

# Nottingham Centre for Children, Young People and Families

## Evaluation of Small Steps Big Changes: Annual Report 2023

Report Prepared for Small Steps Big  
Changes

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) is a 10-year programme hosted by Nottingham CityCare Partnership and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund's 'A Better Start' programme. The programme operates across four wards in Nottingham - Aspley, Bulwell, Hyson Green and Arboretum, and St Ann's. It aims to improve outcomes for expectant parents and children from birth to three years old in the areas of diet and nutrition, social and emotional skills and language and communication skills. It also aims to bring about system change by 'tipping the system on its head' and empowering parents, communities, and workforces to coproduce services and achieve together. Small Steps Big Changes commissions a range of services and activities (for further details please see: [www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)) to achieve these aims. This report presents the findings from the evaluations of the Breastfeeding Incentives Scheme for teenage and young mothers, the New Fathers' Information Pack, and the Ideas Fund.

### Evaluation of the Breastfeeding Incentives Scheme

#### Introduction

The Small Steps Big Changes Breastfeeding Incentives Scheme aims to 'test and learn' the use of financial incentives as a means of improving breastfeeding rates.

The projects anticipated outcomes include:

- More children receiving breast milk at birth and for a longer duration.
- Mothers who breastfeed feeling valued for their efforts.
- Showing how important breastfeeding is for babies, mothers and society.

The one-year pilot is delivered in partnership with the Nottingham City Care Family Nurse Partnership. Family Nurses offer a home visiting service for first time young mothers and families offering support on pregnancy and parenthood including breastfeeding. The scheme offers £20 vouchers at 6 time points in the baby's first year (2 days, 10 days, 6-8 weeks, 3 months, 6 months and 1 year) to all families providing their baby any breast milk. It is available to all young mothers on the FNP caseload including but not exclusive to those in the four SSBC wards of Aspley, Bulwell, Hyson Green and Arboretum, and St. Ann's. The pilot was launched in March 2022.

## Methodology

Our research took a mainly qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview schedule. All interviewees lived within Nottingham City and had been offered incentives and breastfeeding support. Two of the interviewees lived in an SSBC ward, and two did not. We conducted four telephone interviews - all women who had been offered Breastfeeding Incentives and support from healthcare professionals, the Nottingham City Care Family Nurses.

## Findings

### *The breastfeeding experience*

Three of the interviewees had chosen to breastfeed before giving birth and showed a determination to breastfeed whatever others said. Reasons given included the health benefits of breastfeeding, and the women did their own research about the different feeding methods available for their babies, coming to their own conclusions that breastfeeding was the best. Having the confidence to breastfeed was critical as two women discussed feeling shy about breastfeeding, especially following experiences of trauma and feeding in public. Others were adamant to breastfeed, whatever comments they received. The women noticed their babies preferred breastfeeding and got a lot of comfort from the experience, which they found surprising as it was not clear to them that breastfeeding was about more than feeding. Combination feeding – mixing both breastfeeding with bottle feeding – was chosen by women who wanted others to enjoy feeding their baby. However, there were concerns about breastfeeding in that it was not always clear how much the baby was being fed, whereas this was obvious when bottle feeding. The women also experienced better nutrition with breastfeeding because they were being careful about their own diets. Those who have experienced trauma or feel shy about their bodies need particular support in both starting and continuing to breastfeed. Even with just four respondents, the breastfeeding experiences were individualised and very different.

### Support and comments

Support for and comments about breastfeeding came from two distinct categories: family; and professionals such as Family Nurses and Midwives. Comments from family tended to be negative towards breastfeeding and the women did not find they had much support. These included being told to stop breastfeeding, and stories about difficulties when breastfeeding in public. However, support from the Family Nurses proved invaluable in encouraging the



women to start and continue breastfeeding. Practical support about breastfeeding was particularly welcome, although some mentioned that difficulties are not always clarified by professionals. Good breastfeeding support is therefore crucial and professional input is required, especially where families and friends can make negative comments and jokes.

### *The Incentives*

The Incentives were viewed positively by all the women interviewed. While those who had already chosen to breastfeed did not need an incentive to start, they welcomed the scheme and spoke about how they felt it validated their decision. The Incentives were also seen as an encouragement to keep breastfeeding, and here the timing of the vouchers was viewed very positively, drawing attention to achieving weeks and months of breastfeeding. There was some uncertainty about the details of the Incentives, with one woman initially saying she'd not heard of the scheme, and another that she had already been breastfeeding for some time before she was offered any vouchers. However, the value of the vouchers was considered to be a good amount, going towards the cost of for example, formula milk, healthy food and treats. One woman in particular was so enthusiastic about breastfeeding and receiving the Incentives that she told her friends, answering any questions they might have had. She was proud to tell others about the benefits of breastfeeding and share her experiences, and it is possible that this peer influence could be utilised to help promote local breastfeeding rates.

### Conclusion

The Breastfeeding Incentives Scheme with professional support helps teenage and young parents to choose breastfeeding. While there is scope for the support to include training about trauma, provide information in various formats about the difficulties of

breastfeeding, and helping parents feel included should they choose alternative or combination infant feeding, the mothers interviewed all felt the vouchers were a validation of their decision to both start and continue breastfeeding. Consideration can be given to the negative comments young parents might receive from family, and the potential to utilise young parents in promoting breastfeeding to their peers.

## Recommendations

- Continue to offer support and Incentives to promote both the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding, including the timing of vouchers offered and monetary value, as this is greatly appreciated and gives validation to those who breastfeed;
- Provide this support be face to face wherever possible, though other methods of communication such as phone and video can be considered if necessary;
- Continue to offer resources about the benefits of breastfeeding, including online and app resources, so that there is access to detailed practical advice about breastfeeding, to minimise worry that there is something wrong should breastfeeding be a difficult experience for a new parent;
- Continue the respect and support with incentives for those who choose ‘combination feeding’;
- Provide training if necessary, so that those supporting breastfeeding are trauma informed, to help meet the needs of those whose past experiences might impact on their feeding choices due to body consciousness, shyness or anxiety;

- Ensure that breastfeeding support continues to include support for those who might be too shy to breastfeed in public as this can be a source of anxiety;
- Ensure that breastfeeding support staff are aware that comments from significant members of family and friends can have a negative impact on infant feeding choices;
- Utilise the enthusiasm of those who breastfeed for the breastfeeding support and Incentives Scheme, as peer influences are significant in promoting breastfeeding rates in the UK; and
- Increase efforts to involve those feeding their infants in decision-making processes about breastfeeding support schemes and promote their rights to be heard.

## Evaluation of the New Fathers' Information Pack

### Introduction

SSBC's 'New Fathers' Information Pack' (hereafter known as the Pack) is a resource, delivered both online and in paper form, which aims to prepare fathers for when their baby is born. The resource offers practical advice about caring for the new baby and also information about what fathers are entitled to in terms of rights and benefits. The Pack is aimed at the period before birth and shortly after birth. It does not focus beyond the first few weeks of birth, although there is information which is applicable beyond this point. The Pack also offers links to organisations that might be useful for new fathers. The resource is not built upon any pre-existing Pack and is constructed using information from NHS (National Health Service) sources and SSBC's expertise.

It is envisioned that the Pack will be distributed to fathers in order to provide them with vital information and advice about what to expect as a new father. The ultimate goal is to enhance fathers' knowledge and to assist families in preparing for their new baby.

Therefore, the evaluation of the Pack focussed upon exploring improvements in fathers' knowledge concerning their new baby. Specifically, it worked to understand the potential positive impact that the Pack has upon fathers' knowledge but to also explore general thoughts about the Pack itself including its design and implementation. The evaluation also examined the experiences and opinions of professionals responsible in distributing the Pack.

### Methodology

To conduct the evaluation, fathers who had recently had a baby were interviewed (20 participants). Additionally, focus groups were conducted (three online groups) with professionals involved in distributing the Pack, including Family Mentors, Midwives and Family Nurses (Family Nurse Partnership). The data was analysed to understand the impact the Pack had on knowledge and how the Pack was regarded.

### Findings

Fathers felt positively about the Pack in terms of its focus and design. Fathers noted that there is a need for such a Pack as they were lacking in reliable sources of information. However, it was suggested that the positivity portrayed by the pictures in the Pack, be revised as not to set unreasonable standards for new parents.

Fathers shared the Pack with friends and noted how they would return to the Pack a regular interval if they needed specific information. Overall, fathers felt they had gained knowledge

regarding preparing for birth, baby safety, feeding (although there was an uneven focus upon breastfeeding), fathers' rights, financial benefits, and bonding. Overall, the Pack improved fathers' confidence. Fathers' felt that the Pack needed to be advertised more widely and for a national roll-out to occur.

The professionals, were similarly positive about the Pack, noting its accessibility, thoughtful design, and accurate evidence-based information. The professionals felt that the fathers would gain important knowledge from the Pack and shared important experiences where fathers demonstrated new understanding about their rights. The Pack made fathers feel more included in the whole process.

There were a number of confusions regarding who the Pack was aimed at. Some were unsure whether to distribute to second-time fathers or to fathers with older babies. However, the professionals felt that the information was important to all new fathers (whether first baby or otherwise) and welcomed sharing the Pack all fathers.

## Conclusion

The New Fathers Information Pack is designed to provide important information to fathers with a new baby. The Pack was positively received by new fathers who found the information valuable and timely, as they had not received such information before. The fathers highlighted how they liked the design and found the information easy to read and understand. However, it was noted that the included pictures could be more inclusive and representative of their lives. Similarly, the professionals expressed their thoughts regarding the information contained in the Pack and also championed the use evidence-based information. They highlighted how the information in the Pack could be used for all new

fathers but called for greater clarity regarding whether the Pack is aimed at first time fathers only. Overall, the Pack was positively received and there was a call for a national roll-out.

### Recommendations

- That the title of the Pack could be revised to be more inclusive. Perhaps changing this from 'New Fathers' Information Pack' to 'Fathers of a New Baby Pack' so that all fathers are included and not just first-time fathers;
- The Pack should contain a more diverse range of images of families and babies (such as fathers/babies with disabilities);
- There needs to be some consideration about the positivity portrayed in the pictures because fathers felt that this was unrealistic it and prompted a negative response for them; and
- There should be further thought about the balance of some of the information, particularly in relation to feeding. The disparity between amounts of information may be construed as saying that bottle-feeding is to be avoided.

### Evaluation of the Ideas Fund

#### Introduction

The SSBC Ideas Fund is based on the principle of community-based commissioning and launched in 2016. The Ideas Fund was £5,000 for one year in 2016 to 2021 and up to £30,000 for three years in 2021 to 2024. The aim of Ideas Fund is to help services develop their projects, share their experiences and learning, and enable them to be sustainable beyond 2025 when SSBC funding comes to an end. The Ideas Fund encourages local innovation and engagement in the design and delivery of activities that will support children

to: eat well and be healthy; talk and communicate; and be confident, friendly and understand their emotions and behaviour (SSBC, 2021).

Four projects have been included in this evaluation: New Shoots at St Ann's Community Orchard; the BAME Dads Project by Shifting your Mindset; Berridge Nursery and Primary School's Let's Talk, Let's Be Healthy, and Let's Be Happy programmes; and Education FC's Grow Together.

The aim of this evaluation is to explore the perceived impact and benefits of the Ideas Fund and subsequent grassroots projects and sustainability by exploring:

- The difference the projects have made to parents and children from birth to three years old;
- Co-production in terms of how parents from the local community have been involved in the design, set up and/or delivery of the projects;
- Further opportunities for parents who have attended the projects;
- The extent to which the projects have integrated into local communities and developed community connections; and
- The sustainability of the projects.

### Methodology

Data was collected through interviews and focus groups. Twenty-four parents and two childminders participated in an interview or a focus group. This includes 10 participants from New Shoots; 10 from The BAME Dads Project; and six from Grow Together. Fifteen participants were female and eleven were male. Whilst parents from Berridge Nursery and

Primary School were invited to participate in an interview only one parent came forward and this was not deemed sufficient sample size for the evaluation of this project.

Seven members of staff participated in an interview. This includes two members of staff from New Shoots; one member of staff from The BAME Dads Project; three from Grow Together, and two from Berridge Nursery and Primary School.

Focus groups and interviews explored parents,' childminders and staff's experiences and views of the benefits of projects, co-production and further opportunities for parents, and community integration and connections. The staff interviews also explored the Ideas Fund application process and the sustainability of the funded projects.

## Findings

### Application process for an Ideas Fund grant

The application process for an Ideas Fund grant appeared to be a straightforward and supportive process, though it was suggested that it could be daunting for those not familiar with grant applications. The support received throughout the application process and beyond was valued by staff who took part in this evaluation. However, the provision of information about Ideas Fund events and monitoring data requirements (of projects receiving grants from the Ideas Fund) at the outset was proposed.

### Co-production of projects with local parents

Two of the projects included parents in the design and/or delivery of their projects: the BAME Dads Project and Grow Together. For the BAME Dad's Project, fathers were consulted prior to its development. They are also involved in raising awareness of the project and



encouraging fathers from BAME communities to attend the sessions. Fathers are also involved in outreach activities including a Podcast, acts of kindness in Nottingham (e.g., handing out food to people experiencing homelessness), and establishing a dads' garden, where fathers can meet in the summer, and also decide upon and hold events. Moreover, a key element of the BAME Dads Project is peer support, with fathers supporting each other. Two fathers have received training to officially deliver the project when needed and thus participate in the co-delivery of the sessions. Grow Together have a weekly Parent Led session, where parents take the lead through suggesting ideas and running aspects of the session. However there have been difficulties, with staff finding it a challenge obtaining ideas from parents. As a result, they have often had to put forward ideas themselves instead. However, one parent does deliver craft activities at each Parent Led session, which has been successful.

#### *Further opportunities for parents who have attended the projects*

There have been further opportunities for parents attending New Shoots and the BAME Dads Project. Further opportunities for parents from New Shoots have included: attending tours; activities; open days and activities at the orchard; and volunteering at the site.

In addition to delivering some of the sessions, some of the fathers attending the BAME Dads Project have gone on to attend training, to be involved in outreach activities in the community and to raise awareness about the prejudices and discrimination BAME fathers face when going to court to obtain rights to see their children.

#### *Benefits for children and parents attending the projects*

A number of benefits for children and parents attending the projects funded by the Ideas Fund were identified. These are discussed below.

New Shoots was perceived to benefit children's physical and emotional wellbeing, support their socialisation, and increase their confidence, enhance their communication and language skills, and encourage healthy eating. In addition, some parents reported that New Shoots had helped them to develop connections with other parents, reducing isolation and loneliness.

Grow Together delivered three sessions: Tiny Talk,; Sport and Movement and a Parent Led session. Tiny Talk had supported parents and babies to communicate via baby sign language, developing communication between parent and child and thus helping parents to understand their baby's needs. Tiny Talk had also supported babies' socialisation and helped to develop their confidence. Tiny Talk offered parents the opportunity to support and socialise with other parents and this had led in some cases to reducing feelings of isolation. The Sport and Movement sessions were seen to have supported children in developing their language and numeracy skills and benefited their physical fitness and fine motor skills. The Parent Led sessions encouraged healthy eating, and the craft activities supported children to be creative and express themselves and gave them a sense of achievement.

The fathers participating in the BAME Dads Project reported several benefits. Benefits included: improved emotional wellbeing as a result of peer support from other fathers and opportunities to share their experiences and difficulties; practical support and signposting which has led to financial support; peer support and advice that had resulted in contact and

a relationship with, their children, the provision of food; and stress release and therapeutic benefits from working in the dads' garden.

