



The Caring Dads programme with young fathers in Lambeth

*We believe that Caring Dads can be an effective early intervention
for young men involved in violent relationships*

Learning from a pilot in 2015

Working together to keep families together

www.stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk



SUMMARY

Between March and October 2015, St Michael's Fellowship piloted 'Caring Dads' with young fathers in Lambeth. Caring Dads is an evidence-based parenting programme intended to help fathers improve their relationship with their children and to end controlling, abusive and neglectful behaviours.

Although numbers were small, this work suggests that Caring Dads can be an effective early intervention for young men involved in violent relationships, encouraging them to reflect on and to change their behaviour; so improving life chances for their children, themselves, existing and new, and local communities.

We explain how our project was conducted, the outcomes and how we are taking this learning forward in a three-year project which is designed to become self-financing within that period.

Background

St Michael's works to improve life chances for vulnerable children by working with their parents.

For many years, we have championed the role of young fathers who are often demonised in the media. These young men may have very limited access to financial, practical or emotional support, even where their needs are acute. St Michael's has employed two young fathers' practitioners since 2007.

Research shows that where fathers are positively involved with their children, even where parents are separated, children benefit socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively (Allen & Daley 2007). Supportive co-parenting and the father's engagement during infancy promotes better longitudinal outcomes for the child (Syracuse 2013).

Unfortunately, teenage domestic violence, although under-reported, is highly prevalent. One in five teenagers has been physically abused by their boyfriend or girlfriend (Barter 2009). This is supported by our own experience. The young fathers aged under 25 whom we work with in Lambeth one to one are most commonly referred by social services because there is a child protection issue. Separately, we will be working with the child's mother. Our records suggest that in about a quarter of cases, for both young men and women, domestic violence is cited as a factor when they are referred to us. However, as we work with the parents, it becomes apparent that the true incidence is far higher – around 75%. This is in line with Lambeth's own findings (Safer Lambeth Partnership 2011).

The long lasting effect on children of witnessing domestic violence is well-documented. Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to have behavioural and emotional problems (CAADA 2014). Boys exposed to domestic violence are more likely to engage in domestic violence as adults and girls to become victims (Cross Currents 2003).

Caring Dads with St Michael's

Caring Dads is a 17-week programme of two-hour closed group work, usually in the evening, facilitated by one male and one female project worker. Caring Dads follows a defined curriculum supported by workbooks and video.

The Caring Dads 17-week curriculum

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Orientation | 10 Recognising unhealthy, hurtful, abusive and neglectful fathering behaviours |
| 2 Considering fathering | 11 How am I responding to my child's needs? |
| 3 Developing discrepancy | 12 Problem solving in difficult situations |
| 4 Child-centred fathering | 13 Relationships with my child's mother |
| 5 Building relationships with our children | 14 I am not proud of... |
| 6 Listening to children | 15 Rebuilding trust and healing |
| 7 Eliminating barriers to better relationships | 16 What about discipline? |
| 8 How are children different from adults? | 17 Wrapping up |
| 9 Fathers as part of families | |

St Michael's delivery of Caring Dads was distinct from others in four key areas.

-  In addition to the weekly group work, we offered additional one to one support tailored to the individual.
-  We knew the true family situation because we work with the birth mother too, which may include home visits. So it was possible to compare the mother's view of the father's behaviour and actions with his own.
-  With younger fathers aged under 25, the intervention is earlier for them and the child. The young man might not be known to CJS but living on the cusp of criminal behaviour. Children tend to be babies or under one year old.
-  Local knowledge; our outreach team has worked with young parents in Lambeth since 2000. Lambeth commissioners have consistently rated our outreach highest of all commissioned services and for 2014-15 scored young parents' outreach a

perfect 50 / 50. Of particular relevance to Caring Dads is the high level of violence against women and girls in the borough. This in turn is connected to a high number of gangs. (Gang affiliations and being in the 'wrong postcode' were issues we had to take into consideration when planning this project.)

Our weekly sessions took place during the day at St Stephen's Children's Centre in Stockwell not the evening. This was because of the availability free crèche facilities, the availability of St Michael's staff at the time and the fact we were working in partnership with children's centres.

Where fathers were in employment, we helped them to negotiate time off from work to attend Caring Dads.

Method

Eight young fathers aged 18 – 24 years were recruited to the programme. All were St Michael's clients and their partners were known to us. The criterion for recruitment was that they had caused harm (emotional and/or physical) to their partner and/or child.

Between them, the young fathers had nine children whose ages ranged from unborn to five-years. They had nine partners or ex-partners aged between 16 and 22 years.

Fathers' backgrounds were of disadvantage, poverty, childhood neglect and abuse, a history of educational underachievement, worklessness, anti-social behaviour and gang involvement. To be eligible, fathers also had to currently care for or have contact with their child.¹

The scheduled two-hourly group work overran, always lasting at least three hours because of the complexities of the young fathers' situations and the depth of support they needed. The flexibility of the children's centre enabled staff to provide this support. In addition to the weekly group, participants continued to receive tailored one to one support, a range of practical and emotional help around housing, health, substance misuse, training and employment.

At the same time, outreach colleagues worked one to one with the partner.

Four fathers (ie half) completed the pilot. One father was an inappropriate referral and left after the first week. Two fathers left after two weeks because they had found

employment. A fourth left after seven weeks because of heavy substance misuse.

Adaptations

Our pilot took much longer than the allocated 17 weeks. There were two main reasons for this.

1. The daytime programme sometimes clashed with the fathers' other commitments such as child protection meetings, court appointments or work. We wanted to give clients every opportunity to complete the programme so we repeated sessions for those who had missed out.
2. The children's centre closed for four weeks over the summer so we had to suspend activities.

We sourced different video content from the internet to reflect clients' ethnic origins and age and the age of their children.

We also brought forward discussion on tackling abuse since our client group was prepared to address this issue as we knew from one to one exchanges.

Adaptations were discussed with Kingston University, who deliver Caring Dads for the Probation Service. They gave constructive feedback and the new video content was thought extremely appropriate. We will endeavour to time future projects so that they run are able to the 17-week schedule.

¹ One father, referred by social services, did not have contact with his child but the intention was that would have contact during the course of the programme, based on weekly reporting.

Partners' feedback at start of Caring Dads pilot

His behaviour is like a time-bomb and when the time runs out he will explode. Anything will tick him off for instance if I'm watching something and he wants to watch something else and if he doesn't get his way the time will run out. There'll be shouting, getting angry, throwing and shit, slapping, not normal behaviour.'

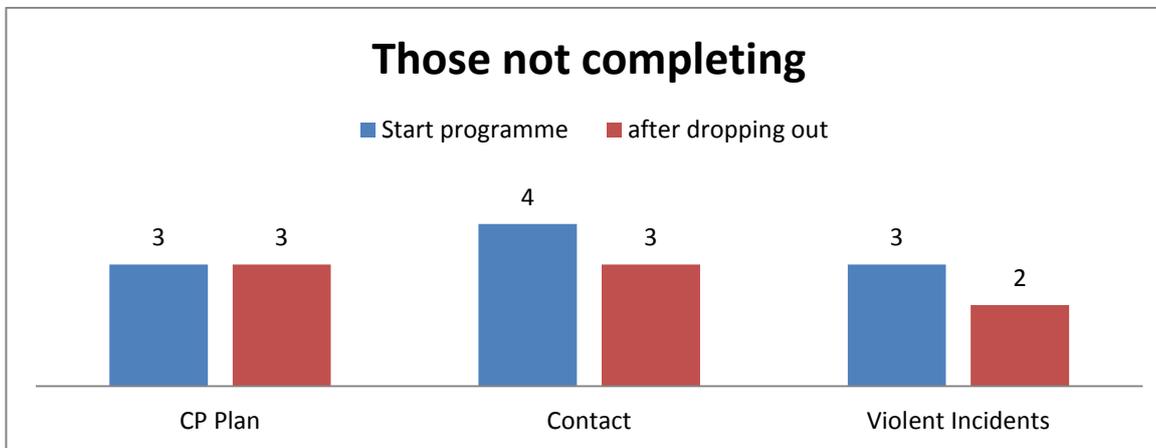
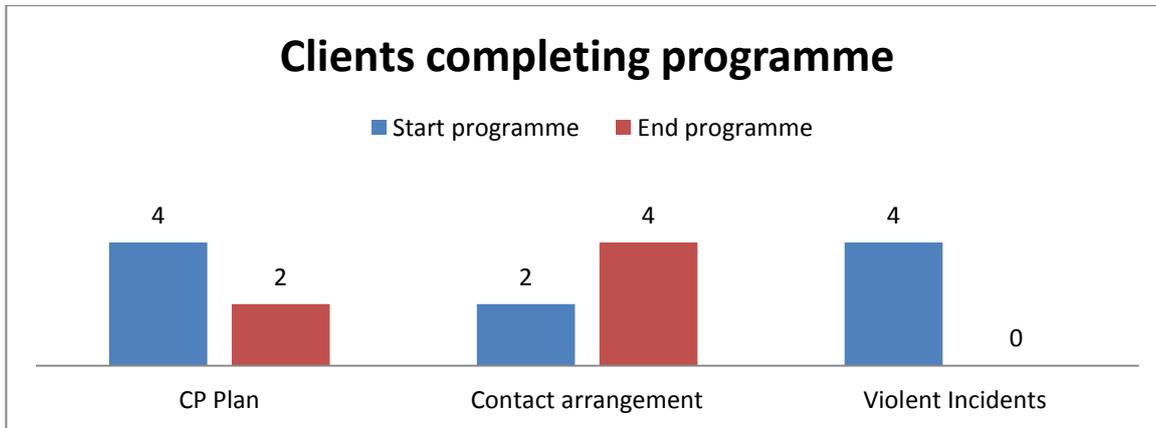
I feel scared of him. He's aggressive to towards me like I'm a road chick that's how he'll talk to me.

He is aggressive and self-centred. He makes me feel irrelevant and scared.

His behaviour is disgusting- he looks at me as if I don't exist. I feel that he is punishing me for my past. I feel disgusted and shamed. He was not helpful with his child. He has no relationship with his child.

Outcomes

In spite of the small size of the group, we monitored both hard and soft outcomes. We collected data on child protection plans, contact arrangements and violent incidents pre and post for those completing and those who did not finish the programme.



We gathered qualitative feedback from fathers and mothers, and feedback on the impact on children through mothers' reporting.

Facilitators spoke to the partners or ex-partners of the young men each week, after the Caring Dads group session.

Mothers reported that the father:

- 👤 was more child focused
- 👤 put the child first more often
- 👤 understood the importance of play
- 👤 now placed value on his ex-partner in her role as his child's mother

One mother told us it was 'weird' that the father was communicating, not shouting, and she has had to get used to 'a new person'.

Fathers reflecting on the sessions reported that:

- 👤 they did not want to be like their own absent and violent fathers
- 👤 they were keen to communicate more effectively with their partner/ex-partner
- 👤 they understood the concept of co-parenting
- 👤 they could identify the difference between parent-centred parenting and child-centred parenting

Partners' feedback at end of Caring Dads pilot

I don't know if it's a result of the programme but our communication is really good.

He's keeping it child centred, before he didn't know how to do that.

He's made a change. He understands that he needs to respect his son's mother. Things between us are cool. I now only call him about our child and he responds really well to me. Before he didn't want me near him. Now we walk together as parents and work together as parents.

He makes me feel respected. Him and my mother hated each other but now even their communication is better, they send each other nice messages. It gives me peace in my heart.

My child knows who is dad is. He now smiles and puts his hands out when he sees him.

I get really good feedback when he has my son. I know that my son is alright. He'll call and ask for advice if he has a concern for our son. My son is babbling 'daddy, daddy, daddy'. I have peace of mind.

Ofsted conducted an inspection in May of St Stephen's Children's Centre during a Caring Dads day and questioned staff and fathers closely. One father in particular wished to share his compellingly positive experience of the programme and spoke at length to an inspector.

Ofsted reported:

“St Michael's Fellowship programmes strengthen parenting for vulnerable young parents and safeguard their children exceptionally well. The work is extraordinarily powerful in changing young men and women's attitudes to gangs and offending; it improves their relationships and helps them to sustain the care of their children safely.”

Next Steps

Based on learning from the pilot, we have been awarded two years' funding from The Rayne Foundation to subsidise further testing of this model. We will commission external evaluation through our training and partnership link with the Centre for Trauma & Abuse Studies at the University of Middlesex. Our aim is to establish a robust business case for local authorities so that Caring Dads with young fathers becomes a self-financing programme for St Michael's.

Elements that we consider particularly successful which we will reproduce were:

-  The video content that was relevant to our audience
-  One to one contact with the young fathers outside the weekly group sessions
-  One to one contact with the children's mother by other members of the outreach team
-  The flexibility of child care arrangements at the children's centre
-  A small group size

Young parents are involved in developing our services and respect for them is integral to our work. The programme curriculum is fixed but young parents may influence how, when and where the programme is delivered. We will involve Caring Dads alumni and their partners in communicating the benefits of the programme and talking about their experiences at the workshops. We will encourage them to help us recruit and market the programme but respect their privacy and parameters.

CONTINUING TO SHARE OUR LEARNING

We will be holding workshops on the new project at 12 and 24 months.

Please let us know if you would like to be kept informed of progress.

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About St Michael's Fellowship

Founded in 1903, we aim to improve lives of the most vulnerable children by working with parents at multiple disadvantage; poverty, learning difficulties, mental health issues, substance misuse, childhoods of abuse, in care, domestic violence. We look to break cycles of deprivation and keep families together if this is best for the child. Services include residential and community-based parenting assessments and support; and outreach with young parents in Lambeth, building parenting skills and supporting into education, employment or training. For 2014-15 commissioners scored Outreach 50/50.

Our work with young fathers

St Michael's was a pioneer of working with young fathers and its work has been hailed by young fathers themselves, practitioners and legislators.

"it offers a safe place to go and talk about the realities of what it's like to be a young father ... It saddens me that there's nothing else like them that exist for other dads but I also feel privileged to be part of it."

Father at Saturday Dads' group

Since 2007, we have also focused on violence against girls and women and have developed with young parents prevention workshops around teenage domestic violence.

St Michael's has facilitated DiVa, a support group for female victims since 2007.

**Working together
to keep families together**

Further reading

Full Ofsted report on St Stephen's Children's Centre 2015
<http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/22886>

Leaflets with more details about the programme may be downloaded here
<http://www.londoncrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Caring-Dads-leaflet-final.pdf>

Further information

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Thank you

We would like to thank the young fathers who took part in this pilot, their partners who shared their experiences, members of the DiVa group who have taught us about the impact of domestic violence on young women and the young mothers who volunteered to take part in research into the impact of violence against women and girls in Lambeth.



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