

“Young Fathers: Higher Education Experiences”

Research Findings and Recommendations 2019

This dissemination document describes the delivery, outcomes and recommendations of a project entitled, “Young Fathers: Higher Education Experiences”. The study is a collaborative piece of research led by Dr Carmen Clayton (Leeds Trinity University/LTU), in partnership with the Young Dads Collective/YDC North (managed by the Family and Childcare Trust) and is funded by Leeds ACTS! (2019).

The project investigates young fathers’ higher education (HE) experiences and aspirations, whilst exploring the role of local practitioners and universities themselves, in providing better access, information and support for young fathers who aspire to enter HE, or who are in HE already.

Project Aims:

In collaboration with the Young Dads Collective (YDC), this project has six main aims:

- 1) To investigate young fathers’, local practitioners’ and university professionals’ views on young fathers’ HE aspirations and experiences. Looking at the existing provision for young fathers and what additional support young fathers may need.
- 2) To provide data sharing events for young fathers and local stakeholders, in which the research findings are made available to attendees.
- 3) To share information online via various HE and young fatherhood related websites.
- 4) To help inform HE institutions with recommendations for best practice.
- 5) To create an HE information leaflet for young fathers and practitioners.
- 6) To help improve the outcomes for young fathers who are wanting to enter into HE.

Summary of key findings:

- Many young fathers have HE aspirations and often, these ambitions often come after they entered parenthood.
- Young fathers suggest that education is important for future ambitions, career goals, personal growth, self-development opportunities and improving their family's livelihoods.
- Many HE challenges are described by the young fathers, from applying to university to studying itself (e.g. balancing family time with educational priorities).
- Young fathers feel that there is a significant lack of HE information available to them, and often advice is geared towards young mothers or younger, more 'traditional' students.
- Some young fathers lack adequate professional support and advice, and this has a knock-on effect, in terms of returning to education or university progression.
- Young fathers seem to be at a higher risk of withdrawing or deferring from their university course in comparison to their peers.
- Many local practitioners feel that they have limited knowledge themselves about HE, HE choices (particularly around new HE routes), what financial help is available and/or lack referral routes to support a young man with educational aspirations.
- It is apparent that both local practitioners and relevant university representatives are keen to understand the difficulties that young fathers may face and possibilities for joint working is being discussed for future practice.

Practice Recommendations:

- Given that young fathers are more likely to be living in disadvantaged circumstances, offering advice about HE and educational support is vital. Supporting young fathers to aspire and to reach their full potential is essential.
- The support available from practitioners and universities can have a significant impact in relation to young fathers' HE journeys.
- HE advice needs to be clearer, particularly around financial support - practitioners and HE organisations can play a key role here.
- Collaborations between local practitioners and higher education establishments would be advantageous in relation to young fathers and their support needs.
- Through effective joint working, HE organisations and local practitioners can provide tailored advice and support for young fathers throughout the HE process.
- Practitioners felt that appropriate training in relation to HE information, provision and support would be beneficial for their professional roles.

Research Outcomes:

The creation of the HE information leaflet has helped support young dads with HE interests and will contribute towards the work of local practitioners who support young fathers in the region.

Through the project, university representatives and local practitioners have brokered new relationships to work in a collaborative manner to help support young fathers who are prospective or current students.

The study has offered professional participants an opportunity to reflect and improve upon their current practice through the discussions held.

Contact:

For more information regarding the research, or how to develop collaborative relationships between universities and service providers to improve outcomes for young fathers in HE, please contact: **C.clayton@leedstrinity.ac.uk**