Berridge Nursery and Primary School ran three programmes: Let's Talk, Let's Be Healthy, and Let's Be Happy programmes. The Let's Talk programme had supported children's communication and language development. The Let's Be Healthy programme had encouraged healthy eating and exercise and it was suggested that the programme may have contributed to fewer children at the school being considered overweight or obese. The Let's Be Happy Programme had encouraged children to talk about their emotions with teachers and develop empathy for others.

#### *Integration into and connections with local communities*

Funding from the Ideas Fund had supported the projects' integration into, and connections with, local communities. The New Shoots sessions encouraged families with young children to access the orchard, integrating the orchard further into the community by widening access and participation. New Shoots was perceived by parents to have a 'community feel' due its social aspect. Additionally, further links with the local community had been developed via networking opportunities provided by SSBC.

FC are working towards building a community hub, and funding to deliver the Grow Together sessions had supported this by enabling them establish groups for families with children under three years old and thus widen their reach. The amount Education FC do for their local community was highlighted by some of the parents interviewed and seen to reflect their integration and connections with the local community.

Fathers from the BAME Dads Project carry out 'acts of kindness' in the community including giving out food and drinks. The acts of kindness have provided opportunities for networking and meeting others supporting local communities, developing community connections further. The dads' garden will be open to the community in the future and will include events, supporting further integration into the local community.

Berridge School and Nursery were already integrated into the local community. However, the programmes funded by the Ideas Fund had helped to develop relationships and connections with parents further.

### *Sustainability of the projects*

St Ann's Community Orchard have a list of funders they apply to for grants and as a result have potential options for the future funding of the New Shoots sessions. They have also appointed a funder to explore potential funding options further.

Education FC are considering applying for funding to continue to deliver the Grow Together sessions.

Funding for the BAME Dads Project was perceived to have acted as a stepping-stone to further funding as it had enabled Shifting Your Mindset to build a track record, evaluate the BAME Dads Project and make plans to expand the project further, including supported accommodation for men experiencing homelessness and the recruitment of more staff.

The Let's Talk, Lets' Be Healthy and Let's Be Happy programmes were already established prior to receiving a grant from the Ideas Fund and funding was used to invest in resources to

enhance the programmes. Consequently, the programmes are sustainable as they are delivered by staff already employed at the school.

## Conclusion

The application process was perceived to be simple and supportive but potentially daunting for these without previous experience of applying for grants. Improvements suggested were further information on what to expect from Ideas Fund events and on data monitoring requirements. Two of the projects included parents in the co-production of their project and there were further opportunities for parents at some of the projects, including training courses, volunteering opportunities, and access to other groups and activities. The projects have been beneficial for the children and parents attending them and this includes improvements in children's communication and language, healthy eating, and social and emotional wellbeing. Benefits for parents ranged from enhanced mental wellbeing, reduced isolation, and loneliness to practical support (e.g., financial support and support to see to their children). Funding from the Ideas Fund had supported the projects' integration into, and connections with, local communities through widening their reach; the delivery of outreach activities, and opportunities to develop relationships with local parents further. All the projects were planning to continue beyond the three years they have been funded for. Approaches to sustainability varied and included: hiring a fundraiser; applying for further funding; and using the Ideas Fund grant to buy resources so that the project can run beyond the three years without the requirement of further funds.

## Recommendations

- Provide information about future Ideas Fund events in advance; and

- Be clearer about the amount of monitoring data required of projects receiving grants from the Ideas Fund.

# Evaluation of the Breastfeeding Incentive Scheme

## Introduction

In 2022, NCCYPF was commissioned by SSBC to carry out an evaluation of the Breastfeeding Incentives Scheme for teenage and young mothers. The Incentives Scheme includes but is not exclusive to those in the four SSBC wards of Aspley, Bulwell, Hyson Green and Arboretum, and St. Ann's. Nottingham City Care Family Nurses promote breastfeeding with teenage and young mothers and has been running since March 2022.

## Aim of the evaluation

There have been few studies undertaken in the UK which evaluate Breastfeeding Incentives with teenage and young mothers. Contributing to this research has implications for the design of health and social policy in the promotion of breastfeeding rates.

Our research sought to understand:

- Parents' perceptions and experiences of the Breastfeeding Incentives Scheme;
- Original feeding intentions and those who influenced this/these decision/s;
- Thoughts and feelings about the Breastfeeding Incentives Scheme, e.g., timings of the vouchers, monetary value and whether the Incentives supported the breastfeeding 'journey;' and
- Any other influences on decision to breastfeed/continue to breastfeed or not.

## Methodology

### Data collection

Our research took a mainly qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview schedule. The qualitative design helped capture the lived experiences and views of those in Nottingham who had been offered Breastfeeding Incentives and to record their own words. The quantitative questions captured the demographics of the participants, their households, and their babies.

The parents interviewed were recruited by the Family Nurses mainly through word of mouth, with individual contact details being passed to the interviewer with their express permission. We then phoned to have an initial chat, and if interest in taking part was expressed, we emailed the information and consent forms, which were returned completed. Dates and times for the interview were agreed with each participant and repeat arrangements were made where necessary. All interviews were completed by phone and audio recorded, using Microsoft Teams.

In total, four interviews were undertaken, all from different families. All respondents lived within Nottingham City, with two in an SSBC ward and two outside. All identified as female and were aged either 19 or 20 years old (their babies ranged from 6 to 14 months old). All of the women interviewed described their ethnicity as mixed White and Black Caribbean. The demographic information on the four participants is provided below but some details have been omitted for the sake of anonymity.



## Data analysis

We used thematic analysis to find common themes across the interviews and look for where the data confirmed or challenged the literature available.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Nottingham Trent University Business, Law, and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee prior to commencement of the evaluation. The evaluation was also registered with the Research and Innovation Department within Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

We provided respondents with written information about the research, including a debrief sheet with contact details of local family support groups, and we gained written consent from all interviewees. All the interviews were conducted by telephone and audio recorded. All recordings were then transcribed verbatim before being analysed. We are grateful for the effort the participants made in describing their experiences including those which were emotionally challenging. A £20 shopping voucher was offered to all interviewees as a thank you for taking the time to be interviewed.

Given the low number of participants, great care has been taken to anonymise the responses and use of any quotes: the decision has been taken not to use pseudonyms but to refer to 'one woman' or 'one of the mothers' etc. This care to anonymise also includes omitting some details from the demographics and choosing not to present these as an overall table.

## Review of the literature

This review explores UK breastfeeding rates, parents' feeding decisions, experiences and perceptions of financial incentives and their impact on initiation and continuation of breastfeeding, and alternative breastfeeding interventions. Areas where literature is lacking are also highlighted.

## Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is associated with a wide range of benefits (Santoso et al, 2019; Gunderson et al., 2018; Victoria et al., 2016; Rollins et al., 2016; Amitay & Keinan-Boker, 2015; Bowatte et al, 2015; Chowdhury et al., 2015; Horta et al., 2015; Horta & Victora, 2013; Luan et al., 2013) and the benefits increase with breastfeeding duration (Department of Health, 2007). Breastfeeding also enhances bonding due to the close contact during feeding. (Moore & Anderson, 2007; Moore et al., 2012). Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months after birth by The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2003), but there are few studies about decisions to combination feed (mixed breast and bottle).

## Breastfeeding rates in the UK

Despite the benefits, breastfeeding rates in the UK are amongst the lowest in the world even with the numerous information campaigns about the benefits of breastfeeding (Srivastava et al., 2021). Financial incentives have been proposed as a method to encourage breastfeeding and improve breastfeeding initiation and continuation and have been successfully implemented in countries such as the US, France and Canada (McNamara, 1995; Saurel-Cubizolles et al., 1993; Washio et al., 2017) but previous evidence examining the effectiveness

of financial incentive programmes in increasing the prevalence of breastfeeding have been weak (Bassani et al., 2013; Moran et al., 2015), with ethical concerns raised (Becker et al., 2018).

