll see it's very, very superficial. I think one of the strong themes through [Dadly Does It] is working in partnership."

(strategic stakeholder)



3. The fathers and their children

The fathers involved in Dadly Does It tended to have long-term histories of economic and social marginalisation. Many experienced various childhood traumas, with associated complex and difficult family relationships and poor educational experiences.

The fathers often had a poor quality of life - especially mental ill-health and social isolation. This was reflected in poverty, unemployment, homelessness, substance misuse and/or criminal activity. The fathers were likely to be subject to interventions by public service agencies.

During Dadly Does It, family breakdown and worklessness were found to be key elements affecting fathers' well-being. Fathers' pride and shame means that they also tend towards unhelpful coping mechanisms, such as isolating themselves and substance misuse.

There is now good research evidence that psychological

and emotional aspects of paternal involvement in children's early upbringing - particularly how new fathers see themselves as parents and adjust to the role - rather than the quantity of direct involvement in childcare, is associated with positive behavioural outcomes in children.

How fathers feel is often mirrored in the experience of their children, whether living with, having contact with, or estranged from them. The children often experience similar early roots of severe and multiple disadvantage: background poverty, complex and difficult family relationships, and poor educational experiences.

"I felt alone. I felt a failure as I had no one to measure up against. I was very depressed ... Everyone needs someone to turn to, to say 'Am I doing this right?' It's not just women who can open up; men can be sensitive too, we just don't get the chance."

(father, Little Hulton)



4. Approach

In each neighbourhood, Dadly Does It focussed on 'what's strong, not what's wrong', and drew on the strengths, assets and hidden wisdom of communities. It used a 'positive deviance' approach, following the four Ds:

"Sometimes it is the people no one can imagine anything of who do the things no one can imagine."
(attributed to Alan Turing)

1. Define the problem:

The community defines the problem, followed by careful observation and questioning to identify successful solutions and outcomes, described in behavioural or relationship terms.

2. Determine the positive role models ('positive deviants'):

The facilitator and local people identify individuals who already exhibit the desired behaviours and outperform others in their community.

3. Discover what the positive role models do (uncommon practices or behaviours)

The individual behaviours ('partial solutions') come together to form a locally discovered solution to the problem, and the community realises the presence of 'positive deviants'.

4. Design ways of sharing solutions

The behaviours are amplified and an intervention is co-designed to enable others to access and practice them through active doing (rather than passive transfer of knowledge), and to expand the solution that works for local people.

5. Test

The work started in Little Hulton in Salford in 2013. Over time, the number of dads increased: both those involved regularly and fully, and those more intermittently and peripherally. A core group of dads evolved, initially as a Council of Dadz. This eventually became a group, Salford Dadz - Little Hulton, that was constituted in 2015.

Fathers eventually created male-friendly spaces where positive role models could talk openly with other dads 'shoulder to shoulder' and try out fun dad-child activities that can enable bonding with their children. The most successful of these is the Saturday Club run by Salford Dadz - Little Hulton. There were also activities such as Father's Day fetes and a dads shed.

The dads involved, especially those most fully engaged, describe how Salford Dadz - Little Hulton provides a safe setting and environment in which to share enjoyable social time with other men. In turn, this generates important opportunities for personal sharing and for recognising that many stressful issues they face are common to other men in the community. Engagement in Salford Dadz provided an alternative to previous settings and relationships that often fostered negative coping mechanisms to stressful situations, and a realisation that positive ways of coping with these issues are possible.

"Before I became involved with Salford Dadz, trying to deal with a situation, I'd probably at that time brush it to one side. And then all of a sudden, Salford Dadz being there to give me advice, give me, you know, abilities to say, well, no, I can't brush it off, it needs to be answered. It needs to be sorted, it needs to be dealt with before we do get worse."

(father, Little Hulton)

The changes from their involvement reported by the dads included:

- a greater sense of positive identity and belonging (feeling cared about and caring for others)
- improved self-confidence and self-esteem
- increased engagement in community events including volunteering, education and work opportunities
- improved relationships with partners or ex-partners, enabled by a greater child focus and therefore more common ground within these relationships
- improved opportunities for positive and interesting engagement with their children, leading to greater confidence in their parenting ability and skills

Whilst not all these were seen in all the dads engaging, they were common themes and often cumulative. That is, the greater and longer the involvement, the more these changes became apparent.

The women (partners and ex-partners) also reported most of these changes amongst the men. Both the men and the women reported that Salford Dadz - Little Hulton had been 'life-changing' in its impact for many of the men involved.

In addition, the women saw benefits for themselves in terms of:

- improved relationships
- creating a more positive view about men (for some)
- greater sharing of the parenting 'burden' - and joy!
- providing them with more time to either relax or develop their own lives and interests

"[My daughter] was a very quiet child, but now she is outspoken in the right way. Tactful."

(mother, Little Hulton)

Greater confidence in the fathers had a ripple effect, leading to greater self-confidence in the children themselves. The views of children and young people are particularly compelling:

- they reported not only an increased amount of time spent with their fathers, but very noticeable improvements in the quality of this time
- this was linked to 'happier' dispositions and improved friendships that they noticed their fathers to have developed
- this led in a cyclical way to mutual improvements in trust and respect between the children and their fathers, and related improvements in their own behaviour
- some also noted improvements in relationships between their parents and certainly greater enjoyment in relationships within the home



6. Development

Building on the learning from Little Hulton, Dadly Does It then ran in two other neighbourhoods.

The idea was:

- to see whether the principles and approach developed in Little Hulton could be spread to different neighbourhoods, and
- to gain further evidence of what does and does not work in benefitting families and reducing demand on public services

After consultation with stakeholders, including families and local leaders, these two neighbourhoods were chosen:

- Winton, Salford (2016-2017) - a more socially diverse population than Little Hulton, immediately adjacent to an affluent neighbourhood
- Langley, Rochdale borough (2017-2018) - a neighbourhood outside Salford, from where local people applied to be part of Dadly Does It

Given their experience from the original project, Salford Dadz - Little Hulton acted as a 'living university' for their peers in Winton and Langley.

The Dadly Does It approach developed in Little Hulton did not fully transfer to the second and third communities. This provided new learning and understanding for future work and next steps.

In Winton, the main activity that attracted fathers was cycling, which led to the setting up of Dadz Cycle Hub. In Langley, various activities were done, including cookery, go-kart making and family discos.

There were varied reasons for men engaging in Dadly Does It and no universal rationale for this. For some, the project was for their own personal development, to improve their self-confidence as a father and to have a shared experience with their children.

"[Bike maintenance] was something that we had never done before, so it was very useful and my son was happy, excited even. He was waiting, 'when it is going to be next time we go?'"
(father, Winton)



A range of factors acted as barriers preventing fathers from fully engaging with the project. Even when fathers were fully engaged, there were concerns with their skills and abilities to successfully engage with potential new fathers particularly across 'class' lines. This was identified as a barrier to the growth in momentum of the project.

Through activities and events, however, a series of positive outcomes occurred:

- greater peer support and solidarity
- increased community cohesion and awareness
- reductions in social isolation
- providing more space for mothers

There were some difficulties in uniting diverse geographical and community areas within the programme. While the project staff had a good understanding of these issues,

some community and estate dynamics changed rapidly and were therefore difficult to respond to.

During the lifecycle of the project, there were unavoidable disruptions to delivery as a result both of staff changes and of the need for staff to take periods of time off work due to family reasons. This had both positive and negative consequences.

“Dad is busy and grumpy, but when he is here he likes it.”

(child, Langley)

Case study - Alex McCraw

I am a father of three. I faced many challenges growing up of sexual and mental abuse, bullying, mental and physical health issues and social isolation. I learnt how to survive by cutting myself off from nearly everything and everyone.

A couple of years ago I received the best help from somewhere I wasn't expecting... A new project was set up to promote the importance of fathers' wellbeing and the impact it has on their kids. They put me in direct contact with other fathers who had been through their own struggles, some of which were similar to mine. Here I found that actually talking about and sharing lived experiences helped me to bring some clarity to my life.

Salford Dadz has allowed me to sit down and talk with someone who 'has been there and got the t-shirt'. On reflection, I understand that when you are at rock bottom it is hard to see any hope. But talking to someone who has also been at rock bottom too can help change your perspective as they have a similar lived experience. This can benefit you more than talking to a professional where there is not that type of connection or understanding.

Moving forward, I feel this kind of support should not be offered as a replacement for the system but should be a big part of the wider support system. Some of this change in society has started to happen already. I hope to be able to help this change happen and that it can continue to lead me and others to a better future.

7. Learning

Evaluation of Dadly Does It was led throughout the project by Leeds Beckett University. Evaluation with children and young people was done by the University of Salford.

The primary lesson from Dadly Does It was to relate to fathers as fathers, rather than as men. Being a good father is often a strong motivator to take action and make changes. Enabling fathers from similar backgrounds to work together and become positively supportive mates can sustain this. They can then collectively determine the terms of their own inclusion.

During the project, it was found that the positive role models ('positive deviants') may be fathers able to overcome their pride and shame to express their feelings. Using social narrative - either one-to-one or in public - they give hope to other fathers who are isolated and in agony. Having a 'mate' and working 'shoulder to shoulder' allows fathers to open up and share their feelings with others who are or have been in similar situations. This allows them to develop positive coping strategies.

