



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 two pilot 2015 - 2017

Working together to keep families together

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SUMMARY

Between 2015 and 2017, St Michael's Fellowship piloted two 'Caring Dads' projects 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 are 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 were conducted, the outcomes and how we are taking this learning forward.

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

Our adaptation of Caring Dads for young fathers 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

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|--|--|
| 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 worked with the birth mother too, which included some 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 was earlier for them and the child. The young man might not be known to CJS but living on the cusp of criminal behaviour. Children tended to be babies or under two years 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 of 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.

Pilot 1 2015-2016

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 fathers 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 fathers' 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 to the 17-week schedule.

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

Partners' feedback at start of Caring Dads pilot 1

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.'

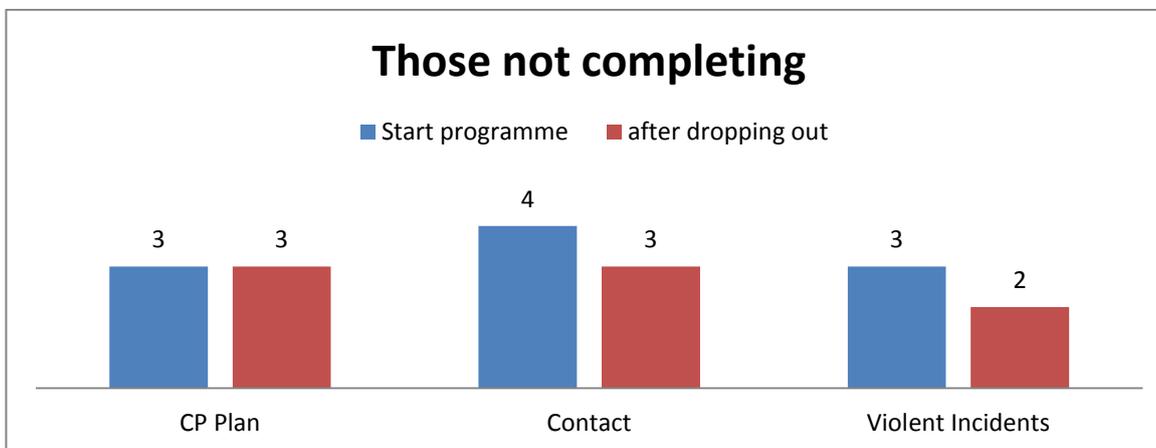
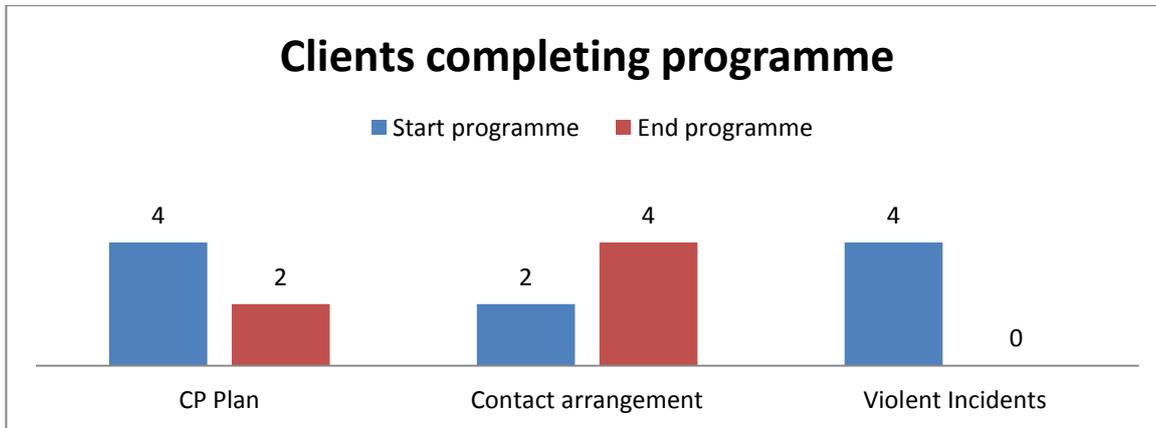
I feel scared of him. He's aggressive to towards me like I'm a road chick that's how he'll talk to me.

