

## Caring Dads Service

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Report of: Chief Officer, Transformation and Partnerships, Children and Families

Report to: Director of Children and Families

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### Brief summary

This report sets out the outcome of a consultation process in relation to a budget proposal to consider ceasing the currently provided 'Caring Dads' Service.

The recommendation is that the Service be ceased and all arising appropriate HR matters be progressed.

### Recommendations

The Director of Children and Families:

- a) Notes the consultation exercise undertaken in relation to a budget proposal to consider ceasing the currently provided 'Caring Dad' Service.
- b) Approves the cessation of the currently provided 'Caring Dads' Service.
- c) Approves that all necessary HR matters arising from the decision to cease the Service be undertaken with affected staff.

## What is this report about?

- 1.0 The Children and Families Directorate continues to experience unprecedented budget pressures and has been tasked with finding significant financial savings. This has required the Directorate to consider all services and functions it provides and bring forward proposals to achieve the required level of savings. These savings proposals were agreed by Executive Board as a basis for consultation. The level of required saving was subsequently agreed by Council at its budget making meeting.
- 1.1 An initial prioritisation analysis was undertaken by the Children and Families Senior Leadership Team in relation to potential areas of saving, which considered a range of factors including:
- **Statutory basis of activity** - the Directorate has a statutory duty to deliver a range of services to provide effective help and protection to children and families who need it. As such there is an ongoing requirement for these services to be maintained, this means that a number of core areas of activity could not be subject to meaningful reduction.
  - **Funding stream and saving** - the Council's budget position is a challenge for the General Fund and therefore services financed by external funding, significantly supported by income generation, or specific funding such as the DSG were generally not identified as areas for savings proposals.
  - **Previous Reductions in Service** – In previous years the directorate has had to make reductions to some service areas to meet specified savings targets. In identifying service areas for the current savings proposals particular consideration was given to those services that have had previous cuts.
  - **Known or likely legislative or policy changes**- Consideration was given to future challenges arising from known/likely legislative or policy change, for example the Council's requirement to reconfigure its early help offer is known.
  - **Reach, deliverability and alternative provision** – Consideration was given to any potential change having a quantum of impact (notwithstanding the impact on individuals within any cohort), and whether the service could be delivered within the necessary timescale to ensure the saving was achieved alongside the potential to mitigate impact by doing things differently e.g. signposting to other activity.
- 1.2 Taking into account the above, the Caring Dad's Service was selected as a savings proposal on the basis that the support provided might be delivered differently in order to achieve a financial saving. This proposal was presented to Executive Board at its meeting in December 2023. The associated Executive Board report identified a saving proposal of £230,000 with a potential impact upon 5.5 FTE posts, it was noted that the FTE posts included vacant posts. Executive Board agreed that the proposal could move forward for consultation. Council at its meeting in February 2024 agreed the budget implications of the proposal with a reduction in expenditure of £230,000 expected in 2024/25. It should be noted that reduction in budget does not give rise to any decision on service delivery, which is the purpose of this report, however the implications of any agreed budget reduction need to be reflected in services delivered/expenditure incurred or income received.
- 1.3 Based upon the above a consultation process with recognised Trades Union representatives was commenced regarding the potential ceasing of the Caring Dad's Service along with engagement with potentially affected staff, this consultation was supplemented with

engagement with staff. The consultation and engagement process was supported by colleagues within Human Resources and followed the agreed Council process for such activity.

- 1.4 The consultation process included a series of meeting and discussions with Trades Union colleagues and affected staff who made the following points:
- a) The validity of the decision by Executive Board to agree the proposal at its meeting in December 2023 was questioned on the basis that full information was not shared, this centred on a) incorrect financial information, b) incorrect staffing information, c) an error in the EDCI, d) a view that the EDCI was incorrect.
  - b) The lack of services in Leeds for men and fathers generally and particularly those causing harm in their families.
  - c) The number of women and children impacted by men's behaviour in families and the benefits of addressing this through targeted service delivery.
  - d) The false economy of such small savings against the loss of 9 years of experience, expertise and the established reputation and systems of the Caring Dads Programme in Leeds.
  - e) The current climate in Social Work – the level of pressure on social workers, the short-term crisis management, the lack of time (and sometimes skills and confidence) for Social Workers to engage men fully.
  - f) The benefits of allowing father's voices to be heard and to recruiting them to the programme, ultimately resulting in improved outcomes for children in the family.
  - g) The benefits of gaining greater insight into the risk a father might pose even if change is limited.
  - h) The equality impact of this proposed cut – reduced inclusion of fathers in services for children and specifically the loss of a service for BAME men causing harm in their families.
- 1.5 The Service has responded to the queries presented by Trades Union colleagues and staff. It was important however to commence with an acknowledgement that the selection of the Caring Dad's service as a proposal for a saving was not in any way a reflection of the work being undertaken or any value judgement on the work that the team do, but moreover it reflected the criteria set out at paragraph 1.1 above. It was also important to note the Directorate are proud of the Caring Dad's service, how it has enhanced the reputation of Leeds and supported other Local Authorities in developing good practice in this area. The specialist focus from the Caring Dad's team has clearly provided additionality and enhanced service delivery for fathers, and positive outcomes for children but the financial pressures faced by the Directorate have meant that all options for budget savings have had to be considered.
- 1.6 Specific responses to the points made in 1.4 were shared with Trades Union representatives and staff and are summarised below:
- a) The Directorate remains of the view that the decision of Executive Board was sound. The financial savings which would be accrued relate to the expenditure of the function, whilst there is corresponding income, it is not material to the budget saving. The number of staff identified related to established roles and did not reflect vacancies as any cessation of the function would give rise to all roles not being filled. It is accepted that there was a drafting error in the EDCI in that the title of the EDCI was incorrect, the narrative of the EDCI however was accurate. The EDCI has been reviewed and the Directorate continue to believe it to be appropriate, it is also helpful

to highlight that the EDCI was subject to internal review as it progressed through the budget savings proposal process.

- b) The funding constraints that exist mean that services that focus on statutory provision must be prioritised.
- c) It is accepted, that alternative, less direct support will need to be offered.
- d) The budget pressures mean that no potential areas of spend can be overlooked and the rationale for this proposal is clear.
- e) The Directorate will need to consider how this can be addressed; however this is not an issue solely related to Caring Dads.
- f) Agreed.
- g) Agreed.
- h) The EDCI implications have been considered, consideration of EDCI implications does not preclude changes but careful mitigation needs to be considered.

1.7 Staff submitted two documents during the consultation process, attached as appendixes one 'CD Evidence and Caring Dad's Leeds Report 2023' and appendix two 'In Support of Caring Dad's'. Both documents were helpful and provided both detailed operational and contextual information on the function of the Caring Dad's Service. In relation to 'CD Evidence and Caring Dad's Leeds Report 2023', the evidential basis of the impact of the Caring Dad's programme is not doubted, unfortunately the Council's financial picture and the level of reductions that the Council has faced year on year does not allow for funding reductions that have no impact, services are predicated on delivery of statutory functions and preventative activity aimed at saving financial resource and delivering beneficial outcomes. In relation to 'In Support of Caring Dad's' again the document is welcomed. A large proportion of the document sets out what the Service delivers, and this is helpful. The statistical analysis within the report is helpful but does show a limited number of men who have completed the full range of sessions, and a relatively low number of men who have attended the Journey project. The document raises the single proofing error in the EDCI document, and the Directorate remains comfortable that the EDCI was sound. The Directorate continues to believe that there will be opportunities for signposting to alternative services and developing new approaches to working with men who are perpetrators of DVA but fully accepts that they will not be 'like for like'. The feedback from practitioners and service users within the document is powerful and a testament to the good work delivered, it does however not address the fundamental question as to how the Directorate can deliver the savings required without there being an impact somewhere, this impact is acknowledged.

1.8 In addition, the following points were raised during the consultation process:

- The ability of Social work teams and practitioners to work with perpetrators of domestic violence – the Directorate confirms that relevant staff are expected to work with fathers and perpetrators of domestic abuse in their everyday work in line with the Leeds practice principles and many do this already. Working with fathers is also covered in training for practitioners.
- The fact that this function is only delivered by Leeds within the Region was noted. The Directorate recognises that although other Local Authorities in the region have considered developing similar services to the Caring Dad's service, financial constraints have meant that they have been unable to do so and therefore there are no similar services locally.
- That alternative provision is not available, and signposting will not be possible – The Directorate acknowledges that support for perpetrators of Domestic Violence is provided by a number of organisations and that there is alternative provision available but notes that it will not be exactly the same service provided. The Directorate will, should this decision be approved, seek to engage with colleagues in the Children and Families

directorate and other providers on how existing services can support the cohort of individuals currently supported by Caring Dads.