“I still like the fact that they do things with him. Because, like I say, it's not all on me then. I've not got to do everything and I think we work better as a family because of him being able to feel like he is worth something and having a good relationship with the kids.”

(mother, Little Hulton)



If fathers feel listened to, feel accepted and have purpose, they regain some control over their own lives and well-being improves. The biggest change is in confidence, enabling them to grow as fathers and as men. Children become more confident and the father's relationship with the mother improves. This challenges the images amongst some women of what fathers are like. There is the start of a cultural shift in attitudes as an alternative positive model of fatherhood emerges.

The learning strongly suggests that improving the well-being of fathers from disadvantaged backgrounds can improve the well-being of their children. It also appears to have the potential to improve the quality of family relationships and to provide benefits to the well-being of partners and ex-partners.

Public and voluntary sector workers verified that they saw changes in the fathers. This this reduced the resources they needed to allocate, or were likely to allocate in future, to support some of the families.

A quality-assured social return on investment study concluded:

- "in the professional judgement of the analyst, the social value created by the project is in the range of £1:£14 and £1:£20"
- £1 invested yielded approximately £20 of social value, of which the potential financial return to the public sector is:
- £1 invested yielded at least £2.25 of potential savings in children's services and
- £1 invested yielded approximately £14 of value for the core fathers involved

Key issues and challenges that arose during the project included:

- the risk of perceived alienation or marginalisation of partners and ex-partners
- the potential for the personality or charisma of project staff to reduce the sustainability of the work
- the risk of any activity by dads being perceived or labelled as a 'service' delivered 'to' dads (with 'referral pathways, etc.), rather than activity developed and owned by the community
- many professionals and agencies find challenging the idea of genuine co-production with local people and communities, with an equal balance of power

The experience of Dadly Does It suggests that the values and principles of strengths-based working are replicable. Specific local solutions emerging from this approach may not be transferable without change. They rely on community knowledge, engagement and commitment rooted in specific local circumstance.

Statutory bodies reflected on the contribution of Dadly Does It in facilitating health and well-being. They perceived it as mitigating the perpetuation of multiple disadvantage within some groups and communities and as developing training for unemployed men.

Dadly Does It was uniquely positioned to listen to fathers whose voices had previously been unheard. This approach encouraged some statutory bodies towards a more inclusive way of working with men and fathers.

Leadership and knowledge transfer are, however, central to embedding strengths-based working in mainstream public services.

To engage with 'mainstream' agencies and to get their recognition of the important role and influence of fathers on the health and well-being of their children, the use of behavioural insights to spread change proved effective. This is through making things:

- Easy: make engagement easy; start small
- Attractive: reframe risk; highlight the benefits to practitioners, managers and commissioners; share stories
- Social: incentivise whole groups; widen team and train them together
- Timely: incentivise change now; make tools timely; change mind sets

"He was saying 'I go to Salford Dadz and we do things with the children' and he was saying how they sit down and do craft things and he was explaining some very positive interaction."

(social worker)



8. Wider impact

The learning from Dadly Does It has been recognised by positive fatherhood being included in the 0-25 plan in Salford and planning for school-readiness in Greater Manchester. In 2018, Salford City Council established up a Dads and Partners working group and Rochdale set up a working group on support for dads during the perinatal period.

Work that spun off from Dadly Does It has included:

- Speaking Dadly: a project commissioned from Unlimited Potential about the role of fathers in speech, language and communication of children in Salford
- input into the planning of BBC Learning's early years initiative

These award schemes have recognised Dadly Does It:

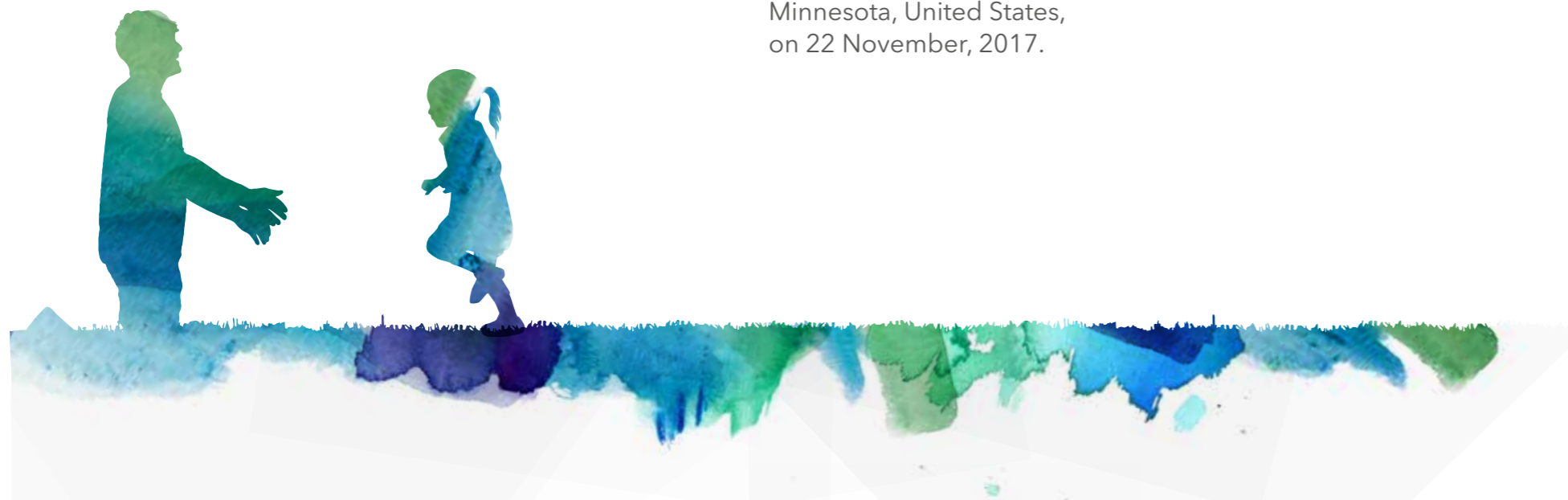
- Heart of Salford Awards 2015 - Small Community Group Award winner (Salford Dadz - Little Hulton)

- RCNi Nurse Awards 2016 - Child Health Award finalist
- Learning Matters in Health and Care Awards 2017 (Health Education England north-west) - Ingenuity Award runner-up
- Prize Fund for Innovation in Health and Social Care within the VCSE Sector in Greater Manchester 2018 - School Readiness Award runner-up
- Greater Manchester Health and Care Champion Awards 2018 - Innovation Award winner

Dadly Does It was also featured in a presentation on transformation in health by Halima Khan (Executive Director - Health Lab, Nesta) at the Transform 2017 health care innovation conference at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, United States, on 22 November, 2017.

“Working as a team is important - both parents.”

(father, Salford)



9. Mainstreaming

An ideal transformed approach would think at least as much about the role of dads within families and communities as about fathers within services.

It would afford fathers and mothers equal importance, with the focus towards meaningful life and relationships, as they define them. This means solutions that are produced with and fit them, recognising individuals and families as a whole, and valuing their strengths and capabilities, with support available when it is needed. This implies relationships of trust, at every level, with genuine listening, empathy and respect for fathers and their families.

For the full impact of positive fatherhood to spread requires a cultural and whole system change, particularly amidst austerity where pioneering and effective ways of working must be found and spread. The current political landscape across Greater Manchester is facilitating this system change, but the challenge to traditional ways of working needs to be ongoing.

“Where I’ve seen it working really well, you usually have a few key community leaders or trusted people within the community who can make those connections and you also have, alongside of that, public services that think in that way. ... There is something about needing to invest in that community infrastructure before it could happen.”

(strategic stakeholder)



Stakeholder agencies are keen to capitalise further on the positive contribution Dadly Does It has already brought to the health and well-being agenda. They have three main considerations with regard to spreading the learning from Dadly Does It across Greater Manchester:

1. Working with fathers:

the innovative way of working with fathers in Dadly Does It was acknowledged as a key strength of the initiative. This fits with the wider strategic aims of the stakeholder organisations.

2. The importance of place:

while there was clearly a recognition of the differences between the individual communities in the Dadly Does It programme, when spreading, it would be essential to put sufficient resource into understanding the complexities and intricacies of each locality.

3. Community solutions first:

for successful spreading of positive fatherhood, the stakeholders identified the need for a shift in the norms around the use of community assets, rather than statutory services, to resolve the issues faced by fathers in disadvantaged communities.

With regard to the sustainability of Dadly Does It, stakeholders identified several important considerations, including:

- demonstrating impact and value through ongoing evaluation, and
- continuing to lobby to influence systems change around men and fatherhood

“I think this is clearly telling us that, yes, to effectively get to those dads, the ones that are out there on the periphery ... the approach that this project adopts is the right approach.”

(strategic stakeholder)



10. Thanks

We thank all of the dads, children and young people who participated in Dadly Does It in Little Hulton, Winton and Langley, and also the mums who supported them.

We also thank the organisations who funded Dadly Does It and the learning from it (Salford Clinical Commissioning Group, the Lankelly Chase Foundation and Nesta) and supported it (Leeds Beckett University, the University of Salford, and the local authorities and clinical commissioning groups both in Salford and in Rochdale borough).

“I know what my dad’s done for me. Everything he’s done for me I can pass on to my kids. Some kids don’t get this. Some kids are in really bad neighbourhoods where they don’t get anything like this.”

(teenage boy, Little Hulton)



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