

Speaking Dadly



Speech, language and communication in Salford

Exploring the role of fathers

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1. Summary

"Working as a team is important – both parents."

This project aimed to learn how dads might best be supported and enabled around speech, language and communication. It involved a series of in-depth, qualitative interviews with fathers across Salford, who were in a variety of family circumstances. Each father had an average experience of around 2½ years of speech and language therapy services with their children, who had an average age of 4.75 years.

The majority of fathers saw **speech, language and communication** as crucial to their child's general well-being and future opportunities. More specifically, the most common theme expressed by most fathers was confidence and independence. Children making social connections and interaction also emerged as a majority theme, as did learning and education. Many fathers also recognised the value of speech and communication in their own right, and its potential to reduce frustration.

Most, but not all, fathers saw clear differences between the **role of a dad** and that of a mum, although none described this as problematic. They were different by approach, by activities with their child(ren) and due to practical and employment arrangements. Fathers described their practical role as a dad in three different ways: generically, activity-wise and communication-specific.

Fathers described their **particular strengths** on offer as a dad in a variety of ways: by activities; by learning; by modelling; by balance and flexibility; and by experience. A few fathers saw no difference between their strengths and those of the mother.

Most fathers saw some **challenges** as dad-specific. Some dads felt challenged because most staff that they encounter are female, and perceived that this affected both some attitudes towards them and the quality of communication. Similarly, some dads indicated difficulties when gatherings or groups of parents tend to be largely female. The collection and use of information about parents (sometimes weighted towards mums) was raised as an issue for dads. Some dads perceived a difference from mums in the relationship to their children.

Other challenges identified were more generic. Fathers expressed general frustrations about difficulties in communicating with their child, and having insufficient time. Several fathers mentioned challenges caused by a child moving between institutions.

While almost all of the dads were very positive about most speech and language therapists they had met, some concerns were raised about a few

individuals, while others raised queries about approaches taken by the Speech and Language Therapy Service more generally. In one case, a father with a disabled child felt that he had to struggle with every service.

A few fathers distinguished their approach from that of the mother. A number of fathers spoke about following their child to find appropriate **solutions**. Fathers described a range of solutions that they had either created or found themselves, while others highlighted techniques that they had learned and/or adapted from speech and language therapists. Several fathers emphasised ways that they had found to discover information and help that was not actively offered by services.

The things identified by fathers that might make things better to **support** them as a dad split between support wanted specific to dads, and that which could apply to any parents. Key was perceiving dads in a positive way, and recognising the primary parent (rather than assuming that this was the mother). Some wanted more personalised and social support appropriate to dads.

More generically, more support earlier on would have been valued, while ongoing communication and easy access to information emerged as a strong theme. Developing positive relationships between professionals and parents was also raised.

When asked what else that they would want to **highlight**, especially to services for children and families, fathers made a range of suggestions, especially with regard to: acknowledging and valuing fathers; recognising the different social circumstances of fathers; where possible, seeing mum and dad as a team, but not as the same; and effective communication by the Speech and Language Service with all parents.

What would 'good' look like for fathers?

Key to supporting fathers is actively acknowledging and valuing them in a positive way – as an asset for their child – and, wherever possible, seeing mum and dad as a team.

More personalised and social support appropriate to dads would be beneficial, engaging with them as dads (rather than as men). In particular, dads are more likely to respond to being asked for help to co-produce solutions, rather than being offered help.

More male-friendly environments and groups would also help, as well as having more male staff working across services for children and families.

Addressing these issues will bring benefits not only to children, but also start to redress the imbalance that puts so many demands on mothers.

2. Background

Learning from case studies of family journeys in speech and language therapy services reported in April 2016 by Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust included that “we need to think about how we meet the needs of dads better.”

Building on the positive development of a speech, language and communication test case, the need to explore how the system could better enable the role of fathers was endorsed at the meeting of the 0-25 Integration Board on 22 April, 2016.

The 0-25 Integration Board also held a general session about the role of fathers at its meeting on 22 July, 2016. This was facilitated by Unlimited Potential, drawing on its learning to date from the Dadly Does It project (see Appendix 1) that has been piloted in Little Hulton and Winton (and now also Langley in Rochdale Borough).

At the 0-25 Integration Board’s meeting on 16 December, 2016, two specific aspects around the role of fathers in speech, language and communication were highlighted:

- Engagement with parents, particularly new parents – this includes work specifically for dads (that is, what messages work better for dads).
- Big increases in English as an Additional Language in Salford schools – built into the strategy for children, but not yet for parents and particularly fathers.

In November 2017, the Programme Oversight Group for the 0-25 test cases agreed to look to fund a small-scale engagement piece by Unlimited Potential around trying to tease out how dads might best be supported around speech, language and communication.

Generally, there appears to be little specific research on the role of dads in speech, language or communication development.

Learning from family journeys

Key themes particularly relevant to dads from the case studies of family journeys were:

- Impact of intervention goes beyond speech, language and learning.
- For their children to enjoy life and for the parents to see communication as the fundamental enabler to this.
- Speech, language and communication skills are fundamental to confidence, socialisation, behaviour and participation in activities of daily life and simply to being happy.

