Men Behaving Daddly

A bespoke parenting course for Dads
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Men Behaving Daddly @ BHI

BACKGROUND:

BHI is a Community Engagement Organisation in Leeds working within communities for equal access to Health and Social Care Provision. We partner with service providers within health for disadvantaged and marginalized communities, equality of service and inclusion of all. Within the last three years, BHI has developed bespoke programmes to ensure that the profile of health and wellbeing issues that disproportionately affect African Caribbean, African and Dual Heritage and other minority communities in Leeds are being raised.

BHI was approached by Uhuru Real Chance project to work in partnership to deliver a bespoke parenting course. The course was named ‘Men Behaving Daddy’. The target cohort were unemployed fathers who had been involved with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and wanted to learn parenting skills that would support them in approaching the topic of Sex and relationships (SRE) with their children.

The course aimed to empower fathers to enable them to become more aware of what information their children were receiving in regards to SRE from school, health practitioners and youth provisions.

The course content was designed to provide:

- Factual information concerning SRE
- Opportunities for discussion
- Evaluation of personal attitudes and how they affect the way we raise children
- Opportunities to speak to children about the SRE information learnt

The course was advertised at a variety of locations and several men showed an interest in signing up for the course immediately. The majority of these individuals were known to both organisations and had used the services in some capacity within the last year. In order to make the selections on suitability, the men were given one to one assessments.

Those that were selected had similar attitudes and values, which were deemed necessary to establish a group that would quickly form a relationship given that the duration of the course was 6 weeks.

The main common denominators amongst the group were:

- A desire to be part of the community cohesion that exists in Chapeltown
- A desire to become a positive male role model in their family and community
- Similar cultural backgrounds
- Similar experiences within the CJS
- Low educational attainment
The programme was flexible and short to encourage the men to complete the course e.g. duration.

**ENGAGEMENT:**

Men Behaving Daddly course was developed for men who were:

- Unemployed
- Socially inactive
- Disengaged from mainstream society
- Deemed ‘hard to reach
- Ex-offenders

The dates and times of the course were chosen strategically to ensure maximum access and sustainability. Six men between the ages of 24 years and 35 years old enrolled on the course. As an incentive to complete the course, the men were given the opportunity to guide the content of the sessions and were offered an all-expenses paid trip to Chester Zoo with their children.

The group were very sceptical and weary about the use of their personal information due to various reasons. They did not give consent for their personal details or photographs to be shared with any third party. However, they were made aware of the limitations that the course facilitators had with regards to confidentiality and safeguarding and understood these clearly.

The course was delivered weekly for 2 hours per week and light refreshments were provided. The session topics were clearly set out at the beginning to support the men in understanding the tasks they were being asked to complete.
The majority of the group had not studied or engaged in an educational course since leaving mainstream education. Below the graph indicates their current engagement level.

![Graph showing group demographics](image)

**EVALUATION:**

Weekly monitoring and evaluation was implemented to ensure that the men were benefitting from the session. This was carried out in a way that would not compromise the social position or alienate them from their peer groups within the community. All feedback was anonymous.

The men were delighted that the course content was not centred on the negativities of anti-social behaviours and crime, but rather on positive aspects of their life.

The men were all fathers but their children varied in ages and gender and they felt the course content was relevant to them all.

![Bar chart showing how many children do you have?](image)
Below are some verbatim comments of the course participants:

"I learnt that as a parent I need to be more involved in my child's life, i.e. installing respect, manners and schooling" (Father of 1 son)

"I'm now up on what they teach my daughter in these places and now I'm gonna start having these conversation with her myself" (Father of 1 daughter)

'I don't feel confident going to my child's school and requesting policies, they'll probably laugh at me and I'm not down for that' (Father of 1 daughter and 1 son)

'What are BHI doing to support man like us in getting our points heard' (Father of 3 sons and 1 daughter)

'I've been away for the last 4 years so this info has given me the heads up on what my daughter could be learning.' (Father of 2 daughters)

**OVERVIEW:**

The men deemed the course very successful and the general feedback was very positive. The men all contributed fully to the activities set and were open and honest about some of their hopes, fear and expectations of attending the course.

BHI and Uhuru Real Chance are committed to seeing the fathers use this opportunity of extra support to its full potential.

The men attended all of the sessions with the exception of one man who was required to 'sign on' at the jobcentre for 2 sessions. He was very disappointed about that and attempted to get his appointment temporarily changed but this request was denied.
EMERGING NEEDS

- **Relationship Building** – one of the dads expressed his anxiety regarding his role and place in his family. He explained that during his time in prison, his partner and daughter had established a routine that he felt he did not fit into and was unable to discipline his daughter as she did not listen to him.

- **Confidence building** - one of the men came to our office to participate in the session planning, as he wanted to embark on a career in youth work. Whilst we were planning, he offered an idea but quickly withdrew it and commented that he thought it sounded ‘dumb’. Staff reassured him that it was a good idea and could be used. The staff challenged his negative self-perception, he explained that as a child, through adolescence he had been taunted as being dumb, and he was always conscious of it.

- **Conflict Resolution** - in one of the activities a father spoke about his expectations of his daughters’ future partner, having to treat her to a very high standard. He then went on to state that in his own relationship he was very hostile to his partner if he felt she asked him too many questions or ‘got too cheeky’. He struggled to understand that this level of conflict was contradictory. His wants didn’t mirror his actions.

- **Self-manage personal emotions/address homophobia** - they men were afraid that if they themselves showed too much affection their sons would demonstrate too much affection also which they viewed as feminine qualities and they equated this as being gay.

- **Deal with early life trauma that impact on daily life** - A dad spoke about his early childhood trauma of being abandoned by his mother and being sent to live with his dad. His dad was a drug dealer and as a result, he was often in very precarious situations, which he found very unnerving. Eventually he went to live with his grandparents but the negative effect on his personality had already taken place.

  He was very aggressive and eventually he had to return to his father. Thus instead of pursuing a career in catering which was his dream and passion he ended up becoming a drug dealer himself, mirroring behaviour that he originally despised.

- **Behaviour management strategies** - having experienced severe physical abuse as a child a dad expressed his despair at finding an effective discipline technique. He said his children do not take him seriously when he speak to them firmly but that he is very reluctant to physically reprimand them because of his own experience.

- **Continuous learning to accreditation** - One of the fathers who requested to participate in the session planning expressed an interest in additional courses that would increase his studying capacity which would enable him to pursue a JNC recognised Youth Work Course.
NEEDS BASED RECOMMENDATIONS

- Counselling should be made available to the men and their families to support/address:
  - Relationship building
  - Childhood traumas and association (physical/emotional/sexual)
  - Abandonment
  - Self-harm
  - Drug dependency

- Short courses that are focussed on confidence and skill building should be available to small groups and their achievements should be celebrated with participation / continuous personal development certificates and support in building a portfolio

- Peer mentoring should be offered and encouraged, which would allow for the development of positive role models.

- Probation and prison service should work in partnership with organisations such as BHI, which would offer continuation of services to those serving prison sentences and ex-offenders on courses, which would be embedded in the rehabilitation programme(s).

IMPACT

- 5 children now have an interactive relationship with their fathers
- 1 went on to seek further education
- 1 became self employed