- 1.9 Should this decision to cease the service be approved, there will be implications for the LCC staff currently employed to deliver the Service. Any reduction in staffing arising from the decision will need to be managed in accordance with the Council's agreed Managing Staff Reductions Policy and every opportunity will be taken to reduce, minimise and mitigate any compulsory redundancy situation.

### **What impact will these proposals have?**

- 2.0 Subject to approval, the proposal may have an impact in that direct help and engagement with a currently supported cohort of individuals, male perpetrators of DVA, will be reduced. Signposting to alternative, but not wholly similar services, will need to be put in place, the directorate is committed to exploring other means of engaging and working with perpetrators of DVA, to improve the lived experience and outcomes for children and their families
- 2.1 An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration (EDCI) screening has been undertaken as part of the initial consideration of the proposal.

### **How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?**

Health and Wellbeing       Inclusive Growth       Zero Carbon

- 3.0 This decision has a direct correlation to the Council's work on delivering improved health and well-being for a number of vulnerable individuals and families. Signposting to offset any negative implications from the reduced direct offer will need to be made. New ways of working and new approaches to engaging with men who are perpetrators of DVA will be explored by the directorate and its partners as they develop the Family Help service.

### **What consultation and engagement has taken place?**

- 4.0 The proposals set out in this report have been discussed with the Executive Member for Children's Social Care and Health Partnerships.
- 4.1 Details of the consultation process with Trades Union representatives and engagement with staff is set out above in 1.3 to 1.8.
- 4.2 A copy of this report was provided to Trade Union Representatives and affected staff on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024, with comments requested to be returned by 12<sup>th</sup> April 2024. Comments returned and Service response to those comments are:
- TU colleagues collectively continue to believe the consultation did not properly consider the arguments made in support of continuing this service or the full impact of its loss. The Directorate's view is that this has been considered and is as set out in the body of the report.
  - TU colleagues collectively have raised consultancy spend within the Directorate as an issue. The Directorate's view is that consultancy spend, is generally one off and non-recurring and in the particular instance quoted by TU colleagues was committed as an invest to save proposal supported by corporate funding i.e. not met by the Directorate.

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?  Yes  No

### **What are the resource implications?**

- 5.0 Ceasing the Service will give rise to a financial saving, on a full year basis of £230,000.
- 5.1 Ceasing the Service will give rise to staffing implications. All staffing related issues arising from a decision to cease the Service will be managed in accordance with the Council's agreed Managing Staffing Reductions Policy and every opportunity will be taken to reduce, minimise and mitigate any potential compulsory redundancy situation.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 6.0 The primary risk associated with the proposal would be the negative impact of any reduced service offering on children and families. This will be mitigated as far as possible by signposting to alternative provision and exploring other means of engaging with male perpetrators of DVA. It should be noted however that any alternative provision will not be available on a 'like for like' basis.

### **What are the legal implications?**

- 7.0 There are no obvious legal implications should this decision be approved and lead to a ceasing of the Service.
- 7.1 Children's Services are expected to provide help and support to children in their area as part of a continuum:
- Early Help services
  - Section 17 Children Act 1989 support for more complex needs
  - Action under section 47 if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

There is no statutory duty for local authorities to provide a specific domestic violence service for men. This service has been a value-added service that has been offered to men within Leeds as part of the restorative approach Leeds City Council takes.

Ceasing the service may reduce the level of support that could be available to parents and assist the court on an evidential basis. It is not a service that the court can direct the local authority to maintain and/or continue to offer.

### **Options, timescales and measuring success**

#### **What other options were considered?**

8.0 Options other than ceasing the Service were considered both during the proposal stage i.e. before Executive Board consideration and also after the proposal was agreed however given the scale of the financial challenges faced no alternative options appeared viable.

**How will success be measured?**

9.0 Subject to approval, safe and effective closure of the Service and the identified savings achieved.

**What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

10.0 Proposals to be implemented with effect from 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024. The responsible officer will be Head of Children's Social Work.

**Background Documents**

None

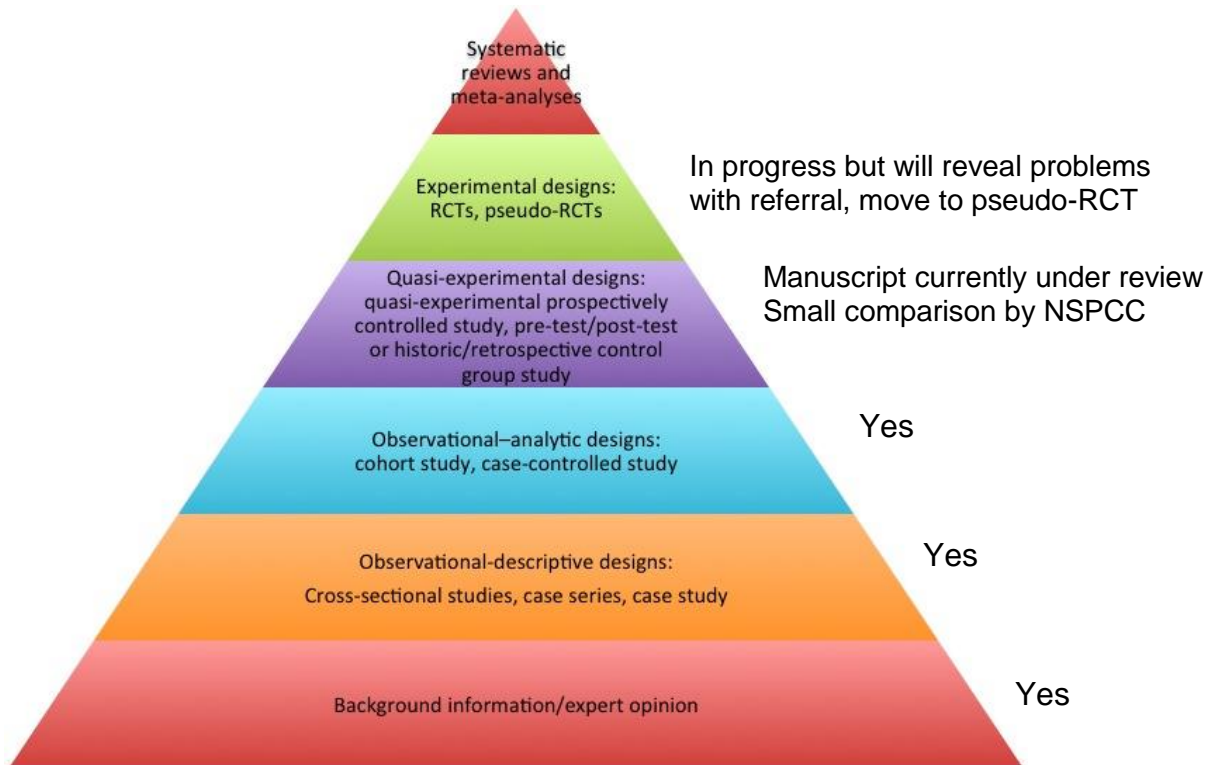
**11.0 Appendices**

Appendix One - 'CD Evidence and Caring Dad's Leeds Report 2023'

Appendix Two - 'In Support of Caring Dad's'

## APPENDIX ONE

### Caring Dads – Summary of Evidence



*Caring Dads* which was one of the first, and still one of the most highly regarded, intervention programs for fathers who have perpetrated violence in their families. *Caring Dads* programs have been started across many developed countries outside of Canada including: Australia, Germany, Sweden, England, Ireland, US, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia and Japan. *Caring Dads* has also been profiled and discussed by many independent writers including UK's Fatherhood Institute, Canada's Centre for Research and Evaluation on Violence Against Women and Children, and the US's Child Welfare Information Gateway and Futures Without Violence sites, and it has been the subject of a TV documentary show in Germany. Independent evaluations and reviews of *Caring Dads* have been completed by Emerge in the US, NSPCC and London Probation in the UK, Diakonie Düsseldorf in Germany and by the University of Melbourne in Australia. The figure above shows the progression of evidence for the program. Some of the key studies and findings are summarized below.

#### Papers and studies that established the foundation for *Caring Dads*

Early studies of *Caring Dads* aimed to determine if there was a need for the program and if there was a match between the aims, goals and philosophies of the program with the issues that were being faced by men and their families. Early work also established the principles that form the foundation of *Caring Dads* and consider how these principles might help to change practice in work with fathers. The foundations of *Caring Dads* are what resonated with other organizations and communities, contributing to its spread across countries.

Scott, K. L. & Crooks, C. V. (2004). Effecting change in maltreating fathers. *Clinical Psychology: Science & Practice*, 11, 95-111.

Scott, K. L. & Crooks, C. V. (2006). Intervention for abusive fathers: Promising practices in court and community responses. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 57(3), 29-44.

Scott, K. L. (2011). *Practical Considerations for Parenting Interventions for Men who Batter*. National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women.



- Scott, K. L. (2011). *Parenting Interventions for Men Who Batter*. National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women.
- Crooks, C.V., Scott, K. L., Francis, K., Kelly, T., & Reid, M. (2006). Eliciting change in maltreating fathers: Goals, processes, and desired outcomes. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 13*, 71-81.
- Scott, K. L. & Crooks, C. V. (2007). Preliminary evaluation of an intervention program for maltreating fathers. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention, 7*, 224-238.

### **Evaluations of Caring Dad that have used observational-descriptive and observational-analytic designs**

A number of studies have examined change in men who have completed the Caring Dads program. These studies have used a range of methods including self-report and interviews of men, their partners and their children and examination of systems and process of referral and retention into the program. A number of these studies have been completed by independent research teams. It is clear that fathers are satisfied with the program. Results from 89 fathers who attended the program following a referral from child protection services found that 89% were either very satisfied or satisfied with the program, 97% would recommend CD to another father in a similar situation and 95% said that attending the program made them a better parent to their child. To summarize, fathers who complete Caring Dads generally show positive change in a range of outcomes including: hostility and over-reactivity to children, respectful treatment of children's mothers; parenting stress, anger and emotional dysregulation, ability to identify the impact of their aggressive and abusive behavior on their children, and child-centredness. Interview data confirms that men enjoy the program and refer to using tools and ideas from the program to improve their parenting. Interviews with men also find that shifts in men's attitudes and treatment of children's mothers is more difficult can lag behind changes in parenting. Reports from mothers and children show that participation in Caring Dads is associated with reduction in men's use of domestic violence, emotional dysregulation and exposure of children to adult conflict. Interviews confirm these findings but also point to the importance of the coordinated management that is built into Caring Dads to ensure appropriate response to the minority of fathers who are not making change or who quick return to the "old ways" after the program.

- Scott, K. L. & Lishak, V. (2012). Evaluation of an intervention program for maltreating fathers: Statistically and clinically significant change. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 36*(9), 680-684.
- McCracken, K. & Deave, T. (2012) [Evaluation of the Caring Dads Cymru Programme](#). Merthyr Tydfil, Wales: Welsh Government Social Research.
- Hood, R., Lindsay, J. & Muleya, W. (2014) Evaluation of Caring Dads: a single site evaluation in an urban local authority: interim report. London: Faculty of Health, Social Care & Education, Kingston University and St George's, University of London. <http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/id/eprint/29990>
- Kaur, R. & Frost, N. (2014, unpublished) Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value Their Children. Evaluation of a Pilot Study in Leeds.
- McConnell, N., Barnard, M., Holdsworth, T. and Taylor, J. (2016) [Caring Dads: Safer Children: evaluation report](#). [London]: NSPCC
- McConnell, N., Cotmore, R., Hunter, D., and Taylor, J. (2016) [Caring Dads: Safer Children: learning from delivering the programme](#). London: NSPCC.
- McConnell, N., and Taylor, J. (2016) Evaluating Programmes for Violent Fathers: Challenges and Ethical Review. *Child Abuse Rev., 25*: 183–191
- Koch, Marlene; Liel, Christoph & Eickhorst, Andreas (2017): [Arbeit mit Vätern zur Prävention von Kindesmisshandlung. Eine Pilotevaluation des Caring Dads Programms in Deutschland](#). [Working with fathers to prevent child maltreatment. A Pilot evaluation of the Caring Dads Program in Germany.] Munich: National Centre on Early Prevention.
- Diemer, K., Humphreys, C. Fogden, L., Gallant, T, Spiteri-Staines, A. Bornemissa, A. & Varcoe, E. (2020). [Caring Dads program, Helping fathers value their children: Three site independent evaluation 2017-2020. Final Report. University of Melbourne.](#)
- Jenney, A. & Scott, K. The provision of specialty DV parenting intervention within child protection settings: outcomes and practice applications. IFSW 2020 Conference (online).<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxpyxP4z9fs&feature=youtu.be>  
Posted July 15, 2020 with 69 views to date.

### **Evaluations of Caring Dad that have used experimental designs**

Conducting experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of interventions for vulnerable populations is challenging as outcomes need to be compared to a group of families who are either randomly assigned to not receive intervention

(experimental) or who do not receive intervention for another reason (often because they are on a waitlist). So far, Caring Dads has been evaluated in a quasi-experimental manner, against a waitlisted control group. Results have found that fathers who complete the program, as compared to those who have not, show significant reductions in subsequent domestic violence and child maltreatment, as reported by children's mothers and in child protection re-referral records. Our most recent study, completed in collaboration with the Child Welfare Institute at CAST, we explored outcomes associated with care and recidivism. We found that, in 11 cases, three in the intervention group (3.6%) and eight in the comparison group (8.1%), children within the family were taken into permanent care of the state, a difference that was non-significant across groups (mostly as a result of very low numbers). Re-referral outcomes, examined for all files where ongoing father-child contact was legally and practically possible (i.e., children were not in protective custody and had not definitely ended contact with their fathers), rates of verified re-referral rates among fathers who completed intervention were significantly and substantially lower (20.5% of cases) than that for the comparison group (36.0%).

Scott, K., Dubov, V., Devine, C., Colquhoun, C., Hoffelner, C., Niki, I., Webb, S. & Goodman, D. (2021). Caring dads intervention for fathers who have perpetrated abuse within their families: quasi-experimental evaluation of child protection outcomes over two years. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 120, 105204.

McConnell, N., Barnard, M., & Taylor, J. (2017). Caring Dads Safer Children: Families' perspectives on an intervention for maltreating fathers. *Psychology of violence*, 7(3), 406.

## Caring Dads Group Intervention Program Report



*Fostering an environment for safe and healthy children living in households free of abuse by working with fathers to prevent and change patterns of abusive behavior*

The Caring Dads curriculum works with fathers to prevent and change patterns of abuse, increase fathers' awareness and application of child-centered fathering and to promote respectful co-parenting with children's mothers. Our primary goal is to increase the safety and well-being of children, recognizing that children's safety is intrinsically connected to that of their mothers.

Fathers participating in Caring Dads attend an intake interview and 17 weeks programming in groups of approximately 12 men, with a minimum of one individual session. Caring Dads also includes contact with children's mothers.

Caring Dads program was developed to complement existing efforts to end child maltreatment and women abuse. Caring Dads facilitators commit to working collaboratively in active partnerships with other professionals involved in men's families, particularly women's services and child protection services, to share information and set goals that are in the best interests of children.

More broadly, the Caring Dads program aims to practice in accordance with a collaborative or integrated model focused on keeping the perpetrator within view and ending men's use of violence in their family relationships.

## **Goals of the Program**

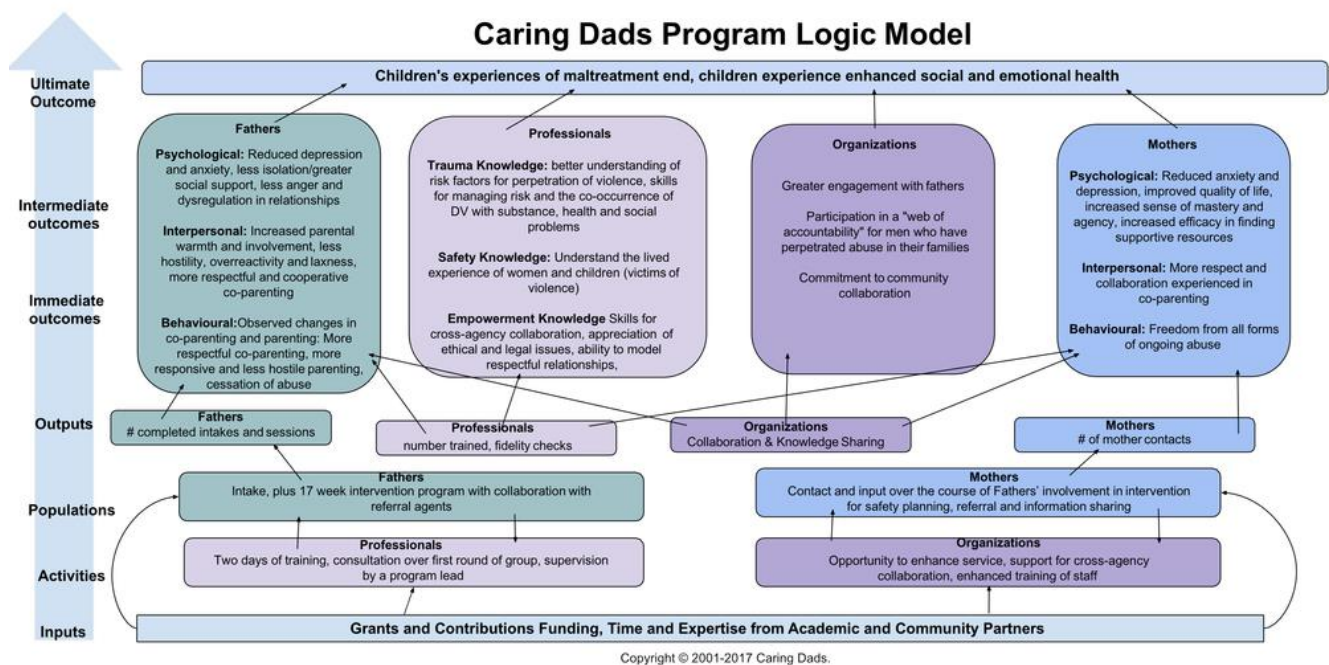
During programming for fathers, four major therapeutic goals are addressed.

*Goal 1. To develop sufficient trust so that men can be engaged in the process of examining their fathering.* Initial program activities are based on theory and research on motivational interviewing. Exercises aim to encourage men's engagement in intervention, develop men's motivation to examine their fathering, and set the groundwork for later confrontation of abuse-supporting cognitions, reactions, and behaviour. As a result of these sessions, high rates of client retention in group are expected.

*Goal 2. To increase men's awareness of child-centered fathering.* The next section of the program is devoted to helping men develop more positive relationships with their children. Using a combination of psychoeducational and behavioural (e.g., modeling, directed practice, assignment of homework) interventions, men are taught skills for listening, praising, nurturing and communicating with their children and for respectful treatment of children's mothers. These sessions are expected to result in men placing greater prioritization on child needs, on improved regulation of men's emotional reactivity to children's behaviours, and on more respectful co-parenting.

*Goal 3. To increase men's awareness of, and responsibility for, abusive and neglectful fathering behaviors and their impact on children.* Using cognitive behavioural therapeutic strategies, the third section of the program is devoted to ending men's abuse-supporting thoughts and behaviours. Clear behavioral goals are set for each father and facilitators monitor men's progress in being able to apply concepts learned in group to behaviours with their children and families. Men are expected to show increased accountability for abusive behaviours, reductions in parent-child hostility, elimination of abusive and harassing behaviors towards children's mothers, and general improvements in parenting.

*Goal 4. To help men appreciate the impact of their behavior in terms of child healing and to plan for the future.* In the final weeks of the program, focus is shifted to consolidating gains, appreciating the time necessary for changing developing trust in relationships and identifying areas of continued need for each man. These sessions are expected to result in further increasing fathers' empathy for their children.



The logic model shown above represents how Caring Dads works with not only fathers, but also professionals, organizations and mothers to achieve the ultimate outcome of ending child maltreatment and improving the lives of children exposed to abuse.

In recognition of the considerable overlap between men’s perpetration of child abuse and domestic violence and due to the intrinsic connection between the safety and well-being of children and their mothers, *Caring Dads* also includes a mother contact component. All caretaking mothers of men's children are contacted by the *Caring Dads* program on a minimum of two occasions, once as soon as possible after men have begun the program and once at the end of his involvement. During these contacts, women are provided with information, referral to support and advocacy services, and if necessary, immediate safety planning.

*Caring Dads* facilitators also collaborate with referral agents and other women’s advocates and child protection professionals. Such collaboration reflects the commitment of the *Caring Dads* program to the safety and well-being of children independent of whether men are successful or unsuccessful in changing their behavior. Generally, *Caring Dads* program facilitators will have a minimum of three contacts with men’s referral agent/other professionals involved with the family, one at the beginning, midpoint and end of the program. Contacts with the referral agent are for the purposes of sharing information about ongoing risk to his children or his children’s mother and, where appropriate, about men’s progress through the program. Ideally, men will make progress over intervention, stop their abusive behaviour, and become more respectful co-parents and nurturing fathers. However, when men's behaviour continues to jeopardize the safety and well-being of their family members, this information is openly shared with referral agents and others planning for the needs of children. In extreme cases, the best outcome for a child following his or her father’s involvement in an intervention may be that facilitators provide information to the referral agent that leads to termination of father-child contact.

### Caring Dads Experience: Leeds data for 2022-23

This report presents findings from a study conducted in Leeds, UK during the period of 2022-23. The data was collected from three distinct Caring Dads groups, active between October 2022 and July 2023. The dataset comprises responses collected from a sample of 33 fathers residing in Leeds. Among these participants, 16 fathers cohabited with at least one of their children and 5 of them (23.8%) were the sole parent of their children. Within the subset of fathers residing with their children, it was observed that 70% lived with at least one of their children's mothers, while

27.3% shared parenting responsibilities with an individual other than the children’s mother. Moreover, 15 fathers reported being having only supervised visits to see at least one of their children, whereas 9 fathers reported seeing their children on regular unsupervised visits.

## Client Outcomes

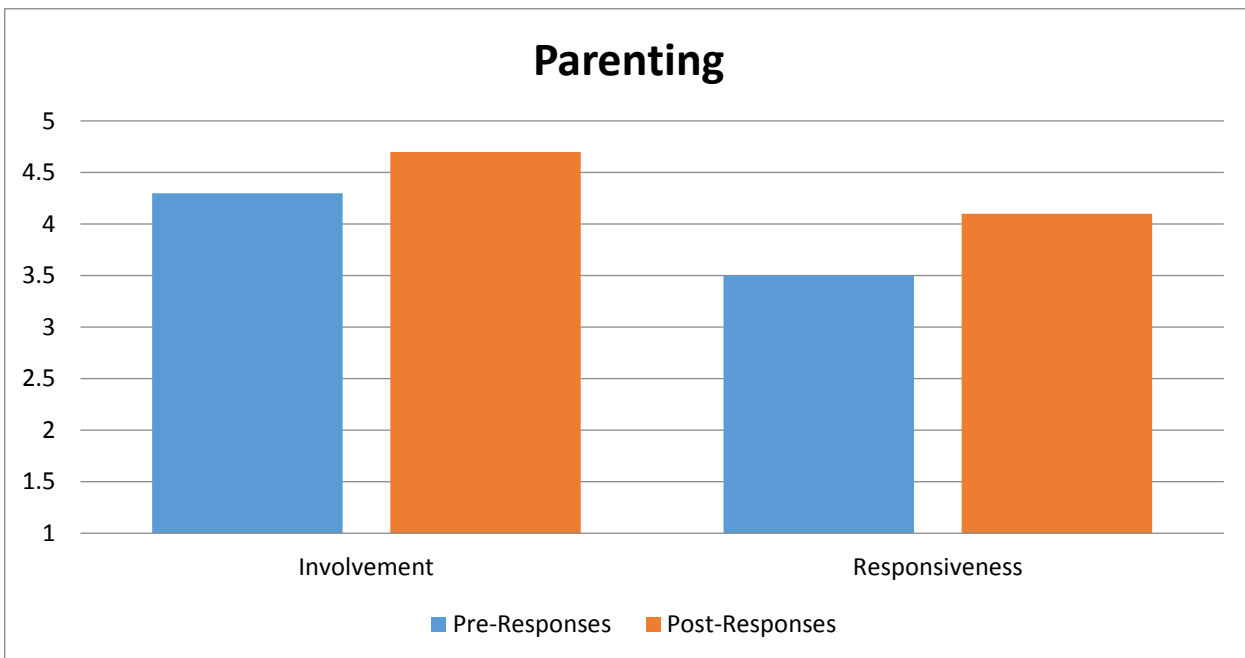
This next section of this report looks at a variety of different goals within the Caring Dads program, and compares self-reported pre-measure survey responses to self-reported post-measure survey responses. These outcomes are ideally combined with reports from children’s mothers, feedback from group participants and information gained from program facilitators.

### *Father Involvement and Child-centred parenting*

One of the aims of the Caring Dads program is to increase the level of fathers’ positive involvement with their children. To assess this, we have asked fathers to report on items representing how well they feel that they are doing as a father in spending time with their children, in showing affection, and in being attentive, or “child centered”. Three items drawn from the Fathering Involvement Inventory assess men’s self-reported positive involvement. Fathers are asked, for example, to rate how good they are at “Knowing where your children go and what they do with their friends.” These items are responded to on a scale of 1 to 6 with 1 representing lower positive involvement and 6 representing higher positive involvement. Fathers were also asked to complete the Parental Mindfulness Questionnaire to assess the quality of a father’s involvement and interaction with their children on a daily basis. Example items from this scale include: “I am aware of how my moods affect the way I treat my child” and “Even when it makes me uncomfortable, I allow my child to express his/her feelings”. Fathers respond on a scale of 1 (never true) to 5 (always true). Results for these two measures are shown below for Leeds fathers on whom pre and post data is available. Fathers’ self-reported scores on both scales increased, with increases being statistically significant and of medium size for quality of father-child interaction.

	Paired Sample		
	Pre	Post	Cohen’s d
Father involvement	4.3	4.7	.18
Total parental mindfulness	<b>3.5*</b>	<b>4.1*</b>	<b>.56</b>

\* p<.05

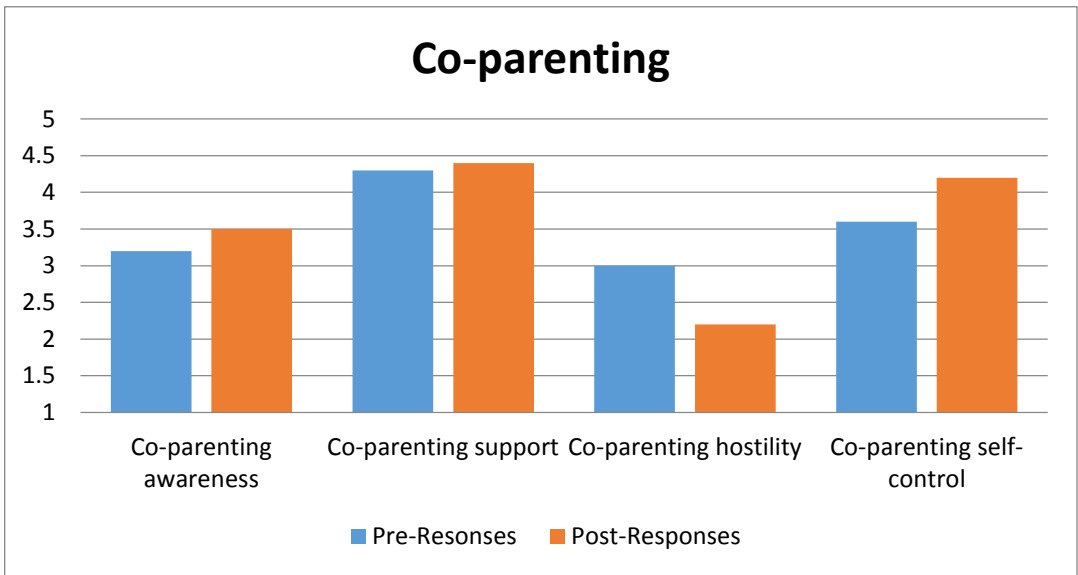


### Co-Parenting

Another goal of *Caring Dads* is to reduce men's involvement in child-focused marital conflict, increase men's respect for his partner as a parent, and improve parental cooperation and problem solving around parenting issues. Many existing co-parenting measures fail to capture the nature of change targeted by *Caring Dads*. For example, a typical co-parenting measure might ask respondents to rate the extent to which their partner supports them or the degree to which they and their partner are able to work out problems. In *Caring Dads*, the focus is instead on how *fathers* are behaving towards their partner. To capture these dimensions of fathering, *Caring Dads* has been working on developing and refining a set of items capturing the extent to which fathers are aware of the impact of their relationship with children's mothers on children, e.g. "I worry that my children may blame themselves when there are problems between me and their mother", their support for the mother-child relationship, e.g., "I look for ways to support my children's relationship with their mother", hostility towards children's mothers, e.g., "It is impossible to sort out disagreements about parenting with my children's mother" and the extent to which fathers focus on using self-control strategies in tense situations with children's mothers, e.g. "When I am frustrated with my children's mother, I remind myself that our arguments affect our children". Fathers respond to each item on a 4-point scale indicating the frequently with which they engage in each behaviour from 1 "Never true" to 5 "always true". Results found that completion of *Caring Dads* was associated with significant and moderate to large changes in co-parenting self control and with a reduction in hostility towards children's mothers. Co-parenting awareness increased, that at trending levels. Fathers' self-reported support for their children's relationships with their mothers was high before the program and remained high at the end.

	Paired Sample		
	Pre	Post	Cohen's d
Co-parenting awareness	3.2 <sup>t</sup>	3.5 <sup>t</sup>	.33
Co-parenting support	4.3	4.4	.15
Co-parenting hostility	3.0*	2.2*	.69
Co-parenting self-control	3.6*	4.2*	.66

\* p<.05, <sup>t</sup> <.10



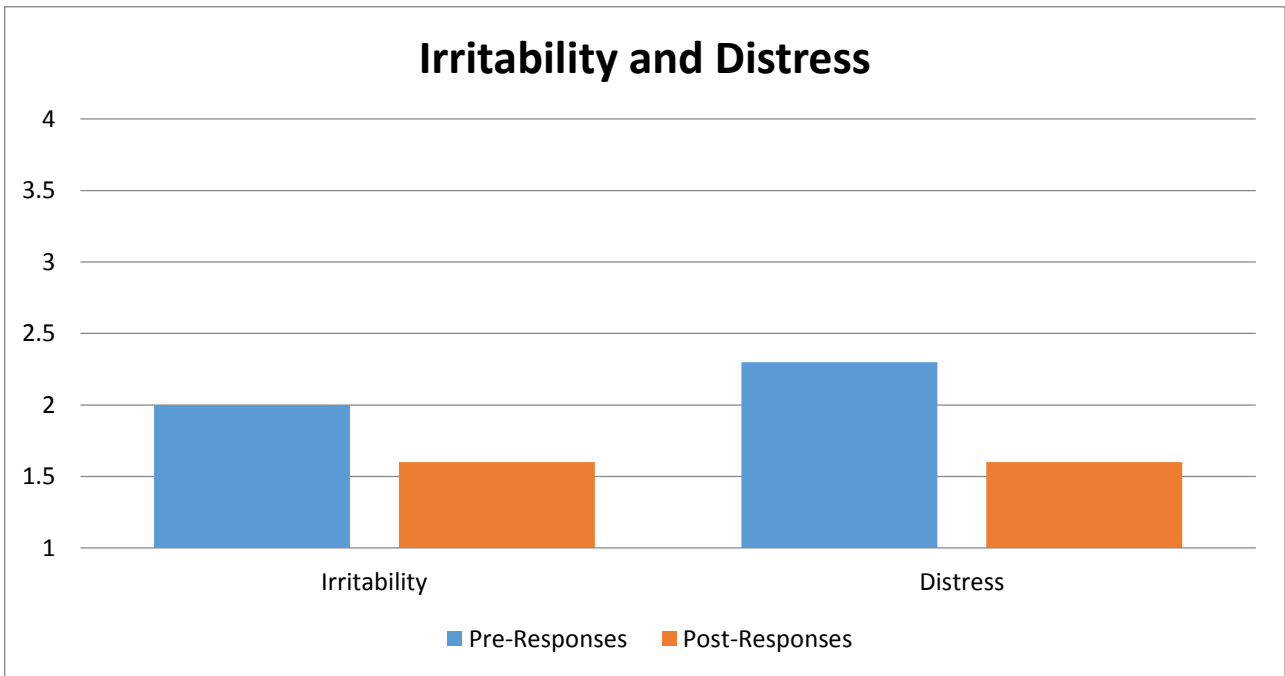
***Irritability and Psychological Distress***

Fathers’ general level of hostility and his level of psychological distress has been shown to be important to parenting. To assess these aspects of fathers’ functioning, men completed the Brief irritability questionnaire and the PHQ-4 brief screening measure for depression and anxiety. For each measure, questions are answered on a scale from 1 indicating less problems and 4 indicating greater irritability/distress. Results show that fathers made statistically significant and large improvements in irritability from the beginning to the end of the program and statistically significant and moderate improvements in distress from the beginning to the end of the program.