- A system that is flexible and responsive to the needs of the child at various ages and stages.
- Liked being provided with information on how to help their child.
- They need staff to work together with them to support their child.
- Financial support for early years placements / transport is vital to the process.
- Families have concerns about the long-term support once their children leave specialist provision.

Other key themes that emerged were:

- Early identification and intervention are critical for the family and their child's progress.
- Quicker access to speech and language therapy.
- Support in navigating the system.
- Parents value experienced and knowledgeable staff who listen to and understand their concerns and who have the skills to make good clinical decisions.
- Speech and language therapy intervention in setting and at home.
- Specialist resources deliver good outcomes.

Learning from Dadly Does It

Dadly Does It is a social innovation project that has been run by Unlimited Potential in Salford since 2013, and in Rochdale Borough since 2017 (see Appendix 1). Its aim is to find new ways to improve the well-being of disadvantaged fathers and to understand whether this can improve the well-being of their children. It is not specific to speech, language and communication.

Key lessons from Dadly Does It to date include:

- Engage with men as dads, not as men.
- Ask men for help (strengths-based) rather than offering help (needs-based).
- Enable men to work shoulder to shoulder, alongside each other.
- Provide a safe, positive, male-friendly environment that enables personal sharing of stresses and challenges, with recognition that positive ways of coping with these issues are possible.
- Psychological and emotional aspects of paternal involvement in children's early upbringing (particularly how new dads 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.
- The concept of genuine co-production with local people and communities is challenging for many professionals and agencies.
- Solutions risk being viewed as a 'service' delivered 'to' dads, rather than a project owned with them.

3. Vision

Children and young people achieve their potential.

Key messages

- It's all about children and families.
- Everyone working together.
- Making the most of Salford's resources.

4. Aim

To learn how dads might best be supported and enabled around speech, language and communication.

5. Principles

- Communication is primarily a means to children's happiness.
- Dads have a different, but equally important, role to mums.
- Engage with men as dads, not as men.
- Listen and see things from the perspective of dads and what matters to them.
- Start with and build on the strengths of dads.
- Clearly value both lived experience and social knowledge.
- Recognise different types of families.
- Families and agencies plan together.
- See issues in terms of relationships, rather than structures or services.
- Not all solutions are 'services'.
- Both resources and impact will go beyond speech, language and communication.

6. Method

Given the relative lack of research evidence, it was agreed that the project should address the first stage of the innovation process – ideas generation (described below). If this proves successful, subsequent stages might then be designed and considered.

1. Recruit 6-12 dads, both new to speech, language and communication services, as well as those with more experience, by asking them for help, using their strengths (skills, knowledge and experience).
Recognise diverse perspectives that may be missing.
2. Gather individual dads' perspectives and, where appropriate, experience of speech, language and communication.

3. From these perspectives, define the problem at hand from the dads' perspectives.
4. Optionally, bring dads together in a male-friendly space and format comfortable to them (two focus groups). Explore:
 - How dads see themselves as parents and their role with their child and family.
 - Their hopes, fears, and 'elephants in the room'.
 - Resources available to dads beyond services, including in places and amongst people and organisations that are 'non-usual suspects'.
 - What already works, whether within services, or solutions that dads have discovered or created themselves (at whatever scale).

With the consent of each person, the Speech and Language Therapy Services provided Unlimited Potential with the name and contact details of 11 fathers to enable them to participate in the project.

Of these 11 fathers, two did not respond, one had to withdraw due to health reasons, and eight were interviewed individually.

Interviews were done in May and early June 2018. Each interview took place according to each father's preference for time and place, around employment and/or caring responsibilities. Six were held at the person's home, one by meeting in a McDonald's restaurant, and one was conducted by telephone.

Each father was provided with a briefing sheet (Appendix 2) and then signed a consent form at the start of the interview (Appendix 3).

The interviews were done as semi-structured interviews using open questions (Appendix 4), so allowing a conversation that allowed the father to explore their key issues and priorities.

7. Results

7.1 Residence:

The eight fathers resided in these wards:

Barton	2	Cadishead	1	Claremont	1	Irlam	1
Swinton N.	1	Winton	1	Worsley	1		

7.2 Diversity:

The eight fathers each completed an equity and diversity form, producing these results:

Age							
0-5	0	6-10	0	11-17	0	18-25	0
26-35	0	36-45	5	46-55	2	56-65	0
66-75	0	Over 75	0				
Prefer not to say		1					

Sex					
Female	0	Male	8	Prefer not to say	0

Gender Reassignment			
Are you a transsexual person – proposing to, undergoing or having completed a process to change your sex?			
Yes	0	No	7
Prefer not to say		1	

Sexual Orientation					
Bisexual	1	Gay or lesbian	0	Heterosexual or straight	6
Prefer not to say		1			

Marriage or Civil Partnership			
Are you married or in a civil partnership?			
Yes	4	No	3
Prefer not to say		1	

