

5 Individual, group and mixed approaches

PROMISING PRACTICE



'I STILL GET THE SENSE THAT THERE IS A NOTION THAT THE FIRST STEP TO ENGAGING YOUNG DADS IS "TO SET UP A GROUP". THIS ASSUMPTION NEEDS TO BE CHALLENGED.'
(Lowe, 2006)

Some projects and agencies providing services for young fathers have been criticised for becoming too fixated on working in groups. Group work can be extremely valuable and have many advantages in delivering services for young fathers. However, it is not universally appealing and can exclude and alienate some young men. Rather than being used as a matter of course, the potential benefits of group work need to be considered and weighed carefully against potential pitfalls and alternative one-to-one or mixed model approaches.

Working with five project sites around England, TSA's Young Fathers Project (Mordaunt, 2005) generated in-depth understandings of group work in order to help young fathers projects to plan when group work would be valuable, and when it should be avoided. The research elicited a number of important learning points (see In Focus, next page).

KEY QUESTIONS

- Which mode of delivery (individual, group, or mixed) will best suit your client group?
- What training needs does this choice of delivery present for workers?
- What barriers may prevent the successful use of group work (e.g. time, space, venue, aims of the group etc.)? How will you overcome these?
- What are the financial implications for delivering young fathers support through one-to-one, group, or mixed approaches?

Individual, Group, and Mixed Approaches

infocus



Using Group Approaches

"It's not that you can't do an awful lot without running a group, but you can do an awful lot in a group."

[trainer from the YFP]

TSA's Young Fathers Project (YFP) - TSA's

YFP set out to develop, test, and evaluate an approach for working with young fathers who were either disengaged or socially excluded. The project was directed at young vulnerable fathers from different ethnic groups in urban

and rural settings. Site locations included Birmingham (Top Dads), London (Newpin), Newcastle (Fathers Plus), Norwich (Mancroft Advice Project), and Sheffield (Father Figures). Each site located within a host voluntary organisation, was expected to work with over 50 young fathers aged under 25, of whom more than 15 would be teenagers, by developing a programme combining group work, one-to-one work, and peer support.

The programmes were to help the young fathers consider their personal attitudes and behaviour as men and fathers, while improving their life skills and practical child care skills.

Findings revealed a number of significant benefits to using group work in services for young fathers:

- young fathers can develop confidence as a sense of security and relationships develop
- peer support can be developed
- young fathers are not totally dependent on the group leader
- isolation of individual young fathers can be broken down

- sometimes preferred by some young fathers over more intense one-to-one contact
- group members can sometimes develop more quickly in a limited space of time
- information can be delivered to many rather than individually.

In addition, a number of key characteristics for successful group work with young fathers were evident including:

- a critical number of core members need to be recruited to form a viable group
- groups must be held at a convenient time, place, and venue accepting of the client group
- group sessions should operate regularly each week or fortnight
- promotion material should state whether children are welcome
- groups should be monitored to avoid possible alienation and/or marginalisation of individuals
- groups should be run by at least two workers, a facilitator and a co-facilitator with suitable training and background.

Contact: TSA, Tel +44 (0)1273 693311

A number of projects and services we spoke to reported successfully using group based approaches in their work with young fathers. Amongst others, these include the Great Yarmouth Young Men's Project, Brighton and Hove Young Fathers Project, Base 25 in Wolverhampton, a fathers-to-be group in Berwick-upon-Tweed (run by a Northumberland midwife), Barrow Dads' Group in Barrow-in-Furness, Boys2Men in London, T-BAG in Halifax, UKdadsposse and the Potential Project in Oxford, M.A.P in Norwich, and DVD in Rotherham. Whilst some of these projects use group work as their core approach (e.g. T-BAG), most of those listed above adopt more mixed models of working in which group work is combined with more individualistic methods. Such mixed models can provide a great deal of flexibility in service delivery (see In Focus).

infocus



Mixed Models of Working

Mancroft Advice Project (M.A.P.),

Norwich - M.A.P. currently works with young fathers through a mix of one-to-one work and group activities. It is a free independent information, advice, and counselling service for young people aged 11 to 25yrs. Provision includes a drop-in for young fathers, practical advice and information, skills development, and support for issues relating to being young men as well as young fathers. Other services include advice on housing, benefits and advocacy, a children and young peoples rights worker, a young fathers worker, free pregnancy testing, free condoms, a Connexions drop-in, and counselling service.

Learning Points

'Our work combines the informality of a drop-in with the formality of doing a focused group activity, it's all combined in one so that the boundaries between the one-to-one

and group sessions become much more blurred.'

- Group work can mean it is difficult to meet individual needs. Whilst some young fathers may be involved with their children and want to work on practical aspects of parenting, others may have no contact and thus want to focus on very different issues. A mix of individual and group based approaches means workers are able to respond more flexibly to young fathers, by utilising the drop-in where one-to-one work can take place, but also conducting structured pieces of work with those that are in attendance (e.g. a group activity on parent craft or working on the production of a CD-ROM about being a father).
- The youth work model is an effective way of delivering support for some young fathers. Moving between informal and more formal styles of working seems to suit the young men as opposed to more single structured approaches (e.g. such as a 6 week course).
- M.A.P. has found that a mixed approach to young fathers work can help engage young fathers, as it is likely to be more suitable for greater numbers of young men. M.A.P. currently works regularly with approximately 20 young fathers who attend the drop-in on a weekly basis.

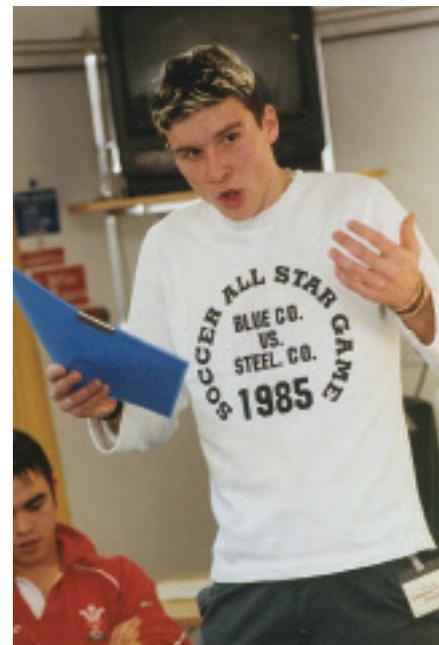
Contact: Andy Wood (Young Fathers Worker), Tel: +44 (0)1603 766 994

The other projects and agencies interviewed for this research identified one-to-one work as the main basis of their work with young fathers. This usually took the form of drop-in style support sessions where young fathers can access a number of support services at one time (and usually in one location). Although purely individualistic approaches can be a costly method of service delivery, they can provide tailor-made support. Moreover, they may be accessible to more young fathers particularly those who may lack confidence, and feel too emotionally vulnerable to want to work publicly in groups (at least initially). Ladz 2 Dadz in Northamptonshire tell us that adopting one-to-one approaches (as opposed to group work) can help to avoid ‘lion-cub’ type scenarios where young men in group situations may feel defensive and be unable to talk about the emotional aspects of their lives:

‘It’s difficult for them [young fathers] to be emotive in a group - we stay away from groups because of the "lion-cub" aspect to them where some young men become competitive and macho... They need individually tailored support packages, that are just for them.’