### Breastfeeding decisions

Feeding decisions are often made during pregnancy (Condon et al., 2013). However, the initial decision to breastfeed and the decision to continue to breastfeed should be viewed as separate, given that after birth, feeding decisions are based on individual experiences (Sheenan et al, 2013). Individualised support is therefore needed to help meet feeding goals.

Feeding plans can change due to unforeseen or unpredictable circumstances (Condon et al., 2013). Johnson et al (2018) found that some changed to formula feeding because breastfeeding was difficult (e.g., not producing enough milk or unsure how much milk their baby was receiving, cracked/sore skin) and others to breastfeeding because the bottle preparation for formula was time consuming. Condon et al (2013) found that although those aged under 20 years are aware of the health benefits of breastfeeding, the most influential factor regarding discontinuing breastfeeding, was social embarrassment about feeding in public (Condon et al., 2013). Partners supporting breastfeeding felt helpless when breastfeeding became problematic and as a result would advise switching to formula feeding to reduce the demands of lack of sleep and unequal responsibility (Chang et al., 2021; Hounsome & Dowling, 2018). They also reported other reasons for switching from breastfeeding to formula feeding including weight management and returning to work.

Often family members such as partners and the infant's grandparents are extremely influential in the decision both to initiate and continue breastfeeding (Davidson & Ollerton, 2020; Negin et al., 2016). Responsive partners can improve breastfeeding outcomes: partners who are sensitive to feeding decisions promote autonomy (Davidson & Ollerton, 2020). This is supported by previous research which also found that those who had autonomy over their feeding choices were more likely to achieve their feeding goals. Negin et al (2016) found grandparents who had previously breastfed their children had a significant positive impact on breastfeeding choices (between 1.6 to 12.4 times more likely to breastfeed). Similarly, Giles et al (2010) survey of attitudes towards breastfeeding with adolescents (aged 13 to 14 years), found that, although their own mother was a significant influence in the attitudes and intentions towards breastfeeding, health professionals, family members and close friends were significant in supporting feeding decisions. Research suggests that teenagers were more likely to plan to breastfeed their children if they were breastfed as a child or had seen their siblings or other babies being breastfed (Giles et al., 2007; Giles et al., 2010; Goulet et al., 2003; Greene et al., 2003; Juliff et al., 2007). Johnson et al (2018) report a number of sources which had influenced feeding decisions, such as breastfeeding incentives, peer support, family and friends, the practicalities of breastfeeding, health professionals, and past experiences of bottle feeding, which might result in being reluctant to breastfeed their other children; others reported being influenced by family beliefs, socio-cultural norms, health and negative experiences of feeding in public spaces. However, the literature does not appear to include how feeding decisions are made when faced with conflicting opinions about breastfeeding, such as negative views from family and positive support from professionals. While Rothstein et al (2020) discuss various influences on vulnerable women in Peru, advocating the use of formula as unhelpful, and McFadden et al (2019) view formula feeding

as the antithesis of breastfeeding rather than a complement, Appleton et al (2018) view formula feeding decisions as not necessarily undermining breastfeeding promotion given that 25% of participants in their study chose to 'mix' feed (i.e. bottle and breast feeding combination).

#### Breastfeeding support from health professionals

Health professionals such as Family Nurses can be instrumental in facilitating, promoting, and supporting the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding (Simpson & Creehan, 2007). However, health professionals can strongly promote breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding, with less support for mixed feeding and formula feeding (Ahishakylie et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2021; Hoddinott et al., 2012). Fraser et al (2020) explored mothers' experiences of breastfeeding support and found breastfeeding continuation was influenced by antenatal, perinatal and, crucially, early weeks health professional support, with realistic information during the antenatal period and face-to-face support in the early weeks being particularly important. Given the disruption to in-person services due to COVID-19, Vazquez-Vazquez et al (2021) recommend phone and video contact to support breastfeeding choices. Therefore, providing breastfeeding support prior to birth, during the postnatal period and beyond can improve the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding.

#### Other breastfeeding influences

Nelson (2009) found teenagers were influenced by the experiences of others who breastfeed (e.g., peers) rather than health professionals' information. This is partly supported by previous research which found that external pressures from family and health professionals can sometimes increase initiation rates but not duration, particularly in vulnerable groups

(e.g., teenage mothers, mothers from low socioeconomic backgrounds) who are less likely to breastfeed (Greenwood & Littlejohn, 2002). Attitudes regarding breastfeeding among teenagers can also be influenced by seeing others breastfeed (Greene et al., 2003; Juliff et al., 2007; Leffler, 2000). Moreover, a review by Negin et al (2016) found overall, grandparents and partners were instrumental in influencing initiation and duration of breastfeeding. The literature does not cover in any depth the utilisation of peer advocates of breastfeeding. Given peer support is regarded as one of the most influential in the promotion of breastfeeding, this is an area that could be investigated further.

Some cultural stigmas associated with breastfeeding impacted on initiation and continuation of breastfeeding. Sihota et al (2019) explored fathers' experiences and perspectives of breastfeeding and found that some fathers stated that breasts were viewed as sexual objects that should only be seen in private. Similarly, some grandparents and partners viewed breastfeeding in public as inappropriate, especially in front of other children (Hounscome & Dowling, 2018; Mitchell-Box & Braun, 2012). These are powerful views by those most likely to influence how breastfeeding is perceived.

#### Breastfeeding and financial incentives

Financial incentives have generated positive behavioural changes. For example, smoking cessation has been encouraged with incentives (Giles et al., 2014; Mantzari et al., 2015; Thirumurthy et al., 2019). However, breastfeeding incentives should be regarded as supplementary, complementing rather than replacing professional support (Hoskins and Schmidt, 2021). Washio et al (2017), explored an incentive-based intervention to maintain breastfeeding in the US and found that incentives in addition to professional support

promoted breastfeeding, compared to professional support alone. A study by Relton et al (2018) in the UK found that incentives alongside professional support promoted breastfeeding in communities with low breastfeeding rates. Similarly, Johnson et al (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews with parents eligible for a breastfeeding incentive scheme and highlighted the importance of clear information and further support for those who could not apply through choosing to bottle feed or being unable to breastfeed.

Breastfeeding incentives can therefore provoke debate. For example, some argue that there may be a perceived responsibility on women to breastfeed, others that the decision to breastfeed is a personal choice and should therefore not be incentivised, and some consider the offer of an incentive as insulting for something they may or may not have already chosen to do (Giles et al., 2015; Whelan et al., 2014). Conversely, Johnson et al (2018) found those who viewed the incentive positively as a bonus or reward at different timepoints during breastfeeding, also felt they were provided with support for some of the challenging experiences encountered during their breastfeeding experience. Moreover, Becker et al (2018) found that higher rewards were preferred, that vouchers for local shops were less preferred and that a gift Pack was preferred to cash; although the findings should be interpreted with caution as 55% of participants in this study indicated they would breastfeed for at least six months. However, Giles et al (2015) examined opinions of a pilot breastfeeding incentive scheme in the UK and found that the breastfeeding incentive scheme was considered unfair and discriminatory in relation to those unable to breastfeed due to illness or not producing enough milk, reinforcing a perceived failure for some.

## Alternative interventions

Various other interventions have been tried to encourage the continuation of breastfeeding (Kim et al., 2018). The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) program (Brodrigg et al., 2013) found that those who received support and embarked on a 2-day intensive course, had higher rates of exclusive breastfeeding at six months compared to others who did not attend the course (Yotebieng et al., 2015). Other research has found that education can have a positive impact on exclusive breastfeeding rates at six months (Voramongkol & Phupong, 2010). Although the BFHI was successful in raising exclusive breastfeeding rates, it requires rigorous staff training and therefore has relatively low accessibility in some areas (Kim et al., 2018). Peer counselling, online support and telephone support can also increase breastfeeding rates (Scott et al., 2017). Finally, however, trauma informed support does not feature much in literature about breastfeeding decision-making processes. Sobel et al (2018) discuss the need for particular sensitivity from health care professionals both during the birth and in supporting feeding decisions for those who have experienced trauma, but this is an area requiring further study.

## Findings

### The breastfeeding experience

Three of the interviewees had chosen to breastfeed before giving birth. They showed a determination to breastfeed whatever others said. As one woman commented,

“Breastfeeding...it’s just named to being the healthiest, and I mean, not easiest, but convenient, it’s really convenient.”



Another mother also made a similar comment explaining the benefits of breastfeeding as her reasons for choosing it as a feeding method.

Respondent: "I've always wanted to breastfeed."

Interviewer: "Can I ask you why?"

Respondent: "If I'm completely honest with you, everything that I've seen about the formula, and what obviously can be in the formula and stuff like that. You know when people find plastic and glass, and all that other stuff, it just put me off. And obviously I was doing my research, and it said it's better for children to be breastfed, and the connection that you have with your children and all that other stuff. And that's what kind of put my mind as I want to breastfeed".

It is to be noted that the three women who chose to breastfeed did their own research about the different feeding methods available for their babies and came to their own conclusions that breastfeeding was the best. They mentioned online searches, using parent forums and new mum apps to inform their decisions.

For one participant the decision to breastfeed her second baby was different to that of choosing to bottle feed her first. She spoke about how she was more mature by the time she had her second baby and had more confidence. Having the confidence to breastfeed was critical to choosing a different feeding method with her second baby, and confidence was also crucial to another woman who hadn't originally chosen to breastfeed at all. This was as much about body consciousness as it was about personal confidence, and both spoke about feeling shy in breastfeeding. One of the women commented,

“[breastfeeding] it’s a weird sensation...it freaks me out a little bit, because I thought, oh no, this is my daughter, and like a private part of my body do you know what I mean, somewhere that she shouldn’t necessarily be...having my daughter be on my breast, it just, it didn’t feel right in my head. And like if I had to be out in the public and she needed feeding, I know you [can] breastfeed in public, it’s not illegal to get your boob out in public, I know that. But it’s just me, myself getting my boob out in public; I would feel totally out of the norm”.

One spoke about her mental ill-health and trauma experiences which made her very body conscious and shy when it came to breastfeeding. However, despite all her reservations, she came to decide that she wanted what was best for her baby, including breastfeeding.

For another, the anticipation of being seen to breastfeed by others was completely off putting when she had her first baby.

“Like I really did want to breastfeed, but because I was a little bit younger, I think I was just, do you know to go out, I would be a bit embarrassed to like just breastfeed in front of people. So got onto formula feeding, and then he got used to it, so I just stopped.”

This public aspect to the breastfeeding experience was further commented on by one of the women as follows:

“I think just like, do you know just having your boobs out in front of people on the street, and just out. Like say if you’re in town or something like that. Especially like, it just makes me feel, it would make me feel uncomfortable in case someone

did say something. Like because obviously there's the stories that people have said. Some people tell you like, oh you shouldn't do that in public, or you should go into the toilet and do that. And it does make you feel like a little bit scared to do it, because you just like, you don't want to have that happen really do you, while you're feeding your child?"

However, another was adamant she would breastfeed her baby whatever others might say.

"To be fair, even if I did have like negative comments for example, I wouldn't listen to it, because it's my body, it's my child, I will do what I think is best for my child."

For two of the women, their babies wanting to breastfeed was very important. One commented that it was her baby's needs and proximity to her breast that resulted in the breastfeeding starting.

"At the hospital...because she had a lot of mucus on her chest, so she wouldn't sleep. The only time she would chill out is if I was holding her, and she was on my chest. And she weren't taking the bottle...So then I thought, oh maybe if we tried breastfeeding now. And I did, and she took to it...so I had to keep doing it at that point, because she was getting food."

Similarly, another noticed that her baby took the lead on which feeding method he preferred.

"My son enjoyed it, so just let him carry on. Like I did try him with a bottle, and I did try him with a bottle with my breast milk, but he wouldn't take to it. So, the only think that I could do, is obviously give him my boob, and yeah."

Other than food, the babies got comfort from breastfeeding. One mother said of her baby,

“She wanted to breast for more things than feeding...because she wanted it for comfort in the end. So, a bit like a dummy, but she was wanting my breast. And she'd always work her way to my breast, and she'd want it all the time sort of thing, when we was out, when we was at the house, she didn't care.”

Combination feeding, where a baby has both breast- and bottle-feeding methods, was used so that others could join in with holding and feeding the baby. While one woman's original plans to bottle feed meant she mixed both breast and bottle, another's combination feeding was also a practical contingency plan.

“I still wanted other people to be able to feed him. And if I wasn't able to carry on breastfeeding, because sometimes you know just like, things happen where you can't even prevent it. You know, like things that are out of your control. So, I just thought, I want to get him used to a bottle, just in case that happens.”

One woman was choosing to wean her baby off breastfeeding and onto bottle feeding, while another was combination feeding because she was worried about the amount her baby was getting from the breast.

“I think one thing with breastfeeding as well is, not knowing if you she's getting enough... I still worry now sometimes, because like you just don't know if you're making enough, and stuff like that, so it's just... I think that's why I do give her like one or two bottles just in case she isn't, then at least I know she's having that as well.”

In addition to the benefits of breastfeeding for her baby, one mother also noticed improvements to her own nutritional intake which in turn meant a healthier lifestyle.

“It’s actually like, obviously when you’re breastfeeding, you have to be healthy, like obviously...buy like fruit and the veg, and just stuff like that... because it makes me feel a lot better, and like a lot more awake...yeah, I just feel so much better.”

The breastfeeding experiences were therefore very different and suggest that those who have experienced trauma or feel shy about their bodies need particular support in both starting and continuing to breastfeed.

### Support and Comments

The support and comments came from two main groups: family; and professionals such as Family Nurses and Midwives. Comments from family tended to be negative towards breastfeeding, and the women did not find that they had much support. One woman spoke about how her family had been discouraging about her breastfeeding her baby.

“Most of the people in my family who have had children, they’ve always bottle fed, they haven’t breastfed, so it was new to me... everyone was saying like, they haven’t done it, they don’t feel it’s right that a baby should be on the breast.”

Similarly, one mother had been attempting to stop breastfeeding her 14-month-old son because of the comments and jokes she had received from her family.

“They always make jokes with me, oh you need to get him off it [breastfeeding], you need to get him off it.”

Interviewer: “Why do they say that?”

Respondent: “Well, they don’t actually tell me like, get him off it now, but they just make jokes about it. Because they say like, oh he's going to be like five, and he's still going to be on it”.

Interviewer: “Oh my gosh.”

Respondent: “Yeah, he's really adamant, it’s hard. I've tried a couple of times to stop, but he just doesn’t want to. I don’t ever see him stopping to be honest.”

One mother commented that even though her family had engaged in breastfeeding, it was the stories about difficulties with breastfeeding in public from her family which she had found initially off putting.

“...people in my family have breastfed before, so I think that as well, because like I've heard stories of people like, when people are out, and people have said to them, oh you shouldn’t be feeding them in public where people can see you. And so, I think that's what put me off the first time.”

However, support from the Family Nurses proved invaluable in encouraging the women to start and continue breastfeeding. For one, the professional input persuaded her to breastfeed when she had originally planned to bottle feed her baby.

“I will tell you the truth, I wanted to bottle feed, because I didn’t feel comfortable with my daughter being on my breast. I had this argument with my family worker. And she said, just try it [breastfeeding] and see what you feel... my family worker

she said, well, do you think you could try it again? And I said, well I will try it again. And since then, I just kept on sort of talking myself into it, and then it came to me doing it naturally.”

For one woman, the Family Nurse and midwife were the only other adults telling her positives about breastfeeding.

“Like in my family [Nurse] she would come like, the benefit from my midwife, would tell me the benefits of it [breastfeeding], but no-one else ever really told me anything good about it.”

One mother spoke about the practical support in understanding breastfeeding. Even though she had decided to breastfeed, she needed support in making it work.

“The Family Nurse helped me understand more about it...And that Nurse also like refers you to... I think you get seen by, like a breastfeeding specialist as well. So, it tells you the ins and outs.”

Interviewer: “Were they really helpful did you find, or where they...?”

Respondent: “Yeah they’re helpful, because they teach you how to actually... it’s easy to just say like, oh I want to breastfeed, but they teach you how to actually you know, like get the perfect grip, and like...Because it’s hard for a baby to like latch.”

However, another mother thought the difficulties of breastfeeding were deliberately downplayed by some professionals, and that there should be more honesty about how hard

and uncomfortable it can be. Even though she was adamant breastfeeding was the best thing she did for her baby, she felt that she was not given essential knowledge.

“Like they just tell you obviously stuff like, oh well, it has better benefits to breastfeed and stuff like that. They don’t actually tell you...about when your nipples are cracked, and about latching, like babies can find it difficult to latch. And it does hurt sometimes, even if they are properly latched on, like it can help, do you know what I mean, and stuff like that...They definitely don’t tell you that they just want it for comfort. I never knew that I always thought that my son just wanted to be on my boob to have a feed. And I never knew, until obviously, I started doing my research as in like, why is my baby always wanting to latch on and stuff...They don’t tell you with like the struggles and stuff, that you can actually go through as a breastfeeding parent.”

It would seem that good breastfeeding support is crucial. In particular, professional input is required, especially where families and friends can make negative comments and jokes.

#### The incentives

The incentives were viewed positively by all the women interviewed. While those who had already chosen to breastfeed did not need an incentive to start, they welcomed the scheme and spoke about how they felt it validated their decision. As one woman commented,

“Yeah, it just makes me feel validated, like the fact that you’re doing something right...it’s like rewarding. So, it makes you - obviously breastfeeding can be really hard, so it makes you, it just reminds you and reassures you that you know, you’re doing something good, and you’re doing a good job.”



Another also echoed feelings of validation.

“No, I think it’s... to be honest, I think it’s more than enough...And it is a massive step to think about breastfeeding, never mind actually going forwards with it.”

It was said that the incentives felt like getting a reward, with one of the mothers commenting,

“Like you feel rewarded for rewarding your child sort of thing...like you’re getting rewarded for doing something rewarding your child.”

One woman also felt the incentives were a form of praise for doing the right thing with her baby.

“Yeah, like it felt, it’s like you’ve been rewarded for something that you’re doing, which is good, like it’s good. So, it makes me feel like I’m doing something right.”

Another spoke about how positive she felt about the incentives, even though she’d decided to breastfeed anyway.

“I was like, oh right; I didn’t even know you could get paid for breastfeeding...”

Furthermore, one of the mothers felt that the incentives were an encouragement to keep going with breastfeeding, commenting on the timing of the vouchers being given as another positive aspect.

“I just felt like people were actually you know encouraging me to keep doing what I’m doing...because she knew I didn’t want to breastfeed in the first place, but I still did it. And I feel like she was just giving me like, like praising me in a way, it

praises you for what you're doing, although you don't want to do it, you're still doing it."

The timing of the vouchers helped one of the women notice her achievements in breastfeeding, with the incentives drawing attention to her keeping going.

"It was kind of just the progress that I was making for example. I don't know how many, I think it was like one day you get it, and then three days...And for that, that was a massive thing for me, for knowing how long I'm breastfeeding for, if that makes sense...Yeah and then as soon as it hits like the six weeks mark, it's like, oh my gosh, like I'm a first time parent, this is my first time breastfeeding...So obviously when I'm talking to family members and friends and stuff like that, it's like they're really shocked that I'm at the six week mark now...It is a massive thing."

One mother also thought the timing of the vouchers helped her to keep going with the breastfeeding.

"Yeah, yeah, I think that's, they're good times [timings]. Because obviously some people would stop after a certain time, and stuff like that. I think like the spaces in between them [the vouchers] are just right."

There was some uncertainty about the details for the incentives, with one woman initially saying she'd not heard of the scheme, and another that she had already been breastfeeding for some time before she was offered any vouchers. However, the value of the vouchers was considered to be a good amount, going towards the cost of for example, formula milk and treats. One commented,

“Especially because I’m combination feeding, also with my son, because he's quite older now as well, he doesn’t rely on breastfeeding for you know, his main source of food, he just kind of has it for comfort...So yeah, he still like, likes to have his few bottles a day. So obviously getting the vouchers, it can obviously help me pay for them, the milk, because that's expensive.”

One of the mothers was so enthusiastic about breastfeeding and receiving the incentives that she told her friends and answered any questions they might have had.

“Like I have told like my friends about it and stuff like that, that's had babies, and that were thinking to breastfeed. And obviously I've let them know that like, well listen; you can get an extra £20 here and there for breastfeeding and whatnot. And obviously with my experience, I kind of spoke to other people about it...They would ask me loads of questions really, about does it, like the most obvious questions like, can you feel the connection, and how do you know if they’re full, and stuff like that.”

She was proud to tell others about the benefits of breastfeeding and share her experiences.

## Conclusion

Our findings provide clear evidence of how much the Breastfeeding Incentives Scheme was valued. While the monetary value was very much appreciated, contributing towards the cost of healthy eating, baby formula and treats, it was the validation of breastfeeding that was most significant. That the Incentives Scheme continues to run alongside and as part of

healthcare professional face-to-face breastfeeding support is crucial as the incentives were welcomed and the support input were equally welcomed. The support and incentives were especially validating for those who had experienced trauma and mental ill health, and who had initially experienced body consciousness issues with the idea of breastfeeding. These experiences have important implications for the promotion of breastfeeding in that breastfeeding support needs to be trauma informed. Those who breastfeed can choose to combination feed - complementing their breastfeeding with bottle feeds for their babies – but this is not a choice supported by much literature about infant feeding. Also, breastfeeding literature polarises breastfeeding against bottle feeding, and at the time of writing this report, a choice to combination feed has not been explored in depth. In addition, one participant was so enthusiastic that she had spoken to her peers about the incentives and the professional support available, as well as the benefits of breastfeeding. We have highlighted both the implications of trauma, combination feeding, and peer advocates as these were clearly raised by the participants. These features have implications for the development and delivery of the breastfeeding incentives scheme. We suggest a range of policy and practice recommendations, including continue to offer support and incentives to promote both the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding; trauma informed breastfeeding support; peer advocates of breastfeeding; continuing to respect other feeding choices including combination feeding.

## Recommendations

We recommend that Nottingham City Care, SSBC and others:

- Continue to offer support and incentives to promote both the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding, including the timing of vouchers offered and monetary value, as this is greatly appreciated and gives validation to those who breastfeed;
- Provide this support be face to face wherever possible, though other methods of communication such as phone and video can be considered if necessary;
- Continue to offer resources about the benefits of breastfeeding,, including online and app resources, so that there is access to detailed practical advice about breastfeeding, to minimise worry that there is something wrong should breastfeeding be a difficult experience for a new parent;
- Continue the respect and support with incentives for those who choose 'combination feeding';
- Provide training if necessary, so that those supporting breastfeeding are trauma informed, to help meet the needs of those whose past experiences might impact on their feeding choices due to body consciousness, shyness or anxiety;
- Ensure that breastfeeding support continues to include support for those who might be too shy to breastfeed in public as this can be a source of anxiety;
- Ensure that breastfeeding support staff are aware that comments from significant members of family and friends can have a negative impact on infant feeding choices;
- Utilise the enthusiasm of those who breastfeed for the breastfeeding support and incentives scheme, as peer influences are significant in promoting breastfeeding rates in the UK; and

- Increase efforts to involve those feeding their infants in decision-making processes about breastfeeding support schemes and promote their rights to be heard.

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# Evaluation of the New Fathers Information Pack

## Introduction

SSBC's 'New Fathers' Information Pack' (hereafter known as the Pack) is a resource, delivered both online and in paper form, which aims to prepare fathers for when their baby is born. It is envisioned that the Pack will be distributed to fathers in order to provide them with vital information and advice about what to expect as a new father. The resource offers practical advice about caring for the new baby and also information about what fathers are entitled to in terms of rights and benefits. The resource appears to be aimed at the period before birth and shortly after birth, however, this is not explicit as the reader is told that the guide is to help them prepare for when the baby is born. It does not focus beyond the first few weeks of birth, although there is information which is applicable beyond this point. The Pack concludes by offering links to organisations that might be useful for new fathers. The resource is not built upon any pre-existing Pack and is constructed using information from NHS (National Health Service) sources and SSBC's expertise.

## Aim of the Evaluation

This evaluation explores the Pack in relation to improvements in fathers' knowledge concerning their new baby. The main focus is to understand the potential positive impact that the Pack has upon fathers' knowledge but to also explore general thoughts about the Pack itself including its design and implementation.

As part of the data collection phase of the evaluation we have:

- Explored and analysed existing literature in this area (including similar existing Packs);
- Interviewed parents who have received and read the Pack ; and



- Undertaken focus groups with practitioners.

## Methodology

### Data collection

Fathers were recruited at point of delivery of the Pack. When new fathers were given the Pack, a letter was included asking for volunteers for this evaluation. The volunteers who were interested in taking part gave their email address/phone number to the person delivering the Pack and these details were passed on to the research team. In addition to this, advertisements were placed on SSBC's Facebook page. All fathers were given a £20 Love2Shop voucher as a thank you for taking part. Only fathers who read and spoke English could take part in the evaluation, as the Pack is currently in English only<sup>1</sup>. Twenty fathers were recruited to participate in the evaluation. The interviews were conducted through telephone call or Microsoft Teams and were recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

To understand the implementation and delivery of the Pack, staff involved with this service were invited to take part in a focus group that focused on the implementation of the Pack, its delivery, challenges, strengths, and whether they perceive that it has made a difference/improved outcomes for fathers. The staff were recruited via an email to relevant professionals including Family Mentors and Midwives, who were identified as most central to the Pack's rollout<sup>2</sup>. The email included an information sheet regarding the aims of the research, along with a consent form for each of the volunteers to complete. The volunteers who were interested in taking part, gave their email address to the research team who

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<sup>1</sup> SSBC intend to issue the Pack in seven different languages in the future.

<sup>2</sup> The research team also conducted a focus group with Family Nurse Partnerships towards the end of the evaluation period as SSBC identified their emerging role with the Pack. This data was collected after the report was finalised but will be noted in our final evaluation report.

organised the focus groups. The focus groups were conducted using Microsoft Teams and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Professionals did not receive an incentive for participation in the focus group. Two focus groups were undertaken with eight Family Mentors.

The interviews and focus groups explored any increase in knowledge as a result of the Pack, particularly with regard to preparation for early fatherhood. It is important to note that as an evaluation (and not research) the focus is upon understanding the impact of the Pack and general thoughts about the Pack. The focus is upon asking questions that reveal what the fathers think are the benefits/weaknesses of the Pack and not upon fathers' experiences of being new fathers.

#### Data analysis

Thematic analysis was undertaken to identify patterns through a process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development. A deductive approach was undertaken whereby data coding and theme development were directed by the research questions. All identifying data was anonymised and pseudonyms were used throughout.

#### Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Nottingham Trent University Business, Law, and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee prior to commencement of the evaluation. The evaluation was also registered with the Research and Innovation Department within Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

Verbal and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were assured that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to.

Participants could withdraw from the study, without giving a reason, at any time up until publication of the findings.

All data was anonymised as soon as possible after collection. Participants were assigned a unique identification number and data was stored against this number rather than against the names of the participants.

Digital audio recordings, notes, transcripts of interviews and focus groups, and questionnaire data were saved securely in a Nottingham Trent University secure and restricted folder. The consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

### Review of the literature

The literature review explores what existing research tells us about the potential impact of information packs for fathers and the aims of similar packs created for fathers. There are a small number of comparable resources that will be examined. Importantly, there will be an exploration of the efficacy of this type of delivery method for imparting knowledge and the validity of the information being shared.

### Introduction

The role of fathers during pregnancy and childbirth has changed substantially over the years, specifically in terms of involvement and support. Research surrounding fatherhood has also continued to increase internationally (Dermott, 2008; Plantin, 2007). The shift to recognising that fathers having a positive and unique contribution within the family is clearly

seen in the attitudes and practices surrounding antenatal and postnatal parenting education. Research shows how fathers are often not included in discussion of antenatal care, and there needs to be support and information in place to help them relate to their partners' pregnancy and give them the opportunity to discuss its impact (McElligott, 2001; Pollock, 2001). In general, fathers wish to be included and involved in the care of the new-born baby, and they want to experience this period of parenthood together with the mother (Fägerskiöld, 2008). The transition to parenthood is a significant life event that can prompt fears for new parents. Research highlights how some of these worries become excessive: 2.6%–39% of women and 2.4%–16.3% of men (Leach et al., 2016) experience significant levels of anxiety during the perinatal period. However, most of the research exploring anxiety has been conducted with mothers (Rowe & Fisher, 2015).

Research suggests that many fathers find themselves at home with their new-born without adequate knowledge to confidently embrace the transition to parenthood (Matthey & Barnett, 1999). Although positive encounters are emerging in research, fathers often report feeling ignored (Baldwin et al., 2021; Coles & Collins, 2009; Menzies, 2019), or patronised and unimportant (Brown & Davies, 2014; Sherriff & Hall, 2014). Moreover, research also tends to be focused on the needs of the mother rather than new fathers, leading to limited studies that address the needs of new fathers (McKellar et al., 2008).

The NICE Postnatal Care guidelines (2021) have been recently revised to be more inclusive towards fathers. Indeed, a review of international studies found that practitioners had negative or apathetic attitudes towards involving fathers in home visiting, thereby discouraging their participation (Burcher et al., 2021). Most research where new-born

babies are concerned has focused on the needs of women, with few studies addressing the

needs of fathers in the postnatal period (McKellar et al., 2008). However, the NICE guidelines now recommend that their workforce engages with new fathers on issues such as breastfeeding education and support, and in promoting fathers' emotional attachment by encouraging skin-to-skin contact, face-to-face communication and learning to respond appropriately to their baby's cues (NICE, 2021). This is important as those fathers who have insufficient information about pregnancy and childbirth are at increased risk of being distressed (Boyce et al., 2007)

### Fathers' role

Historically, men were actively barred from entering the delivery/labour suite during childbirth because this was considered the responsibility of women alone (Shia & Alabi, 2013). Moreover, fathers have generally been excluded in maternity care policies as the focus tends to be on the mother and baby (Burgess & Russel, 2004). Therefore, many maternity services are predominantly centred around the person who is giving birth (Freeman, 2006). Additionally, there have been some fathers who have experienced hospital policies that exclude them from postpartum care and do not encourage them to become involved with their baby (de Montigny & Lacharite, 2004). Fathers are now encouraged to participate in antenatal care and to become part of the process of becoming a parent (Ekelin, Crang-Svalenius, & Dykes, 2004). Draper (2003) argues that fathers do want to be involved in the childbirth experience, both during birth and beyond the labour room. Lee & Schmied (2001) suggest that fathers want to be recognised as having a unique role: "Men are not present at the birth solely to support women—they are there in their own right, as father of the child" (p. 560). Despite fathers' extended involvement in antenatal care, both parents report that fathers are often given a secondary role during childbirth

education and antenatal care (Hildingsson & Radestad, 2005; Premberg & Lundgren, 2006).

The marginalization of fathers during pregnancy, birth, and the postnatal period has been commented on extensively by the Fatherhood Institute (2008) whose overview of existing research on fatherhood concludes that high paternal involvement at all stages of the childbearing year and in the early years of parenting may be correlated with greater family stability.

Research suggests that fathers do not regularly receive information from healthcare professionals, particularly with regard to breastfeeding (Earle & Hadley, 2018; Merritt et al., 2019). New fathers are eager to support their partners with breastfeeding but are actively excluded from breastfeeding education which makes them feel helpless, and thus fathers want a more father-centric education around breastfeeding (Brown & Davies, 2014).

Moreover, research does suggest that there are better rates of breastfeeding initiation, duration, and/or exclusivity if fathers are included (AbbassDick et al., 2019; Mahesh et al., 2018). Additionally, where fathers have been included in breastfeeding initiatives, it has been identified that the mothers had a better understanding of the benefits of breastfeeding (Mahesh et al., 2018).

Fathers who engage with their child from birth and who are actively involved during pregnancy are also more engaged with their infant during the first years of life (Cabrera, et al., 2008). Research also suggests there is an enhanced relationship with the mother (Alio et al., 2013). Fathers' involvement in parenthood can benefit their own physical and mental health (Dermott, 2008; Plantin, 2007) and has been shown to have a potentially positive effect on their children's cognitive and social development and partners' health. In the

Oxford Fathers Study, there were fewer behavioural and emotional problems reported in

two-year-olds whose father had made largely positive comments about them at age three months (Butler, 2012). Other researchers report comparable results: in the Families, Children and Child Care study, it was found that three-to-six-month-old babies whose father actively engaged in playing with them performed better in cognitive tests at age two (Malmberg et al., 2007). When fathers involved in their babies' and children's development, this can also have a positive influence on their own physical and mental health (Johansson, 2012).

#### Father information through the internet

New fathers' support needs are often overlooked by natal healthcare services as it can be difficult for them to attend antenatal classes and appointments because of work commitments (Alio et al., 2011). Consequently, there have been a rise in the number of fathers who are seeking emotional and informational support online (Plantin & Daneback, 2009)

The Internet is a convenient way to source information and support. Internet-based information Packs are important for new fathers, because fathers frequently lack knowledge about parenthood but want to participate actively in parenting activities (Hudson et al., 2003). Indeed, fathers are notoriously difficult to engage via traditional research methods, such as face-to-face interviews and focus groups (Phares et al., 2005). Internet-based interventions have been designed to provide information and support to fathers to address this difficulty (Morris et al., 1999). The internet has become an important source of information and is the main resource accessed by the public to obtain health information (European Commission, 2003). Research demonstrates how father engagement with health services can be enhanced via programmes that have been tailored specifically to their needs

(Berlyn et al., 2008). Furthermore, research suggests that fathers who received practical information about pregnancy and childbirth from friends and colleagues with the same experiences as themselves would be in a better position to educate themselves (Danerek & Dykes 2008; Deave & Johnson 2008).

#### Existing information Packs for fathers

There are several other guides that are aimed at new fathers in the UK. The guides are designed to give new fathers information regarding pregnancy, childbirth, and life with a new-born baby. Below are a few examples of new fathers' Packs in the UK.

#### The New Dad's Survival Guide: 101 tips for dads, by dads<sup>3</sup>

The New Dad's Survival Guide states that it has 101 tips for new dads that have been written by new dads. The survival guide is easy to navigate with numerical tips presented throughout. There are pictures of real-life fathers with their children as the reader progresses through the guide. The survival guide starts with tips on what to expect and covers things like sleeping (or lack of) or colour of their baby's poo. The second section looks at new skills that a new father may learn such as bath times, burping and becoming a multi-tasker. Section three covers new dads bonding with their baby and offers advice on skin-to-skin contact and baby massage. The fourth section covers activities that fathers can do to keep their new-born entertained, followed by a survival kit highlighting essential information such as snacks and teething. The concluding section discusses a new baby's milestones and gives fathers information regarding a baby's firsts. The website which contains the survival guide is designed specifically for dads by dads, and it has a range of

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.daddilife.com/family/expecting/first-time-dads/>



information around family life, books, toys, and everything in between. The website also provides free audiobooks on becoming a new dad, along with a free joke book.

#### Being a New Dad: The Early Days<sup>4</sup>

Being a New Dad has information regarding what it is like to become a new dad, from looking after their new baby, to supporting their partners and where to get help, if needed.

There are also video links which demonstrate their tips for new fathers. The website where the dads' guide can be found also contains lots of information for both parents from pregnancy to life as a parent and the information is there for both parents, not just fathers.

The website aims to cover tips and information that any parent needs for the first 1000 days of their new baby's life. There are links to other services for new parents along with a help line that offers practical and emotional support in feeding their baby, as well as general enquiries. New parents can sign up for free weekly emails offering tips around pregnancy and their new baby. In addition, the website provides information on courses and workshops in different areas around the United Kingdom.

#### Becoming a New Dad | A Survival Guide for New Fathers<sup>5</sup>

The motto of the Becoming a New Dad guide is: You know that becoming a new dad will change your life, but what you may not know is how and in what ways.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nct.org.uk/life-parent/bonding-and-caring-for-your-baby/being-new-dad-early-days#:~:text=Being%20a%20new%20dad%3A%20the%20early%20days%201,Look%20after%20yourself%20...%208%20Further%20information%20>

<sup>5</sup> [www.tribeofdads.com](http://www.tribeofdads.com)

The guide gives information about what to expect when someone becomes a father for the first time. This guide provides information on the following topics:

- How to navigate through pregnancy when becoming a new dad;
- What a new dad should expect during labour for the first time;
- What to do when bringing home, a new baby when you just became a new dad;
- What changes to expect within the first months when becoming a new dad; and
- Tips for becoming a new dad.

The website also provides links to other aspects of being a father such as tips for parenting and tips for potty training. In addition, the website provides information regarding relationships, food, and health and even dad jokes. The website is a source of information for all dads that have internet access. In addition, there are resources to help user find more information that the website may be missing and there is an online forum for dads to ask question if they need any information that is not provided on their website.

#### Becoming Dad<sup>6</sup>

Becoming dad is a guide for expectant and new fathers, launched in November 2021 by the Fatherhood Institute and Mental Health Foundation. The guide is a 12-page information Pack that contains evidence-based information designed specifically for expectants and new dads to help them with their journey into becoming a dad. The guide contains lots of links on where to find more information regarding topics such as where to find other guides for new fathers. The guide tends to focus on the legal aspects of becoming a father such as

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Guide-for-New-Dads.pdf>

money and making sure new fathers have parental responsibility. There are links to support centres such as counselling and drug and alcohol help and advice. Although the guide states it is a practical guide for new fathers, it seems that it is aimed at fathers who are living apart from their babies and do not have a relationship with the baby's mother. There is only one small paragraph on breastfeeding and one page on communicating with their baby; all the other pages are not about looking after a new-born baby but rather about the rights of the father.

## Findings

### Parents' Experiences of the Pack

The first section of the findings examines new fathers' thoughts and opinions about the Pack. The section examines the fathers' thoughts of the overall Pack, including its focus and the information included, but also its design and implementation. The participants highlighted the new knowledge that they learned due to the Pack and discussed ways in which it could be improved in the future.

### *The focus of the Pack*

Participants felt that the focus of the Pack was clear in that it aimed to provide information that would help new fathers. They spoke positively about the need for such a Pack and the approach, as they felt they were lacking such information. The information they did receive before receiving the Pack was noted as being aimed at mothers.

The fathers echoed Alio et al (2011) conclusion that fathers can often be overlooked by natal healthcare services and suggested that the Pack was one way to remedy this.

“It’s a really informative, a great Pack, and I must commend the people that put it up, they did a great job trying to show and expose this kind of information for the fathers. Whereas a lot of information out there, is not as, it’s mainly for the mothers, the women. They are the ones who have a lot of information, and nobody really tries to look out for the father, to see how he can also be informed you know. So, putting this together for the father, I must say is the first I’ve ever come across” (Parent).

Participants explained that they believed the Pack was more than just information for fathers, and that it also helped mothers too. It was suggested that this was because the information, albeit written for fathers, was about having a new baby, and this was transferable to others who are involved in the care of a new baby.

“I got some information about breastfeeding...when