Disability			
Do you have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities?			
Yes	0	No	7
Prefer not to say		1	

Caring Responsibilities			
Do you spend a significant proportion of your time providing unpaid support to a person who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems?			
Yes	4	No	3
Prefer not to say		1	

Race (includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins)						
Asian / Asian British	Bangladeshi	0	Chinese	0		
	Indian	0	Pakistani	0		
British	Other 0 please state:					
Black / Black British	African	0		Caribbean	0	
	Other 0 please state:					
White	English	6	Irish	0	Scottish	0
	Welsh	0	Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0	British	1

	Other 0 please state:		
Mixed / Multiple	White & Asian 0	White & Black African 0	White & Black Caribbean 0
	Other 0 please state:		
Other	Arab 0		
	Other 0 please state:		
Prefer not to say 1			

Religion or Belief			
Buddhist	1	Christian	2
Jewish	0	Muslim	0
None	2	Other 0 please state:	
Prefer not to say 3			

7.3 Family circumstances:

The fathers were in a diversity of family arrangements. About half lived in households with their partner and child/children. Others had separated from the mother of their child/children and had a new partner (sometimes with children from different relationships in the same household) and/or were sharing caring responsibilities for their child with the mother. There was also a foster caring arrangement.

About half of the fathers interviewed were either the main carer of their child/children or shared caring responsibilities equally with the mother.

7.4 Experience of speech and language issues, and speech and language therapy services:

The children of the fathers with speech, language and communication issues ranged in age from 21 months to seven years, with an average age of 4.75 years. The children consisted of seven sons and two daughters.

The fathers' own experience of speech and language therapy services ranged from nine months to four years, with an average of 2.6 years.

7.5 The important of speech, language and communication:

The majority of fathers saw speech, language and communication as crucial to their child's general well-being and future opportunities:

"Gateway to everything"
"Underpins daily needs"
"Communication opens doors"
"Active member of society"
"Being like a 'normal' child"

More specifically, the most common theme expressed by most fathers was confidence and independence:

"Confidence – frustrated at not expressing himself"
"Worrying about speaking in social situations"
"More confident: not frightened of trying new words"
"Not in own shell"
"Independent"
"Self-reliant, look after himself, independence"

Children making social connections and interaction also emerged as a majority theme:

"Social connections and negotiating with children"
"[Child] struggled socially"
"Interacting with peers – social skills"
"Friends"
"Building relationship and understanding him"
"Interact"

As did learning and education:

"Underpins all learning"
"Reading and vocabulary"
"Education"
"School curriculum"
"Education"

Many fathers also recognised the value of speech and communication in their own right:

"Speak and understand more"
"[Child] will express himself better"
"Right to communicate"

and its potential to reduce frustration:

"Reduce frustration"
"[Child] struggled socially – lashed out and hit"

In one case, a father explicitly raised the issue of the risk of poor speech, language and communication being a risk for future criminality.

7.6 Role of fathers:

Most fathers (62.5%) saw clear differences between the role of a dad and that of a mum, although none described this problematic – *"shared responsibility"*, *"diverse environment"*, *"it's OK for parents to disagree"*:

- different by approach:

*[Mum] more nurturing; [Dad] more question/solutions
Culture changing, but [Mum] still has maternal instincts.
"Children chat more to women than men."
"We communicate differently."
Two different approaches*

- different by activities:

*[Dad] does more activities – rock climbing, swimming, watch snowboarding. [Mum] – shopping, etc.
[Dad] more active, hands-on – outdoor, play, bikes, etc. [Mum] tends to be more creative.
[Dad] geared towards father-son activities – sport, fishing, camping, more active and fun. [Mum] has a more generic role – 'across the board'.
Homework / exercises more with [Mum].*

- different due to practical and employment arrangements:

*Depends on [the dad], especially amount of time with child.
[Mum] does most school drop-off/pick-ups.
[Dad]'s work is more erratic, so less consistent.
Availability means Mum tends to do more speech and language exercises due to dad's inconsistent work.
[Dad] works two days per week – provides more child care (so maybe like a mum).*

A minority of fathers (37.5%) saw little, if any difference, between the role of dads and mums:

*"No difference in nurturing and upbringing"
"Not different, as role is as a parent"
"Basically the same, post-breastfeeding"
"Same, just depends on person"*

Fathers described their practical role as a dad in three different ways:

- generically:

*As for everything else – education and social progress
Enhance existing abilities
Help [child] along – praise, encouragement*

- activity-wise:

Activities – rock climbing, swimming, watch snowboarding.