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 were able to monitor 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 1

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.

Pilot 2 2016-2017

Between autumn 2016 and February 2017 we piloted a second Caring Dads programme.

This group, again hosted at St. Stephen's Children's Centre, consisted four dads aged 18-20 years with five children. The children's ages ranged from unborn to two years. Once again, these fathers had many complex issues affecting their lives. They received an increased level of 1:1 support outside of the group from the male co-facilitator.

St Michael's outreach practitioners worked with the dads' partners at the same time, and their feedback, which included scoring with the community domestic violence screening tool HITS and semi structured interviews with key workers, was also used to measure impact. Three children were on Child Protection plans. All were removed from CP by the end of the programme.

HITS scores Week 1					
How often does your partner/ex partner	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Fairly Frequently (4)	Often (5)
Physically hurt you		2			
Insult or talk down to you					5
Threaten you with harm			3		
Scream or curse at you					5
Score					15/20

score greater than 10 signifies domestic abuse

HITS scores Week 17					
How often does your partner/ex partner	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Fairly Frequently (4)	Often (5)
Physically hurt you	1				
Insult or talk down to you		2			
Threaten you with harm	1				
Scream or curse at you		2			
Score					6/20

HITS scores Week 17					
How often does your partner/ex partner	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Fairly Frequently (4)	Often (5)
Physically hurt you	1				
Insult or talk down to you		2			
Threaten you with harm	1				
Scream or curse at you		2			
Score					6/20

Partner's comments before intervention	Partner's comments after intervention
<p><i>Describe your partner's current behaviour towards you.</i></p> <p>He assaulted me really badly in August, so bad that I called the police, and he got arrested on his birthday in September. He went to my birthday party later and spoilt it on purpose because he felt that I had spoilt his birthday. He tries to bring me down when I'm happy. When he's down he wants me to be down too. He's selfish. He does not want me to be happy.</p>	<p>To be honest it's the best it's ever been. He tries it sometime, like when I'm going out he wants to know what time I'm coming back. I will ignore this type of behaviour when it happens and it's happening less often. We're cool otherwise.</p> <p>He doesn't hit me anymore, he's still thinks he's the man, you know the pride thing but there's no physical beatings. I know that domestic violence isn't just physical violence and that it is also emotional abuse. The emotional abuse is less frequent too, he's stopped with the really hurtful put downs. The other put downs don't sting anymore. Maybe it's because I've changed. I got a lot from the diva group. I've matured and there's things that he now knows that I don't put up with anymore.</p>
<p><i>How does his behaviour make you feel?</i></p> <p>He makes me feel low at times. I feel he doesn't support me. When going for my job interview he didn't wish me good luck even though I wished him good luck when he went to his.</p>	<p>I feel good, I feel that's he's maturing. When he tries to be the man I don't let it affect me.</p>
<p><i>What is your partner's relationship like with his child?</i></p> <p>He says that he loves his son. However I don't feel that he loves him as much as I do. He asks to see his son when he knows he's not supposed to.</p> <p>He says I don't deserve our son and he threatens me with social services. He wants to break the bond between me and my son because he's jealous. He thinks if social services take my son away he'll have me all for himself.</p>	<p>It's good, really good. He sees his child every week. We are no longer with social services, we have a special guardianship arrangement now.</p> <p>He's less angry. I understand. When I had to have contact with my child with someone constantly watching me I didn't like it either.</p> <p>He really enjoys his contact with his child now as it's with family and not a stranger. I feel that this has also had something to do with the positive change in him.</p>

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 mothers 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.

About St Michael's Fellowship

Founded in 1903, we aim to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children by working directly with parents. 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; a family contact service and outreach with young parents in Lambeth.

St Michael's has pioneered working with young fathers and tackling the issue of domestic abuse in young relationships.

Further information

michellet@stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk
www.stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk