



Dad Matters (Stockport)

12-Month Evaluation

**Final Report
February 2025**



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Front page images (from top):

- Early years networking event, October 2024 at Stockport County FC
- Walk and Talk session, November 2024 at Woodbank Park
- Stall at a Stockport Homes event, July 2024 at Woodley Precinct

1 Background

1.1 Commission Summary

Home-Start HOST appointed David Waterfall to undertake an independent evaluation of its “*Dad Matters (Stockport)*” project, funded by Stockport Council.

1.2 Report Purpose

The purpose of this report is to engage project stakeholders to gain their views and assess existing documentation, and to collate the evidence base into a single point of reference that responds to the following evaluation questions:

- Has the project achieved its intended purpose?
- What are the lessons learned?
- What is the extent of future demand and legacy?

It is the intention that this report will enable Home-Start HOST and its partners to understand the impact of the project, and to use this insight to help develop and deliver future interventions that have the greatest benefits for Stockport.

1.3 Agreed Methodology

The approach was agreed in advance with Home-Start HOST, and in outline included:

- Discussion with the project team and wider stakeholders.
- Review of background information and operational documentation.
- Review of data collection tools and analysis of responses.
- Collation of the research findings into a succinct evaluation report.

Ongoing contact has been maintained with Home-Start HOST throughout the commission including taking feedback, discussing emerging findings, and updating on progress.

2 Home-Start HOST

2.1 Background

Home-Start HOST is a charity of trained volunteers and dedicated, experienced staff. Its aim is to help families with young children to flourish during the years of early childhood, supporting parents across Tameside, Oldham, Stockport, Bolton & Glossop.

As children who are raised in a stable and loving family environment are more likely to have a positive and healthy future, the Home-Start HOST team support parents so they can give their children the best start in life. The team offer a range of support, from one-to-one support in the home to specialist early learning, breastfeeding and perinatal support.

As Home-Start has been working in Stockport since 1999, there had always been an ambition to have more targeted work in Stockport specifically. Dad Matters was considered a model that could be expanded locally to respond to unmet need, as it had been delivered since 2018 in Stockport only as part of a Greater Manchester wide contract and limited to referrals from perinatal teams whilst offering a light universal presence.

2.2 Dad Matters Model

Home-Start HOST designed and developed the Dad Matter model, with support from Tameside & Glossop Early Attachment Service and the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (part of the Anna Freud Centre), as it was identified that few dads accessed support, and a more reliable pathway was required needed for dads within existing perinatal and parent/infant offers. As a result, Home-Start HOST has been delivering the Dad Matters project across Greater Manchester since May 2017, from a one-year pilot with the Early Attachment Service in Tameside, to 11 coordinators across three Home-Starts in Greater Manchester and over 35 Coordinators and 20 Home-Start schemes across England and Wales.

The emergence of the Start for Life and Family Hubs initiative through local authorities enabled Home-Start schemes across the UK to partner with Home-Start HOST and deliver the Dad Matters model locally to them - resulting in approximately 30 Dad Matters coordinators nationally, who have supported almost 20,000 dads.

Dad Matters is a service that supports dads to have the most successful relationships with their families, by engaging dads where they are to help them better understand their baby, their role as a dad, and how the transition to fatherhood may affect them and their family. Service coordinators work directly with dads and local services that support dads, to assist dads understand how important they are, how to access support when they need it, and why it's essential for baby's development. The national website is at: <https://dadmatters.org.uk>



[Image shows a post on X from the Director of Stockport Homes regarding a Dad Matters event in May 2024, demonstrating the value of the project for local communities].

2.3 Importance of Supporting Dads in the Perinatal Period

The model for Dad Matters is based on a strong evidence base, which clearly proves that the perinatal period (from conception to two years) is a critical time not only for mothers and infants but also for fathers. Benefits may be summarised below (with seminal research and evidence sources indicated in parentheses and listed in full in the appendices):

- **For Dads**
 - **Mental Health:** Around **1 in 10 new fathers** experience postnatal depression, with the highest risk between **3-6 months postpartum** (Cameron et al., 2016; Paulson & Bazemore, 2010). Anxiety and stress levels are also heightened during this period.
 - **Engagement & Confidence:** When fathers receive support, they report increased confidence in their parenting role and stronger bonds with their child (Panter-Brick et al., 2014).
 - **Relationship Stability:** Involved fathers experience greater relationship satisfaction and lower rates of conflict with their partners (Leach et al., 2016).
- **For Mums**
 - **Reduced Maternal Stress & Depression:** Fathers who are engaged and emotionally available can reduce maternal stress and the likelihood of postpartum depression (O'Brien et al., 2017).
 - **Increased Partner Support:** When dads are supported, they can provide better emotional and practical support to their partners, improving maternal mental health and well-being (Pilkington et al., 2015).
- **For Infants**
 - **Cognitive & Emotional Development:** Research indicates that children with involved fathers show better cognitive development, social competence, and emotional regulation (Sarkadi et al., 2008).
 - **Reduced Risk of Behavioural Issues:** Infants with present and supportive dads have a lower risk of developing behavioural and emotional problems later in childhood (Ramchandani et al., 2013).
 - **Secure Attachment:** Responsive and engaged fathers contribute to the development of a secure attachment style, which is linked to better mental health outcomes in adulthood (Brown et al., 2012).
- **For Society**
 - **Economic Benefits:** Early paternal involvement is associated with better educational outcomes and reduced reliance on social services in later life (Lamb, 2010).
 - **Lower Crime Rates:** Children with actively engaged fathers are less likely to engage in delinquency and criminal activities in adolescence (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002).
 - **Better Workplace Productivity:** When dads are supported in their parental role, they experience less stress, leading to higher workplace satisfaction and productivity (Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007).

3 Dad Matters in Stockport

3.1 Local Context

Stockport, a borough of Greater Manchester with around 290,000 residents, has an average health rating nationally but significant inequalities within its borders. It ranks as the 8th most polarised borough in the UK, with an 11-year life expectancy gap between affluent Bramhall and disadvantaged Brinnington.

To address early-life inequalities, the refreshed Stockport Start Well Strategy (2025-2028) outlines a collaborative approach between the Council, Stockport NHS Foundation Trust, and community partners. Underpinned by the Healthy Child Programme and aligned with the GM Early Years Delivery Model, the strategy prioritises child development from pregnancy to age five, with a focus on 1001 Critical Days. It advocates working closely with parents and carers to achieve better outcomes and to ensure every child in Stockport has the opportunity to start well, live well, and thrive.

A granular analysis of data for early years' children continues to highlight Stockport's challenges and the correlation between deprivation and risk of poor childhood outcomes. Stockport wide figures for good level of development (GLD) are 68.7% at the end of Foundation stage, which are above the England average. However, the percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving good level of development (GLD) at the end of reception is lowest in Greater Manchester at 43.3% (as at 2023/4). Furthermore, the inequality gap for white British boys living in poverty is stark: 33.3% of boys free school meal cohort (FSM eligible) compared to girls in FSM cohort 53.3% (as reported at GM School Readiness Board January 2025).

More widely the Stockport Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2023/4) reveals:

- A population where birth rates have risen in areas of deprivation.
- More children and young people are living in low-income households where health outcomes are poorer.
- Changes in the most common health issues experienced by the population, to those linked to lifestyles or are otherwise preventable.
- A period of economic challenge that affects the incomes and entitlement of the most vulnerable people in Stockport.

Collaboration with Nesta [the UK's innovation agency for social good, <https://www.nesta.org.uk>] has provided Stockport with key insights into boys' early development, particularly in social, emotional, speech, and language skills during the first 1,001 days of life. Parent insight work revealed approaches families prefer, including a trusted relationship with professionals. Families in some communities in Stockport have a history of intergenerational disadvantage. Parents/carers are more likely to have experienced/experience high levels of challenge and adversity in their lives and mental health issues are common including depression, anxiety, complex trauma.

The National Panel Report (2022/23) recorded 393 serious child safeguarding incidents, with 40% resulting in a child's death—mainly infants under one (36%). Locally, six incidents in the

past three years involved similar themes: hidden males, safe sleeping, and parents facing adversity.

3.2 Project Need

Recognising the need to engage fathers and significant male partners, Stockport Family Hubs prioritised Dad-friendly practice and perinatal support for co-parents. This aligns with the NHS Long Term Plan (2019), which emphasizes adult mental health support for both parents. A July 2023 survey found that while some fathers felt included in the perinatal period, many sought better mental health support, equal recognition by practitioners, and access to practical resources.

With 26% of local dads struggling with mental health and 40% experiencing stress or anxiety (Stockport survey, 2023), yet few seeking help, the need for dedicated Dad support services is clear. As a result Stockport Council worked with Home-Start HOST, a VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise) organisation to implement the Dad Matters Project to strengthen relationships with fathers and enhance support options.

This resulted in the tender process for the *“Dads Perinatal and Parent Infant Mental Health Coordinator”* contract, which identified the requirement, *“As part of our Family Hub development and strengthening of our early years delivery model we are looking to commission a full-time dads perinatal coordinator for 12 months.”*

Home-Start HOST bid for and secured the contract, which held a budget of £48,227, and ran between 8th January 2024 and 7th January 2025. Due to the success of the first year, the project has been re-commissioned for 25/26 by the council.

3.3 Management Team

The primary role funded through the project was the Co-ordinator, with their employment beginning in January 2024 on 36 hours per week. The role was supported by Home-Start HOST’s Dad Matters Operations Manager, with Home-Start HOST’s Deputy CEO providing scrutiny and acting as contract manager. Routine performance reports were issued to Home-Start HOST’s board for scrutiny and to align with wider governance and budgetary controls.

3.4 Project Targets

The project contract identified a series of targets in the Service Specification:

Targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach 600 to 800 Dads in universal settings- antenatal clinics, targeted outreach (NICU and MBU, post-natal) Work with 50 to 60 Dads on a one-to-one basis. Referrals via midwives & health visitors To support dads borough wide with bespoke ways of working in areas of disadvantage. Taking part in joint visits with enhanced team for dads who aren't engaging with services. Arrange regular walk and talks/events in Stockport. Deliver multi-agency training once a quarter.

- Develop bespoke training for specific teams who may need it.
- Develop a professionals screening tool.
- To support in the recruitment, training and support of volunteers
- Development of peer support pathways
- Resources printed - pull up banners, flyers and posters etc.
- A good knowledge of Stockport and experience working with agencies within Stockport
- Significant knowledge of best start for life and family hub policy guidance

Each of these is considered later in this report.

3.5 Performance Measurement

Home-Start HOST has a track record of successful data collection and management, and utilised existing approaches within the project, including:

- **Case Management:** Home-Start HOST uses the Lamplight (an industry standard CRM/ case management database that tracks service delivery) to collate and report on data. [<https://www.lamplightdb.co.uk>]
- **Referral Form:** an initial 7-page document for completion to gain background information and the need/ context for the referral, made available in Microsoft Word for professionals and an online version for dads.
- **CORE10:** Home-Start HOST use the standard shortened version of the Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (CORE) approach, which is a 10 item assessment measure for common presentations of psychological distress in mental health settings and is designed to be used to track symptoms over the course of treatment. CORE-10 is a shortened version of the original CORE-OM that has over 30 assessment criteria, both of which require respondents to self-report symptoms over the past week. [<https://www.coresystemtrust.org.uk>]
- **Parent Infant (PI) Questionnaire:** a statement-based assessment that explores dad's knowledge of what babies need and how they communicate. The bespoke tool was created specifically for Home-Start HOST in dialogue with the Parent/Infant Clinical lead.

3.6 Key Learning

Insight includes:

Learning - Dad Matters in Stockport

- Several areas of delivery worked particularly well, for example:
 - The team developed strong relations with professionals that generated a good level of referrals and helped to promote awareness of the project.
 - The training offer was well received by external professionals, such as team leaders.

- The project resources were well received, such as banners, booklets, posters and social media assets.
- Recruitment of the project team worked well, being able to introduce a Co-ordinator with parenting and lived experience alongside having a commitment to learning and development, is key and a fundamental as part of any peer support project.
- Developing a more connected local network and system in Stockport, expanding on the limited work already being done in Greater Manchester.
- Joint working with numerous different teams to ensure reach, referrals, best practice and learning are shared beyond the core team. This includes specialist teams, midwives, health visitors, local authority, mental health and parent-infant services.
- Being visible in places where dads can be found is critical, where messaging about dads is important and appropriate, and within services who encounter families and dads. This includes the same teams as identified above, and extends to hospital sites, family hubs and children's centres, as well as GP surgeries.
- Learning has allowed the team to understand the areas of delivery that can be further honed, for example:
 - Enhancing data collection within the Referral Form, particularly increasing the ability to gather data at the mid and end points for outcomes measures.
 - The approach to recruiting volunteers had led to more than was expected, and now the team's priority include understanding the skills and experiences of volunteers so they can be utilised in the best way possible. In moving forward this will expand the universal offer, as well as providing additional capacity for 1:1 and professional development.
 - Historically only objective feedback was secured from professionals during their training, and in moving forward a greater focus will be on securing qualitative and quantitative feedback through more formal surveying to understand the extent of behaviour change and any alterations to day-to-day working practices.

4 Project Activity

4.1 Delivery

Delivery covered three broad forms of activity:

- Encouraging Referrals
- Universal Engagement
- Practitioner Engagement

Each of these is considered below.

4.2 Encouraging Referrals

Referrals came from professional or self-referrals from dads, using the standard Referral Form. In addition the project team attended joint visits with professionals to increase referrals and meet dads who may be less likely to access support. For example the Co-ordinator was asked by a Health Visitor to attend a visit with a complex case for a family that the midwife was concerned about, which resulted in a referral and the dad is now receiving ongoing support through the project. This demonstrates the project's ability to successfully work with complex cases, and the importance of developing credibility - and trust - with professionals such as Health Visitors and midwives.

In addition the team also kept in contact with the referral source where this was a professional/ agency to help build trust and as a professional courtesy to keep them up to date. Many professionals fed back that this was welcomed, and while the detail was confidential the broad indication of sustained engagement and benefit was helpful to them.

Alongside gaining referrals into the project, the team pro-actively signposted dads to other sources of support and local groups to get additional or alternative support, for example if a referral for Dad Matters was not right for them or if they have multiple needs. For example, Andys Man Club, Mentel, Banter and Brew, Just4Dads, or Stockport Infant Parent Service. When the team signpost to other services they let dads know about the service and provide information, and where required gain consent from the dad and complete a referral form or support the dad to complete the referral form themselves.

4.3 Universal Engagement

This broad area of activity focused on going to where dads are and engaging them in a safe place where they were comfortable to talk about being a dad and have the greatest chance of reflecting and then acting on information provided - for example not at a football match or a gym, as these would not be conducive to discussions about parenting.

The activities undertaken by the team were flexible and responsive to the needs and behaviours of dads, with examples including:

- **Home Visits:** the team undertook home visits as part of 1:1 work with referrals and supported with a variety of issues around attachment and bonding, mental health and accessing services.

- **Maternity Ward Presence:** co-ordinating times to visit the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and maternity ward at Stepping Hill Hospital in Stockport to meet and engage dads at an early point in their parenting journey.

Dads would be introduced to the offer and the team member, provided information on the project such as with an accessible dad-friendly leaflet, and informed on how to get in touch if at any point they may need support.

“This was the first time anyone had asked about me and how I was doing. It really made a difference, and I did make contact afterwards to see what was an offer.”

Dad

- **Attending Local Dad Groups:** having a presence at established local dad’s groups in the community to provide information on the offer available, have 1:1s with dads, and increase awareness of the role and presence of the project.

For example, attending the Just4Dads stay and play group for dads, grandads and male carers held twice weekly at the Guywood Centre. [Image shows a Just4Dads session in June 2024 with a dad with twins.]



“Dad Matters is a great local service, especially for new dads as the adjustment to being a parent is so hard. The Co-ordinator really helps dads’ relationships with both their baby and also their partner. This has a wealth of benefits not just for the family, but also for dad’s mental health, and helping dads understand the developmental side of it such as linking with baby’s brain development and the importance of all of this for dads. We’ve seen real behaviour change as a result of dads getting involved in Dad Matters.”

Just4Dads Co-ordinator

- **Workshops:** design and delivery of presentations focusing on specific themes of interest to dads. For example ‘New Dads Workshop’ or a ‘First Aid Workshop’, both delivered in July at One Stockport Family Hub Brinnington.

[Image shows a ‘First Aid Workshop’ in May 2024 held at the Brinnington Hub.]



- **Outreach Stalls:** hosting stalls at various events and gatherings with the intention to engage dads at the right place at the right time. For example, Stockport Homes Community events and One Stockport Family Hub community engagement events.

“Graham has been a regular figure at the Family Hubs networking events and market places promoting awareness and referral routes. He’s been very good at relationship building in the community settings. He was very clear with me and others in the system leadership about the target audiences for the greatest impact - those not engaged, the hidden struggling partners, new dads not on anyone’s radar and that was very helpful to set out that vision for targeted support.”

Family Hub Network Lead

- **Dad Matters Walk and Talks:** delivering walking events to provide a social opportunity and opportunity to share info on the project and to normalise dads talking about commonplace issues. For example, being held once a month at a local Stockport Park where referred-in dads and other dads are invited.

[Image below left shows social media flyer promoting a Walk]



- **External Walk and Talks:** attending events arranged by local providers or statutory sector colleagues to access dads if present, or more usually discussing the project offer with mums and what their partners were experiencing, who would then be able to disseminate the information to their partners with the aim of leading to a referral. For example, Walk into Wellbeing - Stepping Hill Specialised Midwives, and Coffee, Chill and Spill CIC.

[Image above right shows a Maternity Walk and Talk Facebook post at Heaton Moor Park from October 2024].

4.4 Practitioner Engagement

This area of delivery focused on engaging practitioners and professionals to increase their awareness of the project and also increase their capability to successfully engage dads through their day-to-day work.

The activities undertaken by the team were flexible given the diversity of professionals encountered, with examples including:

- **Introductory Spiel:** a standardised 10-minute presentation covering the basics of the project offer, the team, the benefits for dads and professionals, and how to engage with the team. The presentation could be tailored to any specific needs, to ensure it was targeted appropriately at different professionals. For example, midwifery, health visiting or children's services, and family hubs.



[Image shows a midwifery session in September 2024 at Stepping Hill Hospital.]

"I feel that Dad Matters is an absolutely wonderful project and very much needed for our local Dads. Graham, our local co-ordinator, often joins our monthly team walking group to be able to offer support and advice to any dads or mums who are worried about their partner."

I discuss Dad Matters with many, many women that I speak to as part of my role as a mental health midwife and regularly send them the link for them to pass on to their partner/husband etc.

It is extremely evident that support for men/dads is much needed and we and the local community are so lucky to have Dad Matters."

Mental Health Midwife

- **Networking Meetings:** attending community groups and professional briefings to disseminate information about the project and the benefits achieved. For example due to presentations at Family Hub meetings, the Project Co-ordinator has been invited to be a Family Hub Bridge in 2025.



[Image shows an Early Years event in October 2024 at Stockport County FC.]

- **Outreach Stalls:** hosting stalls at various events and gatherings with the intention to engage professionals at the right place at the right time, and helping them to disseminate information their colleagues. For example, attending the Trauma Conference in November 2024 with the sole purpose to talk to professionals about the project.

[Image shows a stall at a Stockport Homes community event in July 2024 at Bridgehall Community Centre.]



- **Professional Training:** a detailed workshop usually of 2.5 hours duration, delivered to specific teams. For example, held for all professionals (including health visitors and social workers) who work with dads, to help them understand the struggles dads go through and giving techniques on how to engage with them. Professional training consists of:
 - How and why Dad Matters works with dads in the perinatal period.
 - The importance of dads within their own right, to mum and to baby.
 - How professionals can refer to Dad Matters.
 - How professionals can increase engagement with dads.

“It sounds simple - but the different impact of using the phrase “mum and dad” rather than “parents” is massive, as many dads hear ‘parents’ and assume this just means mum, so they disengage. Now our team always say “mum and dad” - or “dad and mum” - and we can see a difference in dad’s behaviour and engagement”.

Professional Training attendee

4.5 Key Learning

Insight includes:

Learning - Project Activity

- Several areas of delivery worked particularly well, for example:
 - The professional development of the Project Co-ordinator, for example in terms of public speaking and delivering training.
 - The tools used are simple and engaging for dads and are not only efficient for use as outcomes measures, but can also be used as a tool to initiate conversation. For example if a CORE10 score is low for how a dad is sleeping, that information can be used to start a chat about what may be the underlying issues that can be supported by the project.

- Training received positive feedback, demonstrating the efficacy of the project's inherent quality and the close work that the local authority delivered to promote the opportunities.
 - There is clear evidence of improved practice from professionals in terms of their understanding and how they engage dads, such as their change of language when engaging mum and dad.
 - Working with the embedded local authority training booking system has reduced administration time and meant a more direct route to attendees, leading to better reach, more structure, and better visibility of the training offer.
 - While the full training session is 2.5 hours, to maximise reach and fit with local availability the team have developed and offered bespoke sessions for specific teams, team meetings and event presentations and drop-ins that could be as short as half an hour.
 - The amount of professionals the team have seen in training and at events demonstrates that the service leads value the project's input, insight and expertise as they are willing to release staff from regular duties to attend training.
- Learning has allowed the team to understand the areas of delivery that can be further honed, for example:
 - During the current contract the team put a lot of time into delivering training to reach as many potential referrers as possible of differing content, duration and venue. In moving forwards this will become a more structured and consistent offer through the local authority training programme.
 - In moving forwards it will be a priority to increase bookings through local authority system for training, to increase attendance and reach, further reduce administration time, centralise logistics (room availability, timings, resources), and provide a better opportunity for more structured attendee feedback.
 - The training offer will also be expanded to offer bespoke training for teams, new staff and students as various opportunities arise. More specifically, training will cover Family Foundations, including volunteers, to support the wider work of the family hubs.

5 Performance

5.1 Targets

The Specification held several targets, and each is considered below in terms of the scope of the target, what activity was delivered, and hence whether the target had been achieved.

5.2 Engagement with Dads

The target was to, “Reach 600 to 800 Dads in universal settings- antenatal clinics, targeted outreach (NICU and MBU, post-natal)”.

The typical approach for project delivery was that an initial referral would be logged and added to Lamplight, leading to an initial telephone call with dad to understand the situation and determine the most appropriate support offer. Following this the support would be provided as required for dad.

The total number of individual contacts was 683 equating to 114% performance of the lower end of the target. This figure included the set-up and induction of the project team and as such resulted in lower levels of engagement during training and shadowing activities undertaken at the start of the project. It should be noted for comparison that NHS data for December 2023 to February 2024 shows Stepping Hill had 489 Stockport families access maternity care across that three-month period, which equates to approximately 2,000 across a full year. Given that the project engaged almost 700 dads (acknowledging a likely small number of repeat dads) this indicates a significant proportion - over one third of all dads - were engaged through this project alone.

As such, it is considered that this target has been achieved.

“I never expected that in my journey as a father that I would need as much support as quickly as I did. Things got on top of me quickly, I felt lost and my wife was not equipped to help me, let alone look after a newborn as well.

Luckily for me I stepped Graham from Dad Matters. Graham first and foremost listened to me, and what I felt I needed. He didn't judge me, he just allowed me to talk about the things that worried me. After that Graham was able to follow up with tailored, personal and specific advice, things that have made a real difference to my and my daughter's lives. Practically always available for a chat meant I never felt alone. That took the pressure of me but also my wife. Those first few months were very tough, but getting past them with the support from Dad Matters and Graham means now that I have a wonderful relationship with my young daughter and I am a much more confident and happy dad.

Thanks Graham!”



Dad (referred by Mental Health Midwife)

5.3 Work with Dads 1:1

The target was to, “Work with 50 to 60 Dads on a one-to-one basis. Referrals via midwives & health visitors”.

The total number of referrals worked with was 56, equating to 112% performance of the lower end of the target, and more than the mid-point of the target.

As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

“After a low period in my life, I reached out to Dad Matters for support and to meet other Dads who may have been through a similar situation. I was paired with Graham, who from the first session offered an ear to talk to, along with advice on how I could approach situations I was struggling with differently.



We had a few meetups and chats, which definitely helped me overcome the problems I was facing and bond more with my daughter and wife [as image]. He taught me that spending time with my daughter doing things like playing, reading, drawing, etc were really important for our relationship, and trying to prioritise time with her was something I should do. It was nice to know that there are other dads out there experiencing the same as I did and working together to overcome things.”

Dad (self-referral)

5.4 Support to Dads

The target was to, “To support dads borough wide with bespoke ways of working in areas of disadvantage”.

As detailed earlier in this report a range of support was provided to dads across the entire borough. However to ensure that dads in areas of disadvantage were provided the greatest opportunity to access support, Brinnington was prioritised as a local area that ranks within the 2% most deprived areas nationally. As such the team targeted this area specifically, for example delivering workshops at Brinnington Hub [Image shows a ‘New Dads Workshop’ in July 2024 held at the Brinnington Hub] as well as targeted Professional Training for teams in those areas, and almost a third of all dads supported lived in Brinnington (10 out of 35 dads).



Given the focus of activity, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

5.5 Joint Visits for Non-engaged Dads

The target was to, *“Taking part in joint visits with enhanced team for dads who aren't engaging with services”*.

The team have been invited on two occasions to visit dads that do not traditionally engage with the aim of securing a referral into the project. For example while one such visit in February 2024 to a dad during a claim for asylum did not accept support, a dad seen at a joint visit in November 2024 gave permission for the Health Visitor to make a referral in his name that led to 1:1 support being provided.

As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

5.6 Develop Regular Events

The target was to, *“Arrange regular walk and talks/events in Stockport”*.

13 walk and talk events have been delivered across Stockport, attended by 60 dads. For example at Heaton Norris Park in October 2024 attended by 8 dads where one dad commented *“My wife has really struggled since the birth and I'm very worried about her.”* [Image shows a walk and talk event at Woodbank Park in July 2024.]



As such, given the scale of activity it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

5.7 Multi-Agency Training

The target was to, *“Deliver multi-agency training once a quarter”*.

Three specific multi-agency training sessions were provided for 26 members of the Workforce Development team in August 2024, for example a session at Brinnington Family Hub attended by 10 health visitors where one commented, *“You have made everyone think of their husbands, we feel really sorry for them now for what they must have been going through.”*

During training attendees were asked to complete a short survey and although many attendees did not share their views, responses to the question *“What part of the training was most useful to you?”* included:

- *“How I can engage dads more in my practice and group work to allow them to feel more confident to ask questions about how they can help their baby/child's development and to help them feel heard and respected as a dad who plays an important part in their child's life.”*
- *“Support available for dads and what that support looks like.”*

- “Dads voices- what support dads want and how we can offer it.”
- “How small changes to our daily work can make a big impact in involving dads.”
- “Asking dads how they are doing, involving them as a team in mum’s childbirth journey.”

As such, it is considered that this target has been fully achieved.

5.8 Bespoke Training for Teams

The target was to, “Develop bespoke training for specific teams who may need it”.

Six ad-hoc and bespoke training sessions were delivered to 60 professionals between July and September 2024, for example an ‘Introduction to Dad Matters’ at Stepping Hill in August delivered to 12 professionals where one attendee commented “I will definitely ask more than once about his mental health from now on” evidencing a conscious desire to change practice when engaging dads.



[Image shows a maternity education presentation in April 2024.]

As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

“I have seen how important little changes to my working practice can be. Such as changing terminology, addressing ‘dad’ in letters, writing there name directly. This all helps promote inclusion and builds a better dynamic with dads.”

Training attendee

5.9 Professionals Screening Tool

The target was to, “Develop a professionals screening tool”.

It was agreed at the outset that the existing Parent Infant tool was suitable for the project, and as such no new or duplicative methodology would need to be developed.

The tool is bespoke for Home-Start HOST and acknowledges that the quality of the parent-infant relationship shapes baby’s brain development and lays the foundations for the promotion of a secure attachment. Secure attachment is associated with optimal functioning across a wide range of developmental domains, and babies who receive sensitive responsive care are more likely to form a secure attachment. The tool gains self-assessed responses in line with this.

As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

5.10 Volunteer Support

The target was to, “*To support in the recruitment, training and support of volunteers*”.

The team appreciated the sensitivities involved in the service, and the requirements for those engaging dads to be suitably skilled and trained, and as such the intention was that a small cohort of volunteers would be engaged to build capacity in universal engagements and to offer a small amount of time (such as an hour or so per month) to deliver talks or to support outreach engagement. To support this, and to complement wider communications, the team attended a large volunteer event in Stockport Town Centre at the Merseyway Shopping Centre in September 2024 and set up a stall to promote the project and gauge interest in volunteering. As a result of the team’s input, four volunteers were recruited and brought into the project, this included one who was a dad that had received support from the project and wanted to ‘give something back’, and another was a professional from the Stockport Infant Parent Service who was impressed with the project and wanted to support its delivery.

As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

“I volunteer with Dad Matters because I truly believe in the purpose of the organisation. As a Dad to two young children myself, I know that whilst it can be joyous, fun and enlightening to be a Dad, it can also be stressful, isolating and thankless. It can be hard to say ‘I’m finding the experience of being a Dad really hard’ - because the narrative around parenthood is that it should be this unilaterally magical experience. But it’s so important to speak to out if you need something, for the sake of you and your child.

I believe that in life you should give more than you take, and so I really appreciate Dad Matters giving me an opportunity help out in my community. Even in the short time I’ve been volunteering, I’ve really enjoyed working with Graham and spending time with other Dads. In a time where services are suffocated, this is a priceless resource for people to use - I just wish more people knew it existed!”.

Volunteer

5.11 Develop Peer Support Pathways

The target was to, “*Development of peer support pathways*”.

The team have been keen from the outset to identify opportunities for dads to take ownership of their own progress and think about ways to sustain peer support. For example, the team encouraged and advised several dads from the walk and talk events to develop a WhatsApp group to help them share their concerns, offer each other solutions, and to co-ordinate social activity. This is alongside the routine signposting to other peer support networks, such as Just4Dads, as detailed earlier in this report. [Image shows the project Co-ordinator at a Just4Dads event in July 2024.]



As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

5.12 Resource Development

The target was to, “Resources printed - pull up banners, flyers and posters etc”.

A variety of collateral and marketing materials have been produced. For example banner stands, pens, and ‘Dear Dad’ leaflets have been adapted for Stockport and printed for use by the team.

[Image shows design of a banner stand used as part of the project.]

As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

5.13 Apply Local Knowledge

The target was that the project would benefit from, “A good knowledge of Stockport and experience working with agencies within Stockport”.

Home-Start HOST has a track record of working in Stockport, and the team in particular are familiar with local groups and networks. For example, the Home Visiting work and the PIMH service that has been successfully implemented into Stockport and that has enhanced Home-Start HOST’s reputation and enabled it to build stronger relationships with the Local Authority.

Delivery of the project has further helped embed Home-Start HOST and the project in the area and increased awareness, allowing the team to make stronger connections with key decision-makers and practitioners across the borough. For example, the Fatherhood Institute as well as Local Authority leads and senior officers.

As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.



“I have found Dad Matters to be a great resource. There’s very limited support for dads during the perinatal period, so it’s good to know that there is peer support out there to direct families to. I’m glad to be able to make dads aware there is support out there.”

Clinical Psychologist - Stockport Infant Parent Service

5.14 Apply Technical Knowledge

The target was that the project would benefit from, “*Significant knowledge of best start for life and family hub policy guidance*”.

Home-Start HOST is active in helping inform and shape emerging policy and local priorities, for example the Maternity Voice Partnership, PIMH working group, and the Project Co-ordinator’s role as a Family Hub Bridge. In addition, the project has provided opportunities for the team to enhance their knowledge, for example undertaking PIMHS training in February 2024. The Dad Matters commission is a significant enhancement to the Early Years offer, which supports the Family Hubs approach—a centralised access point for various services. The Dad Matters Coordinator plays a crucial role in the development of Family Hubs by improving access for fathers. The role enhances and facilitates connections between fathers and the services available through Family Hubs, ensuring that help and support are readily accessible. Additionally, the coordinator promotes Dad-friendly practices across the network. This enhancement aims to make the Family Hubs approach more inclusive and effective by actively involving and supporting fathers, thereby strengthening the overall support system for families in Stockport.

As such, it is considered that this target has been successfully achieved.

“Graham is an asset to Dad Matters, he is clearly very passionate about the role he plays and in supporting dads.

During a recent learning circle that I was facilitator for, I observed that even though Graham had no slides he knew the content inside and out, never faltering from the message. Personal interactions when Graham has come along to events has been lovely, he is always happy to help and is very friendly with dads and wider attendees.”

Senior Project Support Officer - Family Hubs

5.15 Key Learning

Overall learning indicates that every target was achieved; with key quantitative headlines being that 683 dads were engaged in universal settings, and 56 dads were supported 1:1.

Targets	
Reach 600 to 800 Dads in universal settings - antenatal clinics, targeted outreach (NICU and MBU, post-natal).	✓
Work with 50 to 60 Dads on a one-to-one basis. Referrals via midwives & health visitors.	✓
Deliver multi agency training once a quarter.	✓
Develop bespoke training for specific teams who may need it.	✓
Develop a professionals screening tool.	✓
To support dads borough wide with bespoke ways of working in areas of disadvantage.	✓
To support in the recruitment, training and support of volunteers.	✓

Taking part in joint visits with enhanced team for dads who aren't engaging with services.	✓
Resources printed - pull up banners, flyers and posters etc.	✓
Arrange regular walk and talks/events in Stockport.	✓
Development of peer support pathways.	✓
A good knowledge of Stockport and experience working with agencies within Stockport.	✓
Significant knowledge of best start for life and family hub policy guidance.	✓

6 Beneficiaries

6.1 Introduction

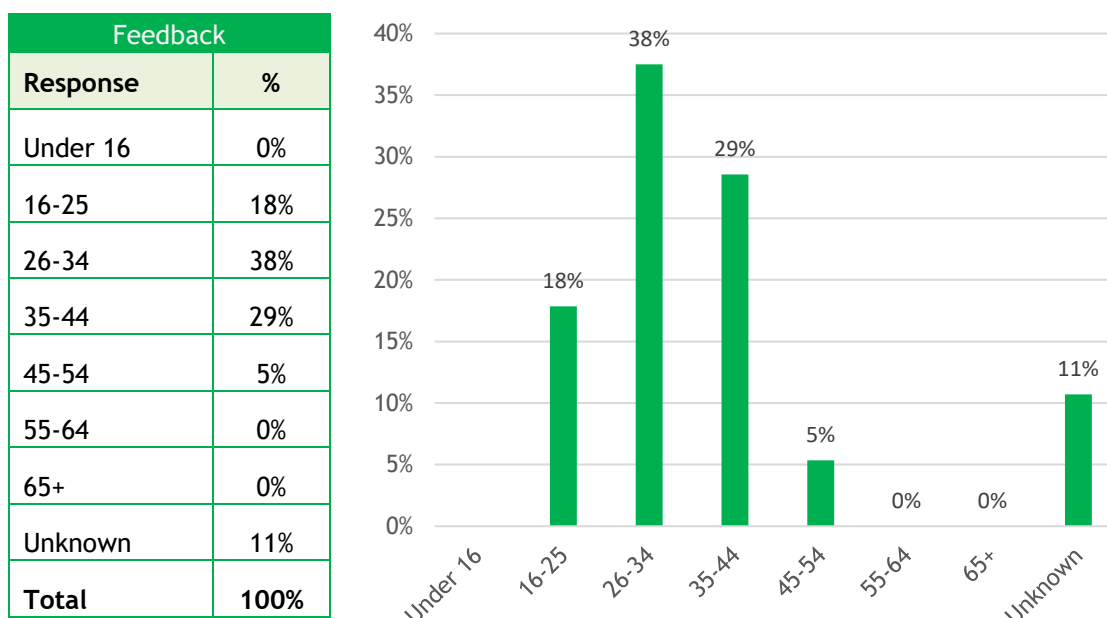
Data has been collated from initial referral information regarding:

- Gender (not included in this report, as all dads engaged are male)
- Age
- SEND
- Ethnicity

Each of these is summarised below, and it should be noted that due to internal system improvements that data collection in the project improved from quarter 3 onwards reducing categorisation of dads as “*not known*” in some demographics, such as age.

6.2 Age

Data gained indicates that the most frequently encountered age was 26-34 years old:



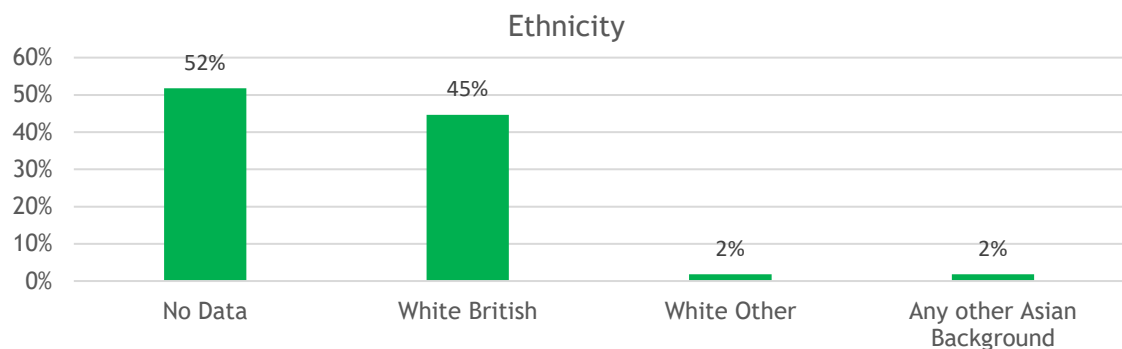
6.3 SEND

Of the 56 referrals gained, 49 were categorised as “not known”, and of the others six dads were SEND.

This demonstrates the fact that although the project team observe a high level of likely SEND, the precise level is likely under-reported.

6.4 Ethnicity

Of the 56 referrals gained, 29 were categorised as “not known” and of the others the majority (25) were recorded as “White British”.



6.5 Key Learning

Insight includes:

Learning - Beneficiaries

- The team realised early in delivery how difficult it was to collect demographic and potentially sensitive information - particularly in universal engagement - and still build trust and have a positive interaction with dads.
- An action to take forward is to include further questions in initial assessment form to reduce the level of “not known” responses, such as for SEND or ethnicity.
- In moving forwards there will be a greater focus on outcomes measures in regular reviews, for example the team have started undertaking four-weekly reviews on outcomes measures to increase the amount of data available.

7 Financial Performance

7.1 Project Funding

The project had a total budget of £48,227. This was wholly funded by Stockport Council.

7.2 Project Spend

The total project spend may be summarised below:

Project Spend (£)	
Item	Budget (£)
Salaries	36,067
Travel	960
Volunteer Expenses	1,250
Resources	2,860
Training Budget	800
Management / Overheads	6,290
TOTAL	48,227

Overall the project team were happy with the costs of delivery, and the work was delivered on budget.

The salary budget line was purposefully kept to a minimum to present good value for money, and as the team knew that Home-Start HOST has good links with local providers and can signpost dads to local offers (such as Stay and Play activities) rather than having to recruit sessional staff.

It should be noted that there was a lot more input from management into the project in the first year than was anticipated, given the importance of the project, for example during team meetings, commissioner updates, and contract reporting.

8 Lessons Learned

8.1 Insights

Project delivery has enabled much to be learned. Aside from the learning identified throughout this report, key insight included:

- **Unexpected Impact of Targeting Disadvantaged Areas:** reaching dads in disadvantaged areas provides not only direct local reach but is also a great opportunity to identify community themes, engage professionals, improve methods of engagement, encourage referrals, and also support dads (and their partners) to understand their role as a parent through Home-Start HOST's wider resources.
- **Importance of Early Relationship Building:** time spent engaging with professionals in early parts of the project translated into good referral numbers, and that referrals were more appropriate and less likely to decline over time as professionals were motivated. Furthermore, working with local professionals assisted the team reach dads from areas where Home-Start HOST struggled to traditionally engage in a referral capacity.
- **Events Provide a Proactive Alternative Contact Point:** some dads reached out to the team because they are specifically looking for events. This provided an opportunity to engage with them on walks and drop ins, which increased the likelihood of them submitting a referral, or being able to be signposted to other more appropriate local services. Either way, events were seen as a good way of increasing awareness, reputation and credibility with local dads.
- **Benefits of Taking Part in Joint Visits:** working with professionals who are seeing families in the home in a safe and positive way, can lead to better engagement with dads who aren't usually accessing services.
- **Training Increases Reach and Referral Rates:** Training was also a consistently strong way to gain contact with potential referrers to increase the service reach, particularly in the set-up phase of the project. The team's ability to offer flexibility (in terms of duration and content of training) was invaluable in maximising take-up within teams who can't easily release a lot of staff for formal training (for example midwives, NICU and health visiting teams).
- **Local Authority is Best Placed to Co-ordinate Training:** working with the Local Authority to book venues and secure attendance of their staff was an effective method of rolling out the offer, engaging with professionals, increasing buy-in, and developing communication networks that were wider than the typical clinical referrers (for example social care colleagues).
- **Benefits of Volunteer Capacity:** universal reach can be improved by utilising volunteers, for example improving engagement by utilising lived experience when speaking to dads and professionals, and also capacity for referrals can be freed-up by utilising volunteers in universal engagement. In addition, the team learned about the pros and cons of the adopted approach by engaging with volunteers and using co-design to consider practical improvements.

- Lasting Impact of Peer Support Pathways:** given the right platform and opportunity dads are able to support each other, but often reach out for support individually. Peer support networks were proven to be a good step out of referral and helped maintain wellness after 1:1 intervention. They also encouraged service users to consider volunteering for Home-Start HOST, or other organisations, which provided long-term benefits for both the individual and the host organisation.
- Importance of Brand and Messaging:** resources (such as leaflets, posters, pull up banners, and wider collateral) and a consistent identifiable brand are critical in easing the process of engaging - especially in unfamiliar locations or with dads that do not traditionally engage. The team found that at various touch points both dads and professionals recognised the logo, colours and branding. Localising them for Stockport helped to demonstrate that the project was a Home-Start led activity, that it was working closely with the local authority and NHS, and that there was a specific local offer of interest.
- Importance of Sharing Learning:** the team's commitment and passion helped successfully reach professionals, families, commissioners, service leads, and service developers. Embedding dad's peer support in a multi-agency setting allowed the team to share expertise, national research and learning, and the project's tailored approach to working with dads in the perinatal period with teams and professionals who otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to develop their own knowledge. This enabled the team to disseminate good practice and supported the development of the Family Foundations offer within the local authority.

8.2 Comparative Data

Data for delivery across Greater Manchester is summarised below, with the highest level in each category highlighted for ease of comparison:

GM Data Comparison												
Category	Bolton	Bury	Manchester	Oldham	Rochdale	Salford	Stockport	Tameside	Trafford	Wigan	Outside GM	Total
Total number of referrals worked with	75	54	63	35	16	27	93	85	45	27	5	525
Total number of new referrals	44	17	26	15	6	15	46	54	20	13	3	259
Number of individual contacts	727	561	439	133	128	189	1,136	525	448	225	29	4,540
Dads seen on universal outreach (excluding NICU)	530	146	343	674	92	103	764	717	121	158	162	81
Dads seen on NICU	25	4	11	16	12	4	9	12	15	27	7	13
Walk and Talks	5	7	8	3	2	3	16	1	4	2	-	51
number of professionals (seen in universal or meetings)	249	154	479	166	15	75	614	509	5	131	127	2,524
number of professionals (DM training)	132	-	257	-	-	53	232	192	32	102	-	1,004

This shows that Stockport has the highest level of performance in five of the eight categories (and 2nd highest in two) as the extra investment, alongside the commitment to a full-time post, enabled the team to reach and support more dads in Stockport than in other areas. This includes areas such as Bolton and Tameside where there is additional targeted support but with only a part-time post.

8.3 Future Delivery

The project team have learned much and have applied formative insight to help hone activity during delivery to maximise reach and impact. In the future, key actions will include:

- Increase capacity for referrals using volunteers in universal spaces.
- Provide a structured training offer.
- Engaging with workplaces to provide resources, training, and support for dads.
- Encouraging and capturing information about onward travel for referrals.
- Further embedding the team into existing local networks, as evidenced by the quote below:

"It would have been probably more helpful if we had created him [the Co-ordinator] a co-working space in the hubs and a more consistent presence.

We would certainly benefit from extended funding and longevity to the programme from family hubs perspective of integrated health and children's services. Feels like we are only still at the beginning of the relationship building phase."

Family Hub Network Lead

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Appendix B - Case Studies

Walk and Talk Leads to Sustained Friendship

Arranged by Stockport Coordinator, a Walk and Talk was organised where 3 referred dads were in attendance. The dads did not know each other and the only link was the work the coordinator was doing with them individually.

Walking round the park, the dads seemed to get more and more confident with each other, where at first it was general chit chat, but this turned into talking about their experiences as a dad so far and issues they were going through. This was great to see, as all 3 of them needed this type of interaction and confidence building.

After a walk round, the group went for a coffee in the café at the park. Conversations continued and bonds started to form. They ended the session with creating a WhatsApp group together and continued to talk on there every now and again, sometimes seeking advice for what they were going through.

2 of the dads in particular got along very well. They have since met up at an event in Stockport, where their families also met each other and have said they will be meeting up again in the near future all together. This is amazing as both have been craving another dad with a young baby to talk to and it also means their wives can also meet up and support each other also.

Support Enables Opportunity to Become Legal Guardian

Referral came in from Social Worker via self referral form portal on website, stating dad with 15 month old child needs help to build relationship with them and gain confidence in being a dad.

Child has been removed from mum and living with grandparents. Dad was originally told he could only have supervised access to child and could not stay at the same home. But this changed after a month or so of Coordinator working with him. He now lives with grandparents as well, sleeping on their settee, and can be alone with child for small durations.

Dad is seeking to prove himself as a good parent, so he can become legal guardian and is seeking a home for them both to live in.

Dad has ADHD and the coordinator has found that whilst talking to him, he seems to drift off in conversation and goes on tangents in topics. The coordinator has learnt to be patient with him so he can get things off his chest and then when it is the right time, he brings the conversation back to the topic of the child.

The dad gets a little stressed and animated when he is talking about services being involved, but is very happy to have Dad Matters available to him and that he has peer support with no judgement or embarrassment.

Work is continuing and is 10 weeks in the process. Dad has been very good at meeting nearly every week, rather over the phone but mainly likes it in person.

Self-Referral Leads to Improved Bonding

Referral came in as email, with the dad seeking support with attachment and bonding issues:

"I have a 3 week old and a lot of the time I feel that she cries when with me and we are not bonding. I wanted to see what there was for me on a 1-2-1 level, whether it be Teams or in person."

Response from the team was advice about our new dad workshops, social media links, passed over to coordinator and self referral form link to start the process. Once the referral came in, the coordinator rang him to find out more info, which the dad was very honest in his struggles and that he felt very low in mood, because he thought he was failing as a father. After some reassurances that he was doing ok and he will feel better soon, and coordinator met up with him a couple of days later to meet in person. They talked about the family not really sleeping and parents have been arguing more recently with the stress and anxiety levels heightened. This seemed to help the dad offload and gain confidence in what he was doing.

From there, it was hard to arrange a time to call or meet up, with the dad cancelling a couple of times and texts being ignored. But when meet ups did happen, again he was happy to share and didn't seem to hold back info when questions asked of him. His partner has had problems due to childbirth since started working with dad, which has put extra pressure on the family. The dad came on a walk and talk hosted by the Stockport Coordinator, which 2 others dads also came to. He set up a WhatsApp group with the others and have been communicating on there since. He also met up with one of those dads at an event they both coincidentally attended, and now they are planning a date when both their families can spend time together. He has mentioned his anxiety about meeting other dads, so for this confidence to do more with groups is amazing to see.

Work is still on going as he is still struggling, but signs are he is doing better with interacting and bonding with his baby, as well as making stronger social connections with other dads.

Drop-in Attendance Becomes Volunteering Opportunity

Dad came into a dad drop in session, held by Stockport Coordinator at Brinnington Family Hub on 31st July 2024. He was saying he really loves what Dad Matters was all about and that he wanted to support us by attending the drop-in session and maybe even becoming a volunteer. He first heard about us at Just 4 Dads dad and toddler group.

Whilst talking to dad about what Dad Matters is all about and finding out why he wants to volunteer, it became quite clear that there was a couple of issues that was troubling dad. He talked about how he was struggling to be a dad and working full time as well, missing out on moments with his son. Dad already seeking support from veteran's mental health service, from previously being in the military and acknowledges that he does need support in general. He filled in self-referral online form with coordinator, whilst in the drop-in session. Supporting dad for over 3 months now, it is apparent that he needs his confidence building at being a parent and has talked about how he wants to give his son a better role model in life, than he had from his father. He has stepped back at a business venture he was setting up with friends, as it took him away from his family more than he wanted to and was stressing him out. Whilst talking to the coordinator, dad has realised that he needs and wants to spend as much quality time with his son, to support the development and bonding with him.

He has said he still wants to volunteer, but agreed that he needs the support right now and he will support Dad Matters when the time is right and when he feels he has more time to commit. He attends the Walk and Talks and engages well with the other dads, which he has also said that he finds this very helpful for his on mental health, being able to talk freely about struggles of parenting.

Document Control

Home-Start HOST
Dad Matters, Evaluation
Final Report, Version 6
C-HH0282
27th February 2025

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