*Active, hands-on – outdoor, play, bikes, etc.
Active and fun activities – sport, fishing, camping.
Play games – books, etc.
Talk and walk – seeing ducks, etc.; animals help.
Reading stories and thinking ahead.*

- communication-specific:

*Use language and express themselves. Make children understand actions.
Modelling, use of clarity, breaking information down. Use of Socratics.
Mouth exercises – playful role when younger.*

7.7 Strengths as a dad:

Fathers described their particular strengths on offer as a dad in a variety of ways:

- by activities:

*Play, take to park, reading books.
Being active through a range of 'doing' experiences.
More physical – bikes, climbing, etc.
Physical side – outdoors, active, play (but "some other dads push too hard").*

- by learning:

*Sharing education
Ability through job – creative ways, so easier to identify approaches –
come partly from job, partly from fatherhood.*

- by modelling:

*Role model
All equal, but [Dad] taking son down 'male route' to lay foundations.
Stern – more listened to by children*

- by balance and flexibility:

*Need to be flexible in approach.
Balance care – teaches child they can do what they want, regardless of
gender.*

- by experience:

*Wisdom (older father) and love
Patience with age*

Two fathers emphasised their view that there was no difference in strengths between them as a dad and those of the mum:

*No difference – skills the same
Don't think I do anything differently – just ways developed in terms of
different roles. Could be interchangeable.
Balance between [parents] as a team.*

7.8 Challenges as a dad:

Fathers described their particular challenges broadly in two ways – challenges that were dad-specific and those that were general for any parents.

Dad-specific challenges:

While a couple of fathers said that the challenges for parents of either sex are the same, most identified some challenges specific to dads.

Some dads felt challenged because most staff that they encounter are female, and perceived that this affected both some attitudes towards them and the quality of communication:

*"Most staff are women."
"School teachers mostly female and much more used to dealing with
mums" – some loss of communication as a result.
"Hard to let guard down."
"Some professionals are surprised when [Dad] arrives rather than [Mum]
– this can reinforce stereotypes for children."
Stereotypes applied to dads [linked to staff all being female].*

Similarly, some dads indicated difficulties when gatherings or groups of parents tend to be largely female:

*"Social groups tend to be mums."
Challenged therapist – an issue being the only male in the room?*

The collection and use of information about parents was raised as an issue for dads:

*Parent details – only one on computer system.
"Schools always call [Mum], even though [Dad]'s number given first."*

Some dads perceived a difference in relationship to their children:

*"Young children are more 'mummy-oriented' in early years."
"Children might talk to women more."
"Bottle feeding improved bonding for [Dad]."*

Generic challenges:

Fathers expressed general frustrations about difficulties in communicating with their child:

"Non-verbal is frustrating, but I have to follow my child."

"Overcoming frustration of not being able to communicate, and not getting fulfilment. I get a feeling of having not done anything useful."

Speech and understanding – one child not focussing.

Insufficient time was highlighted by several fathers:

"Time – balancing speech development with general education."

"Time with [child] is limited because of work. [Mum] has more time."

Working shifts with no breaks: half of time working, half of time caring.

"Don't like the word 'respite', but I would like a break."

Several fathers mentioned challenges caused by a child moving between institutions:

"Frustration because of time from referral to sessions."

Gaps between institutions.

"Different experience at different schools with different cultures."

Move from childminder to nursery to schools to school with speech unit – speech and language therapist had to push. "The handover could have been quicker and smoother. We needed to push when Speech and Language Service went quiet after handover. The initial transition was lost."

While almost all of the dads were very positive about most speech and language therapists they had met, some concerns were raised about a few individuals:

"The first therapist was very clinical and not child-focussed."

"Quality of assessment was poor."

Both parents felt pressured into certain activities.

While others raised queries about approaches taken by the Speech and Language Therapy Service:

Focus on communication (and child's abilities), not just speech – assessments can be too narrow.

[Speech and language therapists] should talk with children more at home, and less at school.

One father who cared for a disabled child had had to struggle with every service (not just speech and language therapy) and expressed great frustration:

*"I have had to struggle with every service."
"No one's listening in any service. I now feel angry with them all."
Getting Speech and Language Service involved at the start
(then initially locums).
"Challenge about adapting the bathroom – I needed to get [my MP]'s support."*

A small range of other issues were raised by different individual fathers:

*Are there any children who don't manage to improve, and what happens?
Balancing with older (disabled) brother.
Emotional support [for father] after the death of a child.*

7.9 Solutions:

A number of fathers spoke about following their child to find appropriate solutions:

*Led by (disabled) child, such as repetition and mannerisms.
Applying speech and language exercises appropriately to [child].
Judging mood: 'carrot and stick' approaches.
One child more play, one child more factual.
Challenge – what child wanted; would work out between [parents].
Organisational skills – plan day for activity and interaction (and patience).*

Fathers described a range of solutions that they had either created or found themselves, beyond those provided by speech and language therapists:

*FIFA / Xbox – using computer, and using words with actions on screen.
Tailoring things to lifestyle (rugby, etc.) helps [Dad] and [son].
Reading – never mentioned by speech and language therapists.
Shoulder to shoulder; starting by reading to them, then over to the child reading to [Dad].
Improvised equipment (such as a walker).*

Some fathers highlighted techniques that they had learned and/or adapted from speech and language therapists:

*Tongue twisters.
Exercises.
Having fun – blowing bubbles.
Picture board of food in kitchen – "the single most helpful thing from the [Speech and Language] service."*

A few fathers distinguished their approach from that of the mother:

"I am better at some things than [Mum] due to education, but [Mum] is more logical."

Emotional process – wife more so; meeting can go better without her there – [Dad] more likely to listen.

[Parents] learn independently, then share learning with each other. [Parents] may test things out differently and some different interactions, but not too different.

Several fathers emphasised ways that they had found to discover information and help that was not actively offered by services:

Information – found out via carers' group.

Amount of information and jargon – be patient, listen, ask for explanation.

Need to be proactive for getting help / services.

Keep going – keep pushing; especially when you feel not everything is right, or it goes quiet.

7.10 Support wanted:

The things identified by fathers that might make things better to support them as a dad were described broadly in two ways – support wanted specific to dads, and that which could apply to any parents.

Dad-specific support:

- *Don't divide [between parents] because of gender.*
- *Treat parents the same (nursery, schools, etc.).*
- *Teachers, etc. should not automatically speak to [Mum] first rather than [Dad].*
- *"The system should recognise the primary parent", [regardless of gender].*
- *Use positives about dads, rather than stereotypes.*
- *Staff who see things from dad's point of view, not their own opinions.*
- *"Give me something to do that I could have control of" – a personalised sheet of words to associate specifically to Dad tailored to dad's interests, and one tailored to mum's interests.*
- *Social groups more aimed at dads.*

Generic support:

Some fathers highlighted support that they would have valued early on:

- *Explanation of what Speech and Language is about.*
- *Information – starter packs for parents (such as disabled child).*

- *Would have been useful early on to talk with other parents – hope, what might come next.*

Communication and easy access to information emerged as a strong theme from most fathers:

- *Having sight of referral forms.*
- *More information/stories for other dads and staff.*
- *Need to be kept 'in the loop'.*
- *Simplify communications between services and parents – be kept informed and 'in the loop' (such as a summary of discussions).*
- *Services responding more swiftly.*

Developing positive relationships between professionals and parents was also raised by some fathers:

- *Get professionals to listen to me; not 'professional right, I'm wrong.'*
- *Speech and Language Services always there to support (build rapport with therapist).*

A few other practical suggestions were made:

- *Learning phonics to support child.*
- *Internet as a resource – videos / tutorial.*
- *Drop-in sessions for struggling parents.*

7.11 Anything else?

When asked what else that they would want to highlight, especially to services for children and families, fathers made a range of suggestions.

Acknowledge and value fathers:

*Acknowledge dads who want to have an active role.
Deal with stereotypes – recognise dads (even if minority).
Cultural things – approach dads as much as mums.*

Recognise the different social circumstances of fathers:

*Some fathers are vulnerable and could benefit from a support network of family and friends for emotional issues – the same as for mothers.
Some dads may feel uncomfortable when the majority is female – address assumptions and slight exclusion by some mums.*

Where possible, see mum and dad as a team, but not as the same:

*Physically addressing mother and father – move away from generic stuff.
Make it feel equal between both parents.*

Speech and Language team understanding who spends most time with child(ren), and then the partner's role.

Working as a team is important – both parents. Then [child] realises that both dad and mum are interested; both reinforce each other – consistent. Dads – try to be in on all sessions, so both parents can relate experiences or remember something; and remembering afterwards.

Communication by the Speech and Language Service with all parents is important:

Work more with parents/carers; better communication and regular updates from Speech and Language Therapy.

Communication – being 'in the loop' with the Speech and Language team. Not having to ask for things.

A couple of fathers wanted better resourcing of speech and language services to improve provision:

Early intervention; more regular screening, different ages, different settings, therefore more creative/innovative or train up teachers to spot issues.

Needs more input in Speech and Language Service – strain on therapists; stretched because of resources, so need more funding.

8. Discussion

Benefits and limitations of qualitative approach:

The qualitative approach to this project has allowed in-depth exploration with fathers on their priorities, preferences and thinking, enabling a more detailed understanding of speech, language and communication from a paternal perspective and in context of their circumstances.

Inevitably, the limitations of the approach mean that care must be taken in generalising from such a small sample size, and conclusions need to be carefully hedged.

Sample of fathers interviewed:

It should be noted that all but one of the fathers interviewed (87.5%) reside in the western half of Salford, which may simply reflect which speech and language therapists identified and nominated fathers for the project.

All (100%) were aged between 26 and 55 years. About 50% were married or in a civil partnership. None identified themselves as disabled but, significantly, half (50%) described themselves as carers. All (100%) identified themselves as white English/British.

This level of diversity may leave questions unanswered about the perspectives of fathers in the eastern half of Salford, younger fathers, disabled fathers and fathers from black and minority ethnic communities.

However, the length of experience of fatherhood with a children with speech, language and communication needs, and the length of experience of speech and language therapy services, suggests a good basis from which fathers could reflect their experience and learning.

9. Conclusions

Within the limitations of this small project, a number of initial conclusions may nevertheless be drawn.

Fathers recognise how crucial speech, language and communication as crucial to their child's general well-being and future opportunities, particularly in terms of confidence and independence. Fathers recognise particular benefits in terms of their child's socialisation and learning.

While many aspects of roles, strengths and challenges with regard to speech, language and communication are shared by mothers and fathers, there are also clear differences, which are complementary.

Many fathers take a different approach to mothers, and use different activities, modelling and learning techniques, drawing on their skills and life experience. They may have different communication styles and use some vocabulary that is distinct from those adopted by mothers.

While some communication and institutional difficulties are common for all parents (and possibly greater for those with a disabled child), others appear to be specific to fathers. Many fathers experience barriers because many gatherings or groups of parents tend to be largely female. Similarly, some feel challenged because most staff that they encounter are female, with a perception that some attitudes towards and the quality of communication with them are less positive and productive than with mothers.

While all fathers learn or adapt techniques from speech and language therapists, some also create or discover a range of their own specific solutions to help and support their child with speech, language and communication.

Research suggests that psychological and emotional aspects of paternal involvement in children's early upbringing (particularly how new dads see themselves as parents and adjust to the role), rather than the quantity of direct involvement in childcare, are most closely associated with positive behavioural outcomes in children.

What would 'good' look like for fathers?

Key to supporting fathers is actively acknowledging and valuing them in a positive way – as an asset for their child – and, wherever possible, seeing mum and dad as a team.

To achieve this requires recognising not only the different social circumstances of fathers and mothers, but also the primary parent (rather than assuming that this is always the mother).

More personalised and social support appropriate to dads would be beneficial, engaging with them as dads (rather than as men).

Dads are more likely to respond to being asked for help (strengths-based) to co-produce solutions, rather than being offered help (needs-based).

More male-friendly environments and groups would also help, as well as having more male staff working across services for children and families. These would enable the improved communication and easy access to information that many fathers want.

Addressing these issues will bring benefits not only to children, but also start to redress the imbalance that puts so many demands on mothers.

10. Recommendations

1. Agencies in all sectors should review their engagement with parents and whether an equitable approach is taken to fathers and mothers.
2. Agencies should take proportionate action to:
 - work with fathers to remove, overcome or minimise disadvantages that they face
 - take steps to meet the needs of fathers that are different from mothers
 - encourage fathers to participate equally with mothers in the speech, language and communication of their child(ren)
3. When commissioning and planning services for children and families, equality impact assessment should be applied with regard to the sex of parents, with particular regard to fathers.
4. Future service specifications should include specific requirements with regards to fathers, such as:
 - In order to maximise the well-being of children, the service should actively recognise and promote the role of positive fatherhood in the

well-being of children. Wherever possible, it should encourage fathers and mothers to work as partners with equally valuable roles in a team for their child(ren). It should also offer approaches and environments that are equally welcoming and appropriate to fathers and mothers.

5. The initial learning from this project, together with other work with fathers, should be shared with the commissioners and providers of other services for children and families, in order to consider their approach to positive fatherhood.

11. Implications

The potential implications of this learning for the commissioning and provision of services for children and families are considerable.

It suggests that there may need to be a cultural change in services to consider fathers equally alongside mothers. In order to facilitate this, both policies and staff training may need to be reviewed to assess their equality impact for fathers and mothers.

The balance of staffing in terms of sex should be reviewed and appropriate action taken where this is imbalanced.

The social and physical environments in which services are provided may need to be revised in order to make them as welcoming and friendly to fathers as to mothers.

Finally, the monitoring and evaluation of services should take full account of both fathers and mothers, and assess whether or not there are equitable provision and outcomes for them both.

12. Thanks

Most of all, thanks must go to the fathers who participated in the project, freely giving their time and sharing their experience. It is hoped that this report fairly reflects the key issues and priorities that they raised.

Thanks to the Programme Oversight Group for the 0-25 test cases for funding this project.

Thanks to Stephen Woods (Head of Service Improvement (Partnerships), Salford Clinical Commissioning Group) for commissioning the project, and for his continuing interest in positive fatherhood.

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Appendix 1

Dadly Does It

Dadly Does It is a social innovation project that has been run by Unlimited Potential since 2013, initially supported by Salford Clinical Commissioning Group. It has been funded since 2016 by the Lankelly Chase Foundation.

What is the issue or problem? What did we set out to do?

The core group is fathers with long-term histories of economic and social marginalisation. Many have experienced various childhood traumas, with associated complex and difficult family relationships and poor educational experiences.

The fathers often have poor quality of life – especially mental ill-health and social isolation – reflected in poverty, unemployment, homelessness, substance misuse and/ or criminal activity. They are at great risk of punitive and coercive interventions by public service agencies. Dadly Does It is also important because, despite all the work by statutory and social organisations over many years, a significant proportion of children in places such as Salford are still unlikely to fulfil their potential and therefore face the risk of severe and multiple disadvantage. Their families tend to make disproportionate use of public services, which are being reduced or withdrawn.

The initial work in Little Hulton in Salford (in the 3% most disadvantaged localities in England) found family breakdown and worklessness as key elements affecting fathers' well-being. Fathers' pride and shame often means they isolate themselves and tend towards unhelpful coping mechanisms, as they are often marginalised from the family home. How fathers feel is mirrored in the experience of the other core group: 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.

Dadly Does It aims to minimise the proportion of children experiencing these things. This helps to reduce the proportion of adults and future generations facing severe and multiple disadvantage. Complementing others' work with mothers, this can be achieved by co-designing flexible responses with fathers, delivered shoulder to shoulder with other fathers, to develop and move on.

The team engage people facing severe and multiple disadvantage by relating 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.

The ambition:

The team is testing in two new neighbourhoods whether the successes of fathers and children in Little Hulton in changing their lives can be sustained, deepened and replicated elsewhere. By doing so, the hope is that further evidence can be gained about how, and why, this approach works and how it might benefit public services.

An ideal transformed system would afford fathers and mothers equal importance, with work focussed towards meaningful life and relationships, as they define them. This means responses that 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 families.

People would be able to determine the terms of their own inclusion, rather than be supplicants at the dinner table of agencies. In fact, those who provide responses should be accountable to the intended beneficiaries. It is therefore critical that the approach is seen as citizen-driven for the well-being of fathers and families, not a 'service' with 'referral pathways', etc.

The team seek to transform lives through mutual enquiry and co-production with fathers by working to co-design and co-develop flexible responses with fathers and families, leading towards solutions that they want. Critically, this includes fathers working shoulder to shoulder with other fathers in protected spaces to develop and move on.

This starts with the strengths and wisdom ('tacit knowledge') within a community. The team use a strengths-based approach called positive deviance: finding those who overcome problems, despite having the same resources as everyone else.

During the action research, the team discovered the '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.

What did we do? What was the intervention or initiative?

The team is seeking to replicate the approach adopted in Little Hulton, adjusted to reflect the learning gained there. This is being done in two new areas: Winton in Salford; and Langley in Rochdale borough. These localities were selected after consultation with stakeholders including families and local leaders.

The organisation uses the four stages of positive deviance (4Ds) in each locality:

1. Defining the problem
2. Determining the positive role models ('positive deviants')
3. Discovering what dads do (uncommon practices or behaviours)
4. Designing ways of sharing solutions

Fathers lead the work and communities are discovering for themselves what the problems for fathers are, who their 'positive deviant' fathers are, and how they deal with problems.

In principle, fathers design spaces where positive role models talk openly about their problems, shoulder to shoulder, not face to face. Fathers then design and run dad-child fun activities, enabling bonding with their children.

The team learned in Little Hulton that, 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 mothers' images of what fathers are like. There is the start of a cultural shift in attitudes as an alternative positive model of fatherhood emerges.

The values and principles of strengths-based working are replicable. Leadership and knowledge transfer are central to embedding these ideas in mainstream public services. 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 (Foot et al., 2010).

What were the key outcomes?

The reported changes that have so far come about from fathers' involvement include:

- 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, assisted by a greater child focus and therefore more common ground within these relationships
- improved opportunities for positive and interesting engagement with children, leading to greater confidence in their parenting ability and skills; this has a ripple effect, leading to greater self-confidence in the children themselves

Whilst not all these are seen in all the men engaging, they are common themes and often cumulative – that is, the greater or longer the involvement, the more of these changes that become apparent.

The women also report most of the above changes amongst the men. Both the men and the women report Dadly Does It has been ‘life-changing’ in its impact for many of the men involved. In addition, the women see 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!); and providing them with more time to either relax or develop their own lives and interests.

The data collected from children and young people is particularly compelling. They report not only an increased amount of time spent with their fathers but very noticeable improvements in the quality of this time. This is linked to ‘happier’ dispositions and improved friendships that they notice their fathers have developed. This leads in a cyclical way to mutual improvements in trust and respect between the children and their fathers, and concomitant improvements in their own behaviour. Some also note improvements in relationships between their parents and certainly greater enjoyment in relationships within the home.

The work is continuing to evolve, with fathers themselves taking greater active control of the direction and strategic vision. New ventures are being attempted to continue to ensure the work is diverse and inclusive, reaching numerous men within the neighbourhood and, hopefully, beyond.

In summary, three key changes have been identified in fathers:

- fathers are now better able to cope with challenges
 - fathers are more confident and engaged fathers
 - fathers feel that they are able to lead more worthwhile lives
- (Robertson et al., 2015)

Public and voluntary sector workers have also verified that they have seen a change in the fathers and that this has reduced the resources they needed to allocate, or were likely to allocate in future, to support a few of the families. A social return on investment study found that the potential financial return to children’s services alone is £1: £2.25 in savings, while every £1 invested yielded approximately £14 of well-being value for the core fathers involved (Inglis, 2016).

What were the lessons learned?

While the team is still doing much learning in the two new neighbourhoods, the men involved, especially those most fully involved, describe how Dadly Does It 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 both the many stressful situations that they face are common to other local men and that positive ways of coping with these issues are possible. In this sense, engagement in Dadly Does It provides an alternative to previous settings and relationships that often fostered negative coping mechanisms (smoking, drinking, social isolation) to stressful situations.