	Paired Sample		
	Pre	Post	Cohen’s d
Irritability	<b>2.0*</b>	<b>1.6*</b>	<b>.85</b>
Distress	<b>2.3<sup>t</sup></b>	<b>2.0<sup>t</sup></b>	.41

\* p<.05, <sup>t</sup> <.10





### Acknowledgments

The developers of the *Caring Dads* program would like to thank Leeds for allowing us to collect data during the course of the program and for participating in our larger evaluation of the *Caring Dads* program.



## APPENDIX TWO

**Caring Dads:** arguments and evidence against the cutting of the Caring Dads Programme as proposed in LCC budget proposals Dec 2023

### The Rationale for the proposal

- Statutory and non-statutory services – the information here is inconsistent. There has supposedly been a ban on all but statutory recruitment in recent months but we have seen jobs in C & F advertised that are not from Statutory Services. Additionally Senior Management have still made a decision that of the non-statutory services the two to cut are Caring Dads and MST CAN; both small teams that provide vital frontline services to some of the most vulnerable children and families in Leeds. What were the alternatives explored? What about looking at non-frontline or other roles to save money?
- The term “spend to save” is frequently used and both these services are good examples of that. CSWS care placements for children are a large part of the C & F spending and yet services like Caring Dads and MST CAN play a part in keeping children out of care where possible and preventing future referrals into CSWS. (Costs of a looked after child can be up to £5,000 a week).
- Instead of spend to save, here we have “false economy”. The proposal says that this work can be done from existing resources or by referral to partner agencies – services are not out there and are reducing; universal council services are over stretched already and this work takes time and involves managing high risk of harm as well as often starting to address past trauma of parents.
- The figure of £230 000 is based on 5.5 posts – one of these was not on the Caring Dads Structure and has been paid for by the Strengthening Families Team, since January 2023. Another half time post has been unfilled since July 2022 and not costing the council money therefore this calculation should be on 4 posts and the figure should be significantly lower.
- The executive board proposal on page 307 says that “there is obvious value in the Caring Dads workstream”. What is the understanding of this ‘value’ according to decision makers and how can it be achieved through blending this into existing services? What would be the implications for children’s services no longer being able to provide this ‘value’ (e.g. more children being received into care.)
- What evidence is there that blending specialist domestic violence work into existing family services works? What model would C & F look to replicate? Where would domestic violence work with men sit? Where would the expertise and experience come from? Who would be responsible for supervising this work, where would the training come from? All these things would need to be considered to deliver this work safely.
- [Leeds Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2023 to 2028](#)  
chapter 3 addresses People Causing Harm  
*“If you already have DVPP and you want to increase the focus on children exposed to domestic violence, then Caring Dads does this very effectively. In Leeds, we have a very successful Caring Dads programme, but we don’t have a DVPP.”*  
The next section outlines existing services of which only Caring Dads is outside the Criminal Justice System and only Caring Dads has a focus on the impact on children of domestic abuse.

### The Caring Dads Team - What we do

- Caring Dads is a small specialist team that sits alongside Children’s Social Workers. At the centre of our work is the delivery of the **Caring Dads Programme**. This is a 17 week group work programme aimed at fathers who are causing harm in their families. Generally these

are fathers with children on Child Protection Plans and referrals are from Children's Social Workers. The work is underpinned by motivational interviewing and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and offers fathers the opportunity to get support to make changes to improve their relationships with their children and partners or ex-partners. It is an evidence-based programme developed in Canada; there are several evaluation reports of the impact and efficacy of the programme including one from the NSPCC who were involved in starting Caring Dads in the UK.

- Leeds has become a leading deliverer of Caring Dads in the UK and the Team delivers training for facilitators nationally to offset licence charges. We have a reputation nationally and internationally and have developed a podcast with Research in Practice, spoken at conferences and taken men who have benefitted from completing the programme to speak to Social Workers in Leeds and other areas of the UK.
- We have been delivering Caring Dads in Leeds since 2014 and a key part of our role has been helping to develop awareness and skills in work with men. Things have improved but this approach and the understanding and skills needed are still not fully embedded in the CSWS; social workers do not in any case have the capacity to do the in-depth work required to support behaviour change for men causing harm.
- **The Journey Project**
  - The Journey Project is a specialist 10-session program exclusively designed to work with men from the BAME communities. It is the sole project of its kind in the north of England.
  - The Journey Project has created a safe space for men to explore their behaviours within an environment that respects and understands their cultural beliefs, free from judgment or misunderstanding.
  - Many of the fathers participating in the Journey Project have experienced significant trauma, stemming from issues such as trafficking, exploitation, or seeking asylum. They have faced racism, structural inequalities and been subject to negative and inaccurate stereotypes.
  - This program serves as a platform for men to explore their stories, identity, culture, and how these elements shape their parenting and relationships. It not only supports them but also challenges cultural and traditional views in relation to parenting and healthy relationships.
- **Opendoor** is 3 sessions designed to prepare men for the full programme. Some men are unsure about starting Caring Dads, too anxious or too much in denial to be able to engage. These sessions are low risk opportunities to discuss parenting, healthy relationships, role models and goal setting. Men are able to get used to a group work setting and find out more about Caring Dads.
- **+1** is a six sessions healthy relationships programme for young men where there are concerns about behaviour. We received funding to develop this and have successfully piloted it. There has recently been considerable interest from schools but the team has not had the staff capacity to develop this further.
- **Waiting list, demand & referrals**

We do not operate a waiting list; referrals to the Caring Dads Groups are open prior to the starts of groups in March and October. In terms of the Journey Project we open referrals as capacity becomes available. This system is so that men do not sit on a waiting list with no other services being offered or have their expectations raised unnecessarily. We are a small team covering the whole city. As well as the programmes we offer we spend considerable time advising workers on approaches, resources, other services etc. For example, since the last Opendoor finished in November 2023 we have had 32+ enquiries and requests.

## Statistics

Since 2014 we have worked with 718 men who are connected to 1574 children.

(this does not include men attending Opendoor or those currently attending groups).

CD Groups	Total Men	Attended 1-3 sessions	Attended 4-12 sessions	Attended 13- 17 sessions	Women Connected	Bio Children connected	Step Children connected	Total sessions attended
2014	69	29	21	19	80	122	34	606
2015	79	22	32	25	88	166	25	679
2016	59	16	24	26	68	99	27	582
2017	52	12	23	18	59	102	26	481
2018	60	21	17	22	74	128	29	500
2019	42	10	7	25	50	90	22	430
2020	13	4	1	8	17	27	9	128
2021	14	6	1	7	18	28	9	122
2022	64	15	22	27	91	162	51	606
2023	31	9	5		46	91	9	Group still in progress
<b>Totals</b>		<b>144</b>	<b>153</b>		<b>591</b>	<b>1015</b>	<b>241</b>	

Journey Project	Total Men	Children connected	Attended 1-3 Sessions	Attended 4-6 Sessions	Attended 7-10 Sessions
2020	16	42	5	9	2
2021	15	42	1	4	10
2022	13	23	4	3	6
2023	8	26			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>133</b>			

SGS 1 to 1 intervention during covid	Total Men	Children Connected	Completed 1-3 Sessions	Completed 4-6 Sessions	Completed 7-10 Sessions
2020	91	247	44	40	7
2021	64	123	21	29	14
2022	28	56	10	17	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>22</b>

Opendoor	Total men	Attended 1 session	Attended 2 sessions	Attended 3 sessions	Total Sessions attended
2023	48	7	15	26	115

- **Evaluation**

There is promising evidence that participation in Caring Dads leads to behaviour change among fathers and reduced risk to children and families. A [2017 study](#) covering five Caring Dads centres in the UK found that risks to children appeared to reduce post-programme, with fewer reported incidents of domestic abuse from fathers and their partners. Fathers reported reduced parenting stress and improved interactions with their children, and children and partners described positive changes in fathers as well. Similarly, an [Australian study](#) based on fathers' self-reports, mothers' reports of fathers' behaviour, and direct observation of fathers found promising evidence of behaviour change among Caring Dads participants across multiple indicators, including recognition of problematic behaviour, implementation of tools to interrupt harmful behaviours, and embedding positive and

respectful parenting practices. Evidence also indicates that behaviour change is more likely to be sustained over time: a [Canadian study](#) found that, over the course of two years, fathers who completed Caring Dads were more likely to remain engaged and in contact with child protection workers, with significantly lower rates of re-referral when compared to fathers who did not receive an intervention.

Please see attached documents:

[Caring Dads: Safer Children: interim evaluation report \(socialvalueuk.org\)](#)

Caring Dads Report Leeds 2023 (Evaluation done by Caring Dads Canada with our data).

Caring Dads – Summary of Evidence K Scott

[Confidential \(kingston.ac.uk\)](#) CARING DADS Multi-site evaluation in London 2013-2015

**Common impacts and outcomes** if a man completes Caring Dads are:

- *Reduced incidents, conflict and hostility towards children and their mothers*
- *Fathers remaining involved in children's lives*
- *Fathers feeling heard and part of the process*
- *Improved engagement with fathers and better relations with Social Workers*
- *De-escalation*
- *Fathers accessing other services e.g. for addiction, mental health, trauma.*
- *Whether fathers make changes or not, Social Workers are better able to assess family dynamics and parenting and make well informed child protection decisions.*

### **The detail of the proposal to cut Caring Dads**

- The details of the proposed savings relating to Caring Dads can be found on pages 307-312 of the report to the Executive: [link](#)
- Page 307 specifies £230,000 savings, identifies 5.5 roles and this information is incorrect. One of these posts was not on the Caring Dads structure and was funded via other funding streams and due to end March 2024, another half time post has been unfilled since July 2022 and is therefore not a saving.
- The licence we pay to Caring Dads Canada is 200 CAD per year (about £117). We have generated over £43,000 in income from training since 2018 which is an average of £8,600 per year.
- Appendix 1 Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration (EDCI) screening page 309. The information on this form is incorrect and inadequate. Section 2 asks for a brief description of what you are screening which is detailed as: *“The ceasing of a specific element of Multi Systemic Therapy focussed on Child Abuse and Neglect.”* This is in fact a description of MST CAN the other service proposed to be cut.
- Section 3 looks at: Relevance to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration  
Towards the end it asks:  
*“Does the proposal involve or will it have an impact on*
  - *Eliminating unlawful discrimination, victimisation and harassment*
  - *Advancing equality of opportunity*
  - *Fostering good relations “**The answer given to this is No. It is hard to fathom how this conclusion has been reached given the nature of this work to reduce harm to women and children, increase involvement of fathers in the social care system and particularly given the specific work done with BAME fathers.*
- The Journey Project was born out of the recognition that BAME fathers faced significant underrepresentation in accessing support related to their abusive behaviour and fostering healthy relationships. Professionals have often found engaging with men from these communities challenging, citing a lack of understanding of their cultural, religious beliefs, and values.

- None of the above gives us any confidence that those filling in this form and providing the information on which to base this decision actually knew what the team does.

**Who will do this work in the future?**

- *“Whilst there is obvious value in the Caring Dads workstream, it is felt that support can be provided which will allow activity to support this particular cohort of Service Users to be delivered using existing resources.” (page 307)*  
This work was not being done before and given the current crisis in Social Work it is impossible to imagine Social Workers having the capacity.
- There are very limited services for men anyway – there are some support groups for men’s mental health, there is some support for new fathers but the difference here is that these men are causing harm and are generally initially resistant to engaging with anyone.
- If men go through the Criminal Justice System they **may** have access to courses in prison or via Probation but there is a vast shortage of suitable interventions across the board.
- While Caring Dads does overlap with what is traditionally called “Perpetrator Programmes” it is also very different and is the only service building on a father’s motivation to be a better dad to try and encourage him to examine, understand and change abusive behaviour in his family.
- **The Strategic Review of Services and Responses to Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Abuse December 2019** carried out for the Leeds Domestic Violence and Abuse Programme Board recommended (page 29, 21.1) considering how the Caring Dads Service can be further developed and sustained. *“This well researched programme should be extended with wrap around support for men before and after completing the programme.”*
- The result of ending this offer of help and support to men causing harm in their families will be a backwards step to excluding and isolating them from families which often increases risk to women and children. This puts responsibility on women to keep children safe without doing anything to hold men to account or make positive changes to benefit children.
- The multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse ([publishing.service.gov.uk](http://publishing.service.gov.uk))  
[The multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk) 2017 recommends focussing on the right things -the child and the perpetrator and recognises:  
“there was a notable absence of attention given to the perpetrators of abuse, compared to the victim.” (page 17). It goes on to outline the impact of this lack of attention and lack of services.

**Feedback**

**Children & Families Colleagues and Referrers**

I think that the service is very important and think it would be a massive loss to CSWS. I would like to support the Caring Dads team in any way that I can and feel that there needs to be further discussion and further exploration around the ending of the service. In terms of the work that I have seen completed with the families that I have worked with I have observed some positive outcomes for men which has had positive impacts for families. I have worked with families where the work completed by the Caring Dads team and has impacted decision making in relation to plans and cases have closed due to the changes. I would like to be involved in anything to support the service remaining in place.



I am really disappointed (fuming!!) in the cut to these vital services. They are so important in influencing change for our children and young people.

I believe that collective measures should take place, and would be happy to strike in terms of trying to save these services. The impact this will have on a supposed "child focussed" city is detrimental and SW's will not have the time or skills to be able to do this direct work themselves.

.....

It is very sad news that this vital service is going to be cut. It is the only service of this sort that we can offer to men. Can there be resources and tools that the course facilitators use that can be distributed to Social Workers if we are having to take on this work please?

.....

It saddens me that we are removing services that could potentially support families staying together. I worry that this will have a detrimental effect on the outcomes of some families.

.....

I have only worked with caring Dads once. But it seems a real shame to cut the only real service we have that supports fathers who are perpetrators of abuse and need some parenting support. Social care being a very female dominated profession, it's always been difficult to engage fathers in work directly. This service provides vital support to prevent the escalation of abusive behaviour. I worry we will see an increase of families placed on child protection plans and in legal proceedings, due to an inability to offer the correct support. While it's necessary to make cuts because of our financial position as a council, it's a real shame to see these cuts being made to family services, that are in my opinion paramount to keeping children safe in the city.

.....

This is worrying as dad's are very often underrepresented and struggle to access support. A lot of families experience situations where support from Caring Dad's helps to keep their family safe and provides positive change.

.....

Thank you for sharing this, I am greatly saddened by this news as I know this service has been a great help to a lot of dads that I have worked with. Im really concerned that without this service dads will be forgotten about, the service helped dads to understand their behaviour and find strategies to avoid them becoming violent. It improved their understanding of CSWS concerns which impacted positively in family time and reunifications.

Could my concerns please be passed on.

.....

I think Caring Dad is a very specialised but integral service providing robust support for many men that we work with that is simply not available elsewhere. The programme has been recognised locally and nationally for the service it provides and the way in which it provides it and I think would be a huge loss to Leeds CSWS.

I also worry about the wider impact on CSWS and what this would have for SW practitioners, would this work then be expected to be delivered on a one-to-one basis by the area teams, if so, how would this work with current workload pressure.

.....



They support so many Dads in making positive changes to reduce the risk to their children. We have had so many cases where we have de-escalated from CP or supported the Dads in returning home because the risk has been addressed as part of caring dads.

I feel caring dads helps reduce the risk so much and I feel without this service, more and more cases will escalate and same as MST-CAN we will end up placing the children at further risk and likely end up with more looked after children.

There is no similar service in Leeds that we could even refer to in their absence. The pressure this would then also likely put on social workers to complete this work in the absence of Caring Dads. I know from Dad's I have worked with in the past commented how much they got out of it not just from the risk side of things but also from the community and the support they experienced within the group.

.....

I would like to share that Caring Dad's is the only service we offer for Father's. I feel it has made real changes to many families I have worked with other the years to allow Father's back in the family home following serious domestic violence. It has also supported many children to have positive relationships with their Father's whereby they wouldn't have had this. There is no other service that offers this level of support for families and no social worker or SWA would be able to offer an equivalent that would match the program. It would be a real loss to the service and leave a big gap in the support we offer families.

.....

I would just say that we have very few services available that feel like a place where father's can go for support. With domestic violence being such a huge volume of the work we deal with, cutting a service which attempts to do work with the perpetrators of domestic violence appears very short sighted, and will undoubtedly increase the risk for children and women within Leeds.

I have experience of Caring Dads having significantly positive effects on father's I have worked with, allowing them to maintain relationships with their children and sometimes their partners. Father's who I know who have accessed this service said that they have learnt vital skills and been able to reflect on their behaviour and the impact this has on their loved ones.

In a service where we often put a lot of responsibility on mother's to safeguard their children and themselves, Caring Dads placed the responsibility on Dad's, challenged their behaviour and supported them to make changes.

.....

I do not think this is a positive way to make financial cuts, we benefit massively from having Caring Dads available for our families. Without this service, it is now placing more work on us Social Workers.

It is very frustrating the level of services that are being shut as it is placing so much pressure on Social Workers to not only do our role but other roles too such as now Caring Dads.

Hope this helps, thank you for letting us have a chance to share feedback 😊

.....

Caring Dad's is the only service we have in Leeds that I know of to support Fathers to address their behaviours and make changes. Other than if they are involved with probation however this is often much further down the line in the life of a problem. Cutting this service does not reflect the Leeds Practice Principle of supporting families early in the life of a problem. Social workers do not have the capacity to complete the gap in the work that the loss of Caring Dad's will leave (I also believe that this requires some additional specialist knowledge and skills to make this most effective, and also the group setting supports the facilitation of this work and impacts on the male's experience of this, which one to one work with a social worker would not provide.)

Cutting services on offer to families does not support social workers to support families early in the life of a problem and eventually leads to greater (more costly) intervention, which is not in the best interests of children or their families.

Our services in Leeds are what makes us stand out, please consider this when addressing such cuts.

.....

I cannot get my head around the fact that we are rethinking and have rethink, we have connected our heads and hearts – all of this does not do anything practical for the families. And the one service that has done the most to effect the most change across the city in terms of reductions of DV is for the chop.

.....

I think that the caring dads service will be one that is sorely missed and it was heavily relied upon, especially within area child protection teams in child and family assessments and family support, but also within looked after services during reunification assessments.

.....

I believe that this would have a detrimental impact as there are no other services available to men other than Caring Dad's and Paul's place. Both have their limitations as Caring dads is for those who are domestically violent with children and Paul's place is for men who have been sexually abused.

With already such a low offer for men, it is only going to have further impact on the support we can offer to men and help encourage them to seek stability and long term change.

.....

Having participated in the training and been a facilitator for the groups I feel very sad that this service will be ending. The programme was intense and like no other support groups out there for men in Leeds. The dads on the groups I attended were able to talk about their feelings and make changes to their behaviours. This then resulted in dad's been able to have better relationship with the mothers of their children and partners, resulting in children having a better parenting experience.

All the staff at Caring Dads are wonderful professionals and excellent trainers and facilitators. They have all worked so hard to create a brilliant Caring Dads Service.

.....

I wanted to write to all of you to express my sadness, and if I'm honest, my exasperation and confusion to hear that Caring Dads may be part of the cuts to the services that Leeds offer our families. Whilst we all recognise that Leeds has a shortfall in their budget and cuts must be made, I, like many of my colleagues working in Child Protection, view the work you all do as vital to keeping children safe in Leeds.

Caring Dads is a unique service, perhaps unique to many Local Authorities. Domestic abuse is, by far the most common Child Protection issue that I and my colleagues manage daily. Most of this violence, witnessed by children, is perpetrated by dads. So, to have a group of highly skilled practitioners, such as you all, who have now developed a wealth of experience and knowledge in working with fathers in a restorative and non-judgemental way (which is core to the Leeds Practice Principles) is now my default first response to trying to solve entrenched domestic abuse.

The reason for this: I have seen, many times, the end results of your work. I have been fortunate to have all the fathers I have referred, complete entire courses, whether that be the full Caring Dads course or the Stop Gap during Covid. I have seen a dad start the Open-Door course and then move onto to the entire Caring Dads course. That father now has a much more loving and supportive relationship with his son, who he sees regularly and a respectful co-parenting relationship with his ex-wife. I put that down to his motivation and to your work with him. His child is no longer open to social care.

As a social worker, I have also learnt a great deal from all of you, from our check-ins and feedback sessions from the courses. I have come to see dads, I had previously seen in a binary light of violent or non-violent, in a much more nuanced and empathetic light. This has helped me work alongside them rather than opposed to them. When I do this, the results have always been positive and ultimately, this has made me a better social worker.

To not have Caring Dads, is to remove from a social worker's toolbox a truly unique, effective, restorative, and vital tool that we have been fortunate to have for many years. Whilst I am deeply sorry that Caring Dads may be no more, I imagine my feelings are nothing compared to what you all must be feeling. It has been an absolute privilege to work with all of you. I hope you all are extremely proud of all the families you have helped and all the children you have significantly contributed to keeping safe. I always thought I would get around to volunteering, caseloads permitting, and now I really regret not just doing it!

Please feel free to share my email with anyone of influence, if you think it may help.

.....

I wasn't aware, and think it's criminal! Seriously, CD is one of the best things CSWS had going for it, and indeed personally the most meaningful piece of work I've done for years....

.....

### **Caring dads feedback from men**

- "I don't know what my life would have been without caring dads, I think I would have lost everything. Now I have my kids and wife. I am a good dad now. Thank you caring dads."
- "that's a kick in the teeth, how can they get rid of Caring Dads. I have spoken at events about Caring Dads. Whoever made that decision doesn't have a clue about what it's like for us. I am so angry."
- "I came to tick a box, but after a couple of weeks I realised that I could learn something, the facilitators are supportive, they listen and don't judge. I now know I can change my life. This group has allowed me to open up for the first time and I now have a better relationship with my partner, kids and social worker. "
- "I've done other programmes in prison, but this is the best programme I have done."
- "I've started thinking. I need to do this. It'd be good for my children. I used to keep quiet, keep it all in...then snap. I think now rather than react."
- "I've learnt to control my frustrations by allowing negative comments to 'float over my head'".
- "I'm learning how to approach problems in a different way, thinking more. I'm talking more to J, kids, about feelings. It's making life easier...'I wasn't able to do that before".

- “Caring Dads came at right time for us as a family, talking more, having each other's backs. I feel as though I am through the other side now and things are much better. I feel more stable, calmer, and have been thinking and reading more about mental and emotional well-being.”
- “I had a lot of bad arguments with my boy’s mum, and I regret how I used to refer to her, I just didn’t care. The workers were pushy, but they did this in a nice way. They didn’t treat me like they were the police. They treated me with respect. This was important as I was talking about all the things that have happened in my life and it felt uncomfortable.”
- “Now I am here for my daughter. I’ve started to understand how important she is and how much I want to be a good dad. I’ve realised I should have done more for my older kids. Caring Dads helped me become more motivated to not repeat the same mistakes.”
- “Caring Dads gave me a better understanding of how to be a role model. I became clearer about the things that I was doing that was wrong.”

### **Caring Dads – feedback from partners & ex-partners**

- “He’s more loving and patient. He helps out more and helps taking them to and bringing them home from school.”
- “I’d like to see what he’s doing in that group cos there’s been a big change for the good at home.”
- “He’s more supportive and tolerant of the children. He now recognises when he’s getting stressed and goes for walks, clears his head and is then able to talk about what made him stressed.”
- “the biggest change is that in the past the children would be more likely to go to me rather than their dad if they needed any emotional or practical support - they would have been scared to talk to him about subjects such as what they had done at school that day, for fear of how he might react. Now the children appear happier to go to him and trust him more.”
- “things are better, before attending Caring Dads he would shout at the children if he was unhappy with them. There is less shouting now. I believe he is changing, but he’s not there yet.”
- “I was surprised he agreed to go. He’s more relaxed and doesn’t shout at the children anymore, he will walk away until he has calmed down. The children are happier, calmer, and more relaxed around their dad now.”

### **Journey Project – feedback from men**

- “Thank you for my sessions, they have saved my marriage “
- “When I arrived in the UK, I was told not to hit my children, but nobody showed me how to manage my children behaviour without using force. These sessions gave me new techniques to help with my children”.
- “Finally, somebody has been listening to me. I feel you understood me and my religion, you we able to relate to me”.

- “People don’t understand my religion or culture, professional look uncomfortable when they speak to me. You always made me feel relaxed and not judged. I was happy opening to you”.
- “I’ve never shared my story with professionals, they just focussed on what I did. You took time to listen and showed interest in my culture”.
- “I didn’t want to do this work, but I am glad I did. It was like a therapy session. I now see my son every weekend “.
- “I have changed , I listen to my wife now, I help around the house, cooking and cleaning. In my culture we don’t do this. I play with my son more; I am more fun and open.