Working with young fathers from South London, Lewisham Young Fathers Project works with young men on an individual basis to provide broad support packages of information and advice as required. The support is flexible and wide ranging, and aims to help local young fathers develop confidence as young men and fathers, as well as improve their relationships with their children. Similarly, Fathers First on the Isle of Wight provides individual support for young fathers that is holistic, flexible, and adaptable to individual needs. Work is needs-led and depends on the presenting issue, but also includes confidence and esteem building, parenting skills, child development, sexual health, and learning opportunities.

The TPSS in Hull prefer not to use group work with young fathers, and instead use exclusively one-to-one approaches. The team report that this is due to a number of reasons some practical (e.g. lack of space) but mostly more strategically related. One reason is that individual approaches allow services to respond more quickly and easily to the complex needs a very young father (e.g. school-age) may have. Individual approaches also mean



.....

‘EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT US THAT MOST YOUNG FATHERS HAVE VERY COMPLEX INDIVIDUAL NEEDS - NEEDS WHICH SIMPLY CANNOT BE ADDRESSED THROUGH "TRADITIONAL" FATHERS GROUP SETTINGS.’

.....

Individual, Group, and Mixed Approaches

young parents themselves can be flexible in how they access service provision; as a couple, individually, or a mixture of both. Young fathers accessing the TPSS services, typically present non-parenting support issues such as housing, education, benefits, and exclusion. Consequently, the team report that with such a 'mixed bag' of support needs, group work is just not appropriate. However, the team do sometimes refer young fathers to local fathers groups if the young man requests it, or if the team feels he may benefit from group interactions (such as experiencing peer support or developing confidence).

Learning Points

'... I felt a real pressure to create a group for young fathers to get together, it felt like a distraction... I am now doing group work and looking forward to it, but only because it is based on earlier one-to-one work.'

- * Practitioners need to challenge the assumption that 'group work' is always best and consider the significant benefits of one-to-one work or mixed approaches with young fathers. The TPSS in Hull have found that group work is simply not appropriate to meet the needs of the youngest fathers who access their services. The TPSS say that individual approaches are vital in meeting the complex and multifaceted needs (including emotional) that the youngest fathers often present.
- * Group work is often conducted on the fringes of a project's main activity with little or no attempt to mainstream the work. Projects and agencies delivering services for young fathers need to consider carefully the purpose and benefits group work may have over other individualistic approaches.
- * To increase the likelihood of successful outcomes and sustain engagement with young fathers, group work programmes need to be adaptable and negotiated with the young fathers in sessions using a mixture of approaches and activities. In the ante-natal group for fathers-to-be provided by Sure Start in rural Northumberland, negotiation concerning the aims and content of the individual group sessions is a regular aspect of the work.
- * Group work can achieve different outcomes from one-to-one work. A mixed approach to fathers work, combining basic information, support, and advice alongside the exploration of issues and attitudes connected to fatherhood, is likely to attract greater numbers of young men. M.A.P. in Norwich successfully adopted a mixed approach to working with young fathers meaning they can offer a wide range of flexible support to young fathers.

Bringing younger and older fathers together



One issue that arose when talking to a few projects and agencies about approaches to delivering young fathers work (particularly those using elements of group working), was whether fathers work should be age-related or differentiated in order to be most effective. In other words, can young fathers and older young fathers (say in their mid 20s and older) benefit mutually from participating together? If so, what issues does this raise for each age group?

Although we cannot resolve such questions here, it is useful to think about the implications they may have for young fathers work. As might be expected, the findings from our research are mixed. Some practitioners we spoke to suggested that although younger and older fathers may have diverse support needs, group work that mixes ages can work as each age-group supports the other in different

ways. For example, DVD in Rotherham found that ‘being a dad’ was enough to allow the group to work successfully together:

‘You might be 17,18 and have three or four kids. You might get a dad that’s at 30 who is on his first. So, this 17 year old lad will support that older person becoming a dad, and the older dad can support that individual about life experiences... I don’t think they really saw age as an issue - they looked at coming together because they’ve got a common goal - they’re all dads. They’ve all got different circumstances, but they’re all dads.’

However, the most common view from our research (and others) seems to suggest that for the youngest fathers, some form of age-differentiated approach may be most suitable. For instance, the TPSS in Hull said that in their view, the needs of the very

‘We quickly realised that because young fathers as a group are so diverse - they can be so young, they can be 14 and like a rabbit in headlights - really, really scared. Or they can be over 20. You can’t mix the two together, they have such different needs.’

Individual, Group, and Mixed Approaches

youngest fathers are simply too far apart from older fathers to bring them together in a meaningful way. Furthermore, evidence from TSA's young fathers project (Mordaunt, 2005), suggests that young fathers have a range of needs specific to their age and maturity which can often best be met by a more age-related approach. The findings showed that for young men in the 17-19 age groups, developing fathering skills was not high on their agendas, particularly during their initial engagement with the project. However, as the presenting concerns of employment, education, contact with their children, child protection, or housing were addressed, then some gradually became more involved in fatherhood issues.

What this suggests is that for the youngest fathers (e.g. school-age fathers), the 'hooks' used to draw them into a project or programme, will probably need to be different to those

used to engage older fathers. Whilst group approaches may suit some older fathers, less formal youth work style approaches are likely to be more suitable for young fathers where outreach work can take place in their own territory or in neutral settings. However, Alan Seabrook (Young Men's and Young Fathers Worker) from Brighton and Hove Young Fathers Project (BHYFP) tells us that it is important not to 'throw the baby out with the bath water'. He suggests that bringing young and older fathers together to do 'fathers work' can be successful in very specific circumstances such as ante-natal classes. In such situations, younger and older young fathers are likely to be there for the same reasons (e.g. information and advice relating to pregnancy and birth), and if a young fathers worker is present, then further individual work can take place outside of the classes to address other more specific presenting issues if required.