The greatest challenge is that many child-related services focus on mothers and largely ignore fathers. Services that do engage tend to operate so people must fit them, rather than services fitting people. Services often look in silos at specific needs of individual 'clients', rather than relating to whole people in their social context and recognising their strengths.

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 (Opondo et al., 2016).

Equally, Dadly Does It still risks being viewed as a 'service' delivered 'to' the men rather than a project owned with them. The idea of genuine co-production with local people and communities is still a challenging one for many professionals and agencies.

As a result of this, the team have learned how to engage and negotiate with 'mainstream' agencies and how to gain recognition of the important role and influence of fathers on the health and well-being of children. Not least by drawing on behavioural insights to engage with leaders and decision-makers in statutory agencies – spreading change through making things easy, attractive, social and timely, such as:

- 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

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Appendix 2

Speech, language and communication – exploring the role of fathers

This is a briefing sheet for fathers (including other people in a father role) taking part in this project.

The project is being done by Unlimited Potential, which is a community benefit society based in Salford - <https://www.unlimitedpotential.org.uk/>

The project is funded by Salford City Council, working together with NHS Salford Clinical Commissioning Group.

Introduction

I am Chris Dabbs and I work for Unlimited Potential.



Unlimited Potential has been working with fathers in different parts of Salford for about five years. We are exploring the effects of positive fatherhood on the happiness and well-being of children.

If there is anything in this sheet that you do not understand, please let me know and I will explain.

Purpose of the project

Dads have an important role in the speech, language and communication of their children. This is often not recognised.

After recent work with families, speech and language services in Salford have decided that they need to think about they engage and meet the needs of dads better.

In the project, I want to learn more about the role of dads, and how they might best be supported around the speech, language and communication of their children.

Your involvement

The speech and language therapy services have given me your name and contact details. They have told me that you have said that you are happy to take part in this project. They have said that you have consented to be contacted for the project.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can decide whether or not to take part. You can withdraw at any time. This will not affect any services that you or your family get.

Unlimited Potential is a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 (Register number 30669 R at the Financial Conduct Authority).
Registered Office: Innovation Forum, 51 Frederick Road, Salford M6 6FP.



What will happen

Your involvement depends on what you prefer. This can be in an individual conversation (in person or by phone), a group discussion, or answering questions by email. This should take no more than 30 minutes.

This will cover your views on:

- the speech, language and communication of children
- the role of dads in this
- the support and services available and how they relate to dads

Information from the conversation or discussion will be recorded. It will be used to inform a report. Quotes might be used. But neither you nor your family will be identified in any way.

Benefits

The project aims to improve support for dads in the speech, language and communication of their children in Salford.

It might also help to promote more widely the role of positive fatherhood in the happiness and well-being of children.

Risks

There is no significant risk in taking part in the project. You will not have to share anything that is uncomfortable, or that you do not want to share.

Confidentiality

The information from your conversation or discussion will be kept confidential. No one except Chris Dabbs will have access to it afterwards. It will be kept for no more than three months and will then be destroyed.

Reimbursement

You will not be paid or get any incentive for taking part in the project. If you incur any costs (such as for travel), we will pay you back for these.

Sharing the results

You will be sent a summary of the results, if you want one. If you want to have the full report, this will be sent to you.

Contact

If you have queries or concerns, please contact Chris Dabbs at Unlimited Potential: 0161 743 4502 or email chris.dabbs@unlimitedpotential.org.uk

Appendix 3

Speech, language and communication – exploring the role of fathers

Consent form

Statement by the participant

I have read the project briefing sheet, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to participate in this project.

Name	
Signature	
Date	

Statement by the person taking consent

I have provided the person above with the project briefing sheet, or read it to them.

To the best of my ability, I have made sure that the person understands that these things will be done:

1. An individual conversation, email questionnaire or group discussion.
2. Answers will be recorded and used to inform a report.
3. Information collected will be kept for no more than three months and will then be destroyed.
4. A summary of the results and/or a full report will be sent to each participant, if they want one.

I confirm that the person was given an opportunity to ask questions about the project, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the person has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Name	
Signature	
Date	

Appendix 4

Speech, language and communication – exploring the role of fathers

Name		Date	
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Question	Answer
1. How old is your child? How long have you been involved with speech and language services?	
2. Why is speech, language and communication important for your child?	
3. What role do you think that you have as a dad? Is this any different from the role of a mum? If so, how?	
4. What particular strengths do you have to offer as a dad? <i>(skills, knowledge and experience)</i>	

<p>5. What particular challenges do you have as a dad?</p> <p><i>cf. mum</i></p>	
<p>6. What solutions have you created or found?</p>	
<p>7. What might make things better to support you as a dad?</p> <p><i>cf. mum</i></p>	
<p>8. Is there anything else that you think is important?</p>	
<p>9. Would you be interested in meeting other dads to discuss things together?</p>	