6 Young fathers workers

PROMISING PRACTICE

In this section we explore a number of issues relating to practitioners who work with young fathers. Our research tells us that where there are dedicated young fathers posts, the workers tend to be men. We examine whether this is necessary and discuss the role of gender and ethnicity in delivering both specialist services (for fathers), and more generic mainstream services for parents. Finally, we present learning points regarding the skills practitioners need in order to work successfully with young fathers.



Gender and ethnicity in practice

Gender and ethnicity (of workers and clients) raises a number of key questions in relation to young fathers work. Although some women often express clear preferences in terms of the gender of workers (e.g. in health settings such as GP surgeries), this preference is often not quite as clear cut in relation to young men (Lloyd, 2001). T-BAG in Halifax tell us that their teenage fathers usually prefer to confide with the female workers, rather than the male worker. Similarly, the Health Initiatives Team at Education Leeds (working with school-age fathers) reported that the young men who attend the after-school group (FACT), tend to develop strong connections with the female nursery nurses. Both projects proposed that it may be the ‘maternal’ aspect young

men were responding positively to, but also asserted that young fathers respected the knowledge and expertise these women bring to the work.

Such findings challenge the often unspoken assumption that individuals working with young fathers should necessarily be male (and fathers themselves). They also challenge the idea that there is a need to create dedicated young fathers workers posts (filled by men) in mainstream services. However, there is perhaps an important caveat here in that without dedicated young fathers worker posts, it is perhaps likely that the impetus for change in championing work with young fathers, has the potential to fall by the wayside. In our research, practitioners views were fairly

‘It doesn’t have to be a fella. It’s not about it being a man. It’s about somebody being dedicated to that role.’

‘...AS LONG AS THEY [THE WORKER] ARE GENUINELY CONCERNED, CARES, AND CAN SOLVE YOUR PROBLEM, I DON’T THINK GENDER MATTERS.’

KEY QUESTIONS

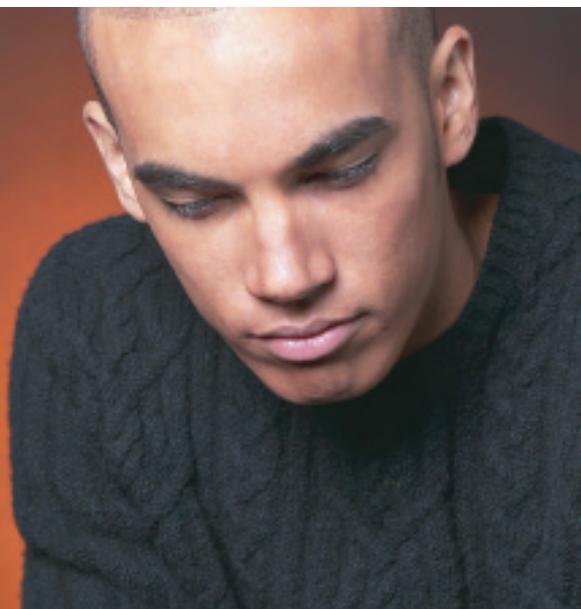
- How might the gender or ethnicity of a worker impact on the success of young fathers work?
- How can pervasive and traditional constructions of masculinity be challenged by practitioners working with young fathers?
- Who is responsible for young fathers work? The dedicated worker or a whole-team approach?
- If an individual working with young fathers is male, do they also need to be a father?
- What do the above questions mean for the recruitment of staff working with young fathers? What role might positive action play in this process?

unanimous, with most suggesting that whilst gender is important, it doesn't necessarily mean individuals working with young fathers should be male. Many of those interviewed affirmed that women can and do work successfully with young men around fathering issues, and that young fathers do not always wish to work with other men. This was seen as partly due to homophobia (e.g. worries about being perceived as gay for working 'too closely' with another man), but also because many young men prefer to talk to women about issues such as relationships and child care as they see them as more qualified in these areas.

Overall, the projects and organisations we spoke to overwhelmingly agreed that it is the skills and attitudes of the worker that is more important than their gender. Being welcoming and 'there for them', approachable, knowledgeable, sensitive, reliable, and positive about fatherhood were said to be qualities that are more important than whether the worker is male or female. Nevertheless, some projects also said that a male presence is desirable in support services intended for young parents and that in some cases, this means creating a dedicated young fathers worker post. For

example, Fathers Plus in Newcastle and the Upfront Team in Bradford feel it is important for male workers to be more visible in services for young parents. In this way, projects can begin to confront perceptions that such services are primarily for women, and help prevent young men feeling services for parents are not for them. Moreover, Lewisham Young Fathers Project and the Health Initiatives Team at Education Leeds told us that a male fathers worker can offer significant influence in helping to challenge ingrained perspectives and attitudes of other professionals about young fathers, by offering an alternative 'side of the coin' in team or wider strategy meetings.

'Some professionals don't see a lot of positives in young men... it's important that whoever's in this [fathers worker] role challenges that. It can be uncomfortable as it might challenge somebody on the same team... but there's a need to ask those awkward questions to move a situation forward.'



It is likely that the best arrangement is probably to have both male and female workers co-operating and engaging with, and available to, young fathers (Burgess and Bartlett, 2004). Indeed, DVD in Rotherham emphasised that having male and female workers can be useful in that it gives young fathers the choice of who supports them, but also allows modelling of male/female co-operation which some families may not have witnessed.

We also asked projects and organisations about the role a worker's ethnicity might play in their work with young fathers. Responses were along similar lines to that of gender, in that it was a worker's skills and attitudes that were more important than ethnicity *per se* (see also ContinYou, 2005a, 2005b; Lloyd, 2001). However, two projects specifically reported that the ethnicity of young fathers workers had been an important factor in recruiting and engaging Asian young men in their local areas. For example, workers from Upfront and West Bowling Sure Start in Bradford, told us that being

South Asian in an area with a large Pakistani and Bangladeshi population had been key in developing relationships with young men and understanding the cultural barriers preventing some young fathers from accessing services. Language skills (e.g. the ability to speak Urdu, Punjabi, as well as English), knowledge of local communities and religions, and understanding of cultural sensitivities were all thought to be central in developing and delivering services, and helping young fathers to access these services.

The boys2MEN project has emphasised the benefits having suitably experienced African Caribbean workers brings to work with black young people including 'positive role-modelling'. Indeed, the Top Dads Project in Birmingham (Mordaunt, 2005) attributed its success in engaging African-Caribbean young men as largely being due to the personal credibility of the project worker, a prominent figure in the local African-Caribbean community.

Learning Points

- * The specific influences gender and ethnicity may have in terms of engaging and delivering support for young fathers, are likely to be complex. In some cases, it may be helpful to strategically recruit staff in order to take such factors into account. For example, projects and services in Lewisham and Bradford have both emphasised strongly the positive impacts worker gender and ethnicity can have on the success of engaging with young fathers and young men.
- * The implicit assumption that practitioners working with young fathers should be male (including dedicated fathers workers), needs to be challenged. Although having a male presence can be very beneficial, and in some cases desirable (e.g. help to keep a focus on key issues for young fathers), this does not mean that women cannot, and do not work successfully with young men on fathering issues. Indeed, some of the most successful work with young fathers has been undertaken by women, and it is important to appreciate that female staff do not need to 'wait for a man' before engaging with fathers (Burgess, 2006b).
- * Ethnicity appears to be significant when it comes to reaching young men from BME groups. Skilled workers from similar ethnic backgrounds may appear to be more approachable in the first instance to the young men. The worker's cultural knowledge and understanding may also enable him or her to 'connect' more easily with young people from minority ethnic groups.

Worker skills and training



TSA's Young Fathers Project revealed a number of key characteristics for workers that seem to determine whether a project or organisation working with young fathers is likely to be successful.

'Young fathers work is not just the remit of the young fathers workers role - it is the whole team's responsibility.'

The Characteristics of Successful Fathers Workers

Workers need to be:

- * proactive in creating initial contacts with referral agencies
- * determined to contact potential young fathers
- * constantly patient in making regular contact with clients
- * accessible to clients during the week by telephone (mobile and land-line)
- * based in a centre accessible to clients
- * approachable in the eyes of the young fathers
- * trained to work one-to-one and as a group facilitator
- * realistic in understanding boundaries of own expertise
- * able to refer on clients who need services beyond the scope of the project or service
- * respectful of clients but able to set boundaries of acceptable behaviour
- * willing to accept each client's stage of development and work with it.

Adapted from Mordaunt (2005)

'IF THERE'S ONE SKILL THAT MATTERS MORE THAN ALL THE OTHERS, IT'S THE ABILITY TO DEVELOP NETWORKS...'

Practitioners we spoke to confirmed many of the key characteristics reported by Mordaunt (2005). Similarly, ContinYou's (2005b) *Top Dads* also identifies a number of qualities important for those working with young fathers. A number of workers told us that confidence and the ability to challenge other professionals is an important quality. Fathers Plus, the TPSS in Hull, Lewisham Young Fathers Project, and the Health Initiatives Team at Education Leeds all highlighted that challenging attitudes was an important skill to develop. Workers need to be able to promote the idea that young fathers work is not just the remit of the dedicated young fathers worker's role, but is the whole team's responsibility. They also need to be able to tackle fellow professionals who hold stereotypical negative views about young fathers.

Practitioners also told us that in order to encourage others to work with young fathers, individuals need appropriate training to ensure that it is done in a way that encourages a 'whole team' approach to engaging routinely with mothers and fathers. Yet despite the obvious importance of staff training, TSA's Young Fathers Project shows that it is frequently overlooked as time and budget pressures are focused on setting up the work, and then developing it. There are a number of key organisations that offer training for individuals working with young fathers. Details are provided in 'Top Tips'.

* TOP TIPS *

Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA)

Offers training and conferences on a wide range of subjects including working with young fathers, working with young men, developing positive self-esteem in young people, developing training skills, and many more. Training courses can be tailored to specific requirements, or be designed from scratch to meet specific needs.

The *Working With Young Fathers* course covers a number of areas including:

- * successful approaches to engaging young fathers
- * what's happening where in England
- * what young fathers say about support
- * one-to-one and group work
- * peer support
- * being strategic
- * working with very young fathers
- * the worker gender debate.

Contact: Lise Hansen or Sarah Lee (Training Co-ordinators),

Tel. +44 (0)1273 771 249 or **Website:** www.tsa.uk.com

Working With Men (WWM)

Offers a range of training courses on working with boys and young men including masculinity, working with young fathers, what works with fathers, working with violence, boys and underachievement, managing work with boys, sexual health and young men, and more. WWM also run a programme of workshops which aim to benefit and equip professionals whose work impacts upon young people, especially boys and young men.

Contact: Trefor Lloyd, **Tel:** +44 (0)20 7732 9409 or

Website: www.workingwithmen.org/training

Fathers Direct

Run one, two, and three day courses on Working with Young Fathers. The courses can be run in-house, or for a consortium of local agencies. Amongst other things, the training aims to help participants:

- * understand young fathers' roles in child development
- * examine attitudes and feelings towards young fathers
- * develop the confidence, knowledge and skills needed to encourage positive relationships between young fathers and their children
- * plan effective needs-led approaches
- * explore and develop strategies to overcome barriers in trying to integrate services for young fathers into mainstream provision
- * explore cultural and personal assumptions about men and fathers
- * learn key approaches and techniques in working with young fathers
- * reflect on working practices
- * examine ways of working in partnership with young mothers and the wider families of both the mother and father
- * learn how to stay well-informed and supported as work with young fathers develops.

Tel: +44 (0)845 634 1328 or **E-mail:** training@fathersdirect.com

Learning Points

'Some agencies can be overtly hostile to start with - not understanding - the ability to get inside and prove worth before the project's actually delivered something, is absolutely vital.'

- * It's not the interrelation of gender, ethnicity, or age that matters in setting up and delivering effective support for young fathers, rather it is the skills of a worker that are important (though of course such skills partly flow from an individual's background and experience). Practitioners require a broad range of transferable and specific skills in order to maximise potential successes. Sure Start in the West Bowling and Manningham areas of Bradford tell us that the ability of a practitioner to network and be able to explain the benefits of the work clearly to other professionals, are essential skills in young fathers work.
- * Workers do not necessarily need to be 'experts' in terms of their knowledge of parenting and other issues. Instead, it is important for workers to be realistic about their own boundaries and limitations, and be able to refer to appropriate 'others' as and when necessary.
- * A clear message from the literature (e.g. Quinton *et al.*, 2002) is that many health professionals know little about young fathers, do not see them as central to their tasks, and feel that they lack the confidence and necessary skills to engage with young men. Because of the predominance of women in support services, it is likely that a number of these professionals will be women. However, it is essential that in acknowledging the role and interplay of gender in delivering support for young fathers, this does not equate to a culture of blaming female workers. Instead, it is important to recognise that the prior professional experiences that many women have had often do not provide them with the relevant opportunities to work with young men. Consequently, there is a need to support female workers so they too are able to challenge negative beliefs about young fathers. Moreover, anti-discriminatory training that helps develop whole-team approaches which recognise young fathers as legitimate specialist and mainstream service users is also valuable.



7 Working with other organisations

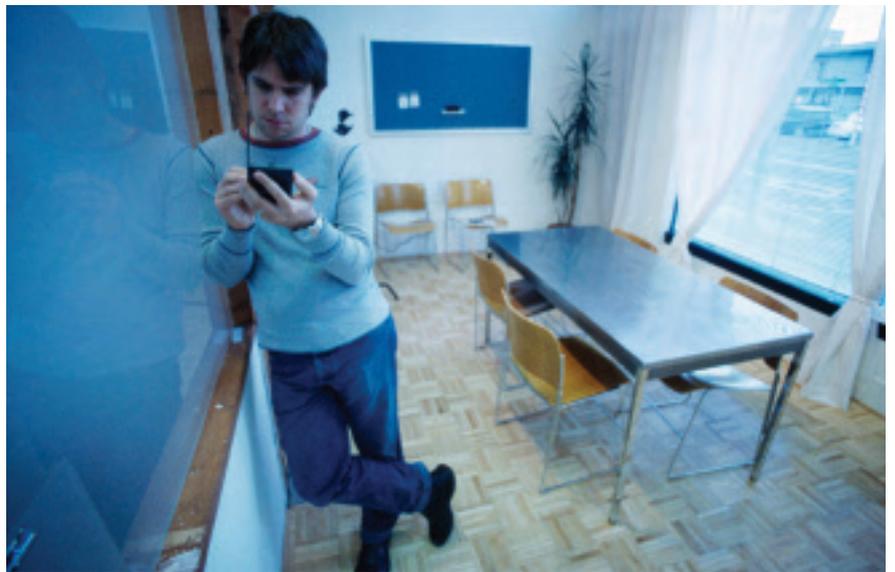
PROMISING PRACTICE

In this section, we present some examples of young fathers work that have successfully adopted multi-agency approaches. We asked practitioners about the benefits and pitfalls in developing positive relationships with other agencies. They also offered 'hints and tips' for those wanting to explore ways of partnership working.

Partnerships and networking

Building a network of positive contacts and relationships with other professionals and organisations is a key factor in the success of young fathers work. Views from practitioners tell us that networking is important for a number of reasons including:

- Establishing networks means that young fathers can be linked in with the most appropriate services that can support them. It is unlikely that any one project or agency can meet the range of young fathers' support needs.
- Building positive relationships and trust with other agencies can help smooth the way to accessing services for young fathers. Resistance from agencies is common regarding the perceived benefits of young fathers work. Networking can help to challenge such perceptions and stereotypes.
- Positive networks can have a direct impact on young fathers work in terms of providing valuable routes for raising awareness of the work, and creating opportunities for the dissemination of expertise and learning (e.g. by delivering training to other agencies). For example, as a direct result of developing strong links with various organisations and agencies, Fathers Plus offers various workshops, training, resources, and practical advice on a consultancy basis.



KEY QUESTIONS

- How will you gain the confidence of other organisations and agencies for potential referrals?
- What methods will you use to gain contact with others working with young fathers?
- How will you present your work to convince others about the important and value of your work?

'YOU NEED TO FIND OUT WHAT OTHER AGENCIES ARE OUT THERE - MAKING THEM AWARE OF YOUR WORK - AND UNDERSTANDING ITS BENEFITS...'

Working with Other Organisations

Various practitioners and project managers we spoke to said that being strategic and planning a multi-agency approach to young fathers work had been a particularly central part of their work leading to successful outcomes for young fathers. Amongst others, DVD in Rotherham B2b+ in Sunderland (see In Focus), Lewisham

Young Fathers Project, and the Gloucestershire Young Fathers Outreach Project (GYOP) all explicitly highlighted the importance of developing positive networks, and working in partnership with other agencies to meet more fully, the individual needs of young fathers.

infocus



Multi-Agency Working

B2b+ and the Y-Not Project, Sunderland

B2b+ and Y-Not projects are multi-agency initiatives with Sunderland Social Services Directorate being the lead agency. Other partners involved in setting up and running the project include Sunderland Children's Services, Connexions Tyne and Wear, Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust, Teenage Pregnancy Board, Sure Start (Plus), Bridge Women's Project, and Children North East.

B2b+ works in partnership with all of the agencies currently involved in providing support and advice to young parents across Sunderland. The project provides support for teenage mums, dads, and their children by improving learning and health, strengthening families and communities particularly in relation to the involvement of fathers, and improving the social and emotional well being of teenage mothers and fathers and their children.

Services for young mothers and young fathers are numerous and comprehensive including:

- an informal drop-in for access to support including health, Connexions, housing advice, welfare rights, and childcare

- a Childcare Development Worker for parenting advice
- a Young Fathers Worker for support, advice, and training opportunities.
- a variety of courses and training (e.g. Craft, ICT, Maths, English, Independent Living Skills etc.)
- a toy library - toys are available to borrow and advice offered on appropriate toys and safety equipment
- free crèche facilities run by trained early years workers
- full access to the Y-Not? Project – this is an extension of B2b+ for young mothers, young fathers, and young people leaving care. Provision and activities include an art project, theatre group, writing group, DJ training/courses.

Learning Points

'One size does not fit all!'

- A multi-agency approach is an extremely effective way to ensure the individual needs of young mothers and young fathers are addressed.
- The imaginative use of resources in the project is made possible by the way the project is funded. Mainstream funding from Social Services, Education and Health has to be spent in particular ways. However, additional funding streams from the European Social Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Sure Start Plus grant (no longer available), and Teenage Pregnancy implementation grant, can allow monies to be spent more flexibly.
- The range of activities offered makes the project unique within Sunderland and contributes to why the number of young

fathers accessing the project continues to rise. In 2003-4, 15 young fathers accessed B2b+ rising to 40 young fathers during 2004-5. So far in 2005-6, 35 young fathers have accessed the services.

Next steps – Given the educational and emotional support young mothers currently receive from the project, B2b+ are hoping to develop similar support for young fathers beginning September 2006. The 'Connect' course for young fathers will be a City and Guilds accredited course run by the City of Sunderland College and a local voluntary agency working in partnership with B2b+. Taking place over two days a week for 32 weeks, topics will include basic skills (maths, English, IT), relationships, communication, team building, life skills, motivation, economics, capacity building as well as learning about the environment and agriculture.

The B2b+ Young Fathers Worker will work alongside the other agencies providing the course, to ensure the young fathers can access it and complete it successfully. They will also be offered emotional and practical support that is usually lacking when they do other types of training or educational courses. This scheme will enable the young fathers to apply for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) so that they have financial support to study, and can still be involved in the more 'nurturing' and 'parenting' type courses that B2b+ offers.

Contact: Charles Thompson (Young Fathers Worker) or Alison Horrox (Manager, The Place), Tel: +44 (0)191 553 2381

Although a number of workers we spoke to reported successful working with other agencies and organisations, none said it had been easy. Working with other agencies is rarely straightforward, most commonly because of stereotypical beliefs held about young fathers, and conflicting approaches to young fathers work (ideological and practical). For example, differences in attitudes and/or misunderstandings about the value of work with young fathers and models of working (e.g. deficit *vs.* more positive models) can make networking particularly challenging. ContinYou's (2005a) publication *'I'm a Better Dad Now'* reports a number of difficulties experienced by two young fathers projects (DVD and Base 25). Negative beliefs and assumptions about young fathers, inappropriate referrals, mis-understandings about project aims, and conflicting approaches to work all added to the creation of barriers to effective networking. Such views were also reflected by several young fathers practitioners we spoke to, often expressing considerable frustrations over their dealings with other organisations and agencies.

* TOP TIPS

Projects and organisations working with young fathers tell us networking affects all aspects of their work. At the back of this publication there are a number of young fathers projects and organisations that may be of interest. You may want to contact some of these to share examples of promising practice, and perhaps explore opportunities for joint working. Some generic examples of agencies and organisations that workers tell us they network with include:

- * schools, colleges, and Local Authorities
- * social services including leaving care services
- * probation services and youth offending teams (YOTs)
- * health authority services (including maternity services, health visitors, and midwives)
- * specialist projects (e.g. Homelessness projects)
- * drug and alcohol action teams (DAATs)
- * mental health services
- * Youth Service
- * healthy living centres
- * sexual health workers
- * young people's information and advice services (e.g. Information Shops, Connexions)
- * Sure Start local programmes and Family/Children's Centres
- * Basic Skills Agency
- * Job Centre Plus
- * domestic violence and 'perpetrator' programmes
- * family courts /mediation services.

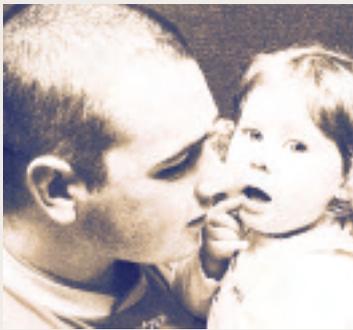


Networks for young fathers workers

In our research, practitioners commonly reported that their post often represented the only dedicated young fathers provision, which can sometimes be an isolating experience for the post-holder. As the interviews progressed, it became clear that many individuals working with young

fathers desire some kind of practitioner network where workers can get together to share examples of promising good practice, and build on the experiences of those working in similar fields. Some projects and services have begun to build such networks including Fathers Plus and Base 25 (see In Focus).

infocus



Practitioner Support Network

Young Fathers Practitioner Support Network

Base 25 in Wolverhampton has established itself as a service to provide young fathers below the age of 25 with practical support regardless of their status or situation (e.g. relationship with the mother or contact with the child). It works on a one-to-one and group basis, taking a person-centred approach and placing emphasis on building positive relationships. A free telephone help-line is available for those unable to attend in person.

Developed and run by Base 25, the Young Fathers Practitioner Support Network meets every 6-8 weeks to share examples of promising practice and plan strategically for future work. The network was initially created to help support young fathers workers in Wolverhampton Sure Starts and Children's Centres. This support network is viewed by Base 25 as a vital component of their young fathers work by helping practitioners to reflect on their experiences and share ideas.

Contact: Jason Dudley (Young Dads Project Coordinator),
Tel: +44 (0)1902 572 044

North East Forum of Father Workers

Fathers Plus in Durham is a project of Children North East, a well-established charity serving the needs of children and families in the North East of England. Fathers Plus aims 'to ensure that the role of the father is valued, supported and included in all approaches to work with children and families.' In 2004, Fathers Plus was awarded a major Parenting Fund award to enable a Regional Resource Centre for Fatherhood to be established in the North East. The Centre acts as a voice for fatherhood, feeding back to policy makers and strategists (regionally and nationally) the experiences of practitioners and parents at the sharp end of service delivery. The Centre also aims to help practitioners and organisations in their work engaging fathers and promoting the importance of fatherhood.

Fathers Plus facilitates the North East Forum of Father Workers which meets every two months and provides opportunities for practitioners working with young fathers to meet, network, and discuss issues and developments relating to their work. The forum meetings include guest speakers and regular skill building workshops for the members. For example, the Child Psychotherapy Trust (CPT) has delivered a series of workshops on the 'importance of fathers' to Forum members. The North East forum also supports a number of sub-regional groups running in Gateshead, County Durham, Sunderland and Teesside. Plans are in place to develop similar groups in Newcastle, Northumberland, and Tyneside.

Contact: Roger Olley (Project Manager),
Tel: +44 (0)191 256 2444

The North West Fathers Network

Established since 2001 and with over fifty members in 2005-6, The North West Fathers Network works in partnership with fathers and father's workers throughout Lancashire, Cumbria, Cheshire, Liverpool, and Greater Manchester. In addition to sharing promising practice throughout the North West, the network also designs and delivers local, regional and national training events and conferences.

The North West Network welcomes new and existing members from across the North West. The network meets every two months and offers support for new and existing projects, networking and organising forthcoming events as well as a growing programme of bespoke training packages. An annual fee of £30.00 covers membership of the network and attendance at the meetings, including all correspondence. A website for the network is currently being developed and will be available shortly (circa. December, 2006).

Contact: Dave Morrison ((Community Support Manager), Tel: +44 (0)1229 871 480 or Mike Turley (Community Men's Worker), Tel: +44 (0)1772 655 789



Learning Points

- * Competing priorities and busy workloads can make gaining the commitment of partner agencies difficult. Practitioners working with young fathers need to be able to explain clearly and explicitly, what the work is about, and the importance and value of engaging with young fathers - such as demonstrating the tangible benefits for the whole family, not just the young father.
- * If young fathers work is to impact on other agencies and local services, it is essential that raising awareness of the work is retained as a central objective. In the short-term, this may mean workers developing networks and contacts through a variety of means such as visits, presentations, case conferences, distributing information to agencies about core objectives and progress, and communicating with those working directly with parents (e.g. health visitors, ante-natal services, Connexions staff etc). In the longer-term, developing networks and partnership working may require some workers (with strong support and supervision from line managers) to operate at a more strategic level. This could involve activities such as attending key meetings to influence strategy (e.g. those relating to teenage parents, sexual health, Children's Centres etc), and inviting local services to buy in the expertise gained by working with young fathers (e.g. offer training to help other agencies become more 'father-friendly').
- * Training courses and conferences for those working with young fathers can be particularly effective ways to develop core skills, learn about current developments, and network with others who are working with young fathers. Working With Men, Fathers Direct, and TSA all offer training and conferences around young fathers work.
- * Joining (or setting up) a regional support network for practitioners working with young fathers can be a valuable way to develop contacts, access training, and share examples of promising practice. Although there are a number of projects and agencies already doing this, most are not. In our research, practitioners said there was a strong demand for the creation of such support networks to support their work with young fathers.



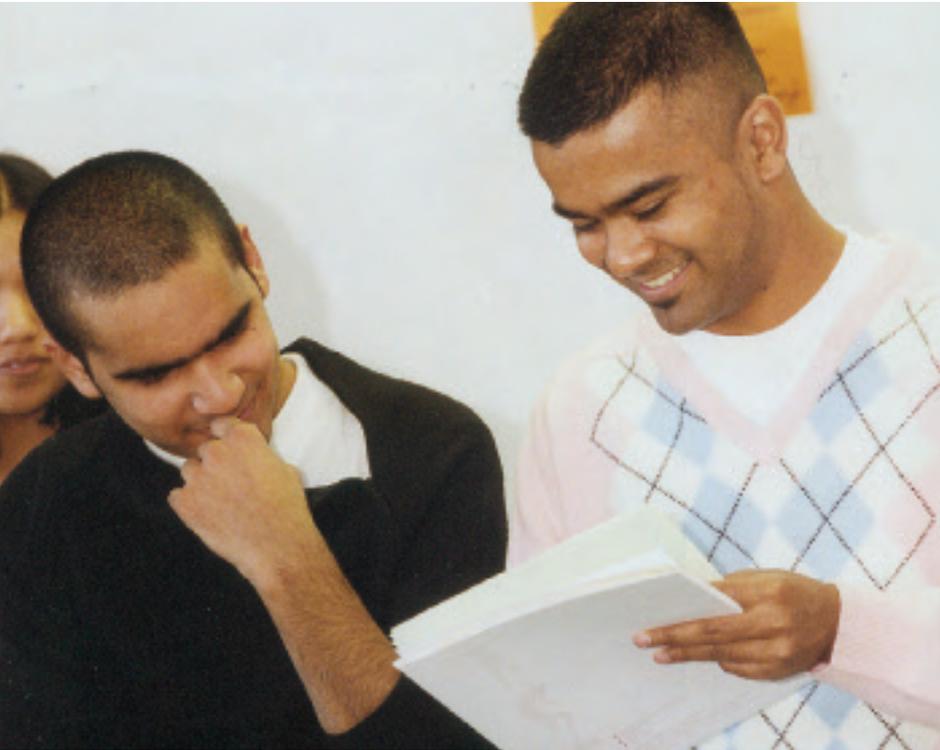
.....

'SOME OF THE AGENCIES WOULD BE UNFRIENDLY TO START WITH...THEY DIDN'T SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DAD'S ROLE – THEY JUST DISMISSED IT.'

.....

8 Thinking about your work

PROMISING PRACTICE



A number of publications advocate the need for reviewing or evaluating work with young fathers in order to get services right and meet the needs of greater numbers of young men (e.g. ContinYou, 2005a, 2005b; Lewis, 2006). We would agree that any review or evaluation of young fathers work is a necessary step to see what is working, what might need changing, as well as providing information for funders and helping the planning of future work. We asked a number of projects and agencies working with young fathers how (or if) they reviewed or evaluated their working practices.

Evaluating and building on promising practice

Many practitioners told us they find it difficult to evaluate young fathers work, particularly in the early stages of a project as outcomes and successes are hard to measure, and may become increasingly more complex as the work progresses. TSA's Young Fathers Project (Mordaunt, 2005) reports that one of the most difficult aspects of evaluation involves trying to prove what impact the work has had on the young fathers, and their relationships with their children.

All of the projects and agencies we spoke to said that they regularly reflected on their working practices in some way, and that this was usually done in order to build on experience, meet funders' requirements and be able

to meet more fully the needs of the young fathers that they worked with. Whilst some projects (e.g. Base 25, DVD, M.A.P., and Fathers Plus) have done this in more formal ways (through independent evaluations), most young fathers projects and services take a more informal approach to review and evaluation. For example, the Upfront team in Bradford regularly review and evaluate their working practices through consultation with young fathers, and team meetings where staff get together to reflect on their experiences. However, Upfront do recognise the limitations of not having formal evaluations, namely that valuable learning is not recorded.

The Health Initiatives Team at Education Leeds, reviews and evaluates progress regularly through various channels including team meetings and supervision. The team collect a great deal of monitoring data as a matter of course (e.g. attendance at the FACT group and pre-and-post natal referral, ethnicity, age at conception, and so on). Moreover, they also regularly reflect on practice in more informal ways through critical discussion to add ‘richness’ to the reviewing process:

‘We also have an [informal] way of doing things that’s not very paper-based... every fortnight there’s a team meeting where people report back – so on a day to day level, it’s monitored like that... more of a dialogue than hard-line monitoring and evaluation. It’s qualitative, rather than quantitative because the numbers are quite small. If

you started just looking at statistics, it’s not very helpful. But if you look at the quality of information, that’s what’s significant.’

What was clear from the fieldwork for this research, was that many projects and services for young fathers do not differentiate explicitly between monitoring (continually checking progress against a plan of work by collecting information) and evaluation (determining whether aims or objectives have been met). They may also not be explicit about the different purposes of evaluation (e.g. accountability or learning and development). These are important distinctions and should be considered at the earliest stage of the work (e.g. when writing applications for funding).

KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose of your evaluation?
Accountability or learning and development?
- How can you ‘prove’ the impact of the project on young fathers and their relationships with their children? What approaches or methods might be suitable for this?
- How can young fathers be meaningfully involved in the evaluation process?
- How will you make sense of the information you collect?
- How will you share your findings and with whom? (e.g. team members, other projects, partner agencies and organisations).

* TOP TIPS

The purpose of evaluation will change the type of questions that need to be asked. If the purpose of evaluation is for accountability, questions might include:

- * has the project met its aims and objectives?
- * how has money been spent?
- * should the project continue?



If the purpose of evaluation is for learning and development, questions might include:

- * what are the project's strengths and weaknesses?
- * what are the implementation problems?
- * which things have worked, or have not?
- * have you identified the ‘good practice’, and is it transferable?

Adapted from McKie *et al.*, (2002)

Thinking About Your Work

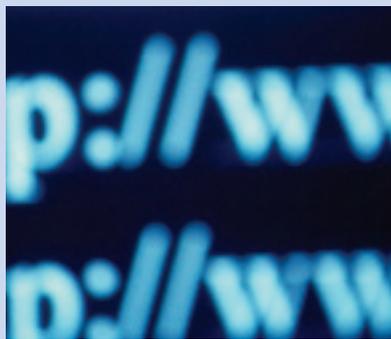
'The extent to which the relationship between the young fathers and their children had been changed for the benefit of the children was of central importance to most stakeholders.'

Most projects and services we spoke to evaluated their work primarily through team meetings (or similar), with young fathers workers feeding their experiences into the overall project or team strategy. Whilst of value, such methods do miss important learning by not talking to the young fathers themselves. A number of young fathers projects have demonstrated promising practice in this respect. For example, T-BAG in Halifax continually collect and monitor information concerning the young fathers who attend the support group (e.g. attendance, background information, current situation etc). Moreover, T-BAG involve young fathers in their evaluation processes via a steering group. This group consists of five teenage mothers and two teenage fathers who access the service, and who meet once a month to

ensure the project continues to be relevant to young parents in Calderdale. Furthermore, DVD in Rotherham, Base 25 in Wolverhampton, B2b+ in Sunderland, and Fathers Plus in Newcastle, have all appointed external evaluators to critically examine their working practices including taking into account the view of young fathers who use their services.

However, using external evaluators can be an expensive process for voluntary sector organisations and projects. The Charities Evaluation Services (CES) offer reduced-cost evaluation services specifically for charities. Other organisations also provide very accessible (and free) resources to help groups and organisations monitor and evaluate their work (see In Focus).

infocus



Useful Resources for Learning How to Evaluate

The Evaluation Journey: An Evaluation Resource Pack for Community Groups.

This evaluation pack is free to download from www.ashscotland.org.uk. This excellent and generic resource uses examples from topic-specific work to help groups and organisations through the process of monitoring and evaluating. The resource aims to:

- make evaluation accessible and easy to understand (especially for those with little previous experience)
- show how evaluation can be embedded into ongoing work, and can inform the planning and development of future work

- offer guidance on collecting and analysing information using conventional and less conventional ways of capturing and presenting information (for example, video diaries, collage work)
- provide information on sources of support and advice on evaluation and research methods.

Linda McKie, Joy Barlow and Paula Gaunt-Richardson (2002) *The Evaluation Journey: An Evaluation Resource Pack for Community Groups*. Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Scotland.

Website: www.ashscotland.org.uk

The Charities Evaluation Services (CES)

The CES offer information and advice on monitoring and evaluation specifically for the voluntary sector. CES offer training courses on monitoring and evaluation (including in-house), and provide consultancy for charities and funders. CES can help to develop self-evaluation frameworks, commission an external evaluation or develop a custom-made quality system.

Website: www.ces-vol.org.uk

Learning Points



- * Peer evaluation can be a really effective method of developing practice. Involving young fathers who have participated in the project or programme can be a valuable resource for exploring what works and what needs to change. Young fathers asking other young fathers about what they need, what works, and what doesn't, is likely to be more powerful and meaningful than being asked by a professional – e.g. young people may feel questions are more legitimate coming from their peers. However, as paper-based evaluation forms such as questionnaires are biased towards literacy skills, they may not be suitable for some young people. Workers need to consider more creative, alternative methods or approaches for evaluation (see Top Tips, p51).
- * In general, funders' requirements are often more likely to be quantitative in nature. However, evaluation doesn't just mean using numbers. Projects and services tell us that qualitative data (e.g. generated through interviews, case-studies, focus groups etc) can provide richly nuanced understandings about the effectiveness and success of project outcomes.
- * Monitoring and evaluation should be a strategic element of any young fathers work, preferably be planned from the outset, and progress reviewed regularly. However, it's never too late to start. The sooner planning for evaluation takes place the better, but it is never too late (McKie *et al.*, 2002).
- * Key aspects of evaluation are likely to include an assessment of engagement strategies, contacts and relationships with other agencies and organisations, referrals to and from other agencies and services, and impact on young fathers. Evaluating such impact is likely to include assessing changes in fathers' confidence, esteem, parenting skills and changes in young fathers' relationships (e.g. with the child and/or mother).
- * It is important that workers have the appropriate skills to carry out monitoring and evaluation activities. There are a number of organisations offering useful resources, training, and consultancy to help individuals develop these skills.
- * It is well known that services (e.g. maternity, Connexions) tend not to routinely collect information on young fathers, or their circumstances (e.g. Featherstone, no-date; Quinton *et al.*, 2002), in part, because of the intensive resources needed to do this and maintain accurate information. However, to aid the evaluation process, young fathers projects and services should routinely record at least basic information relating to areas such as age (father and child), marital status and current situation (e.g. lone parent, living with mother, step-father living apart from child), housing, employment, agencies involved with, ethnic background, and so on. TSA's young fathers project developed a useful pro forma to assist projects in collating such information (see Mordaunt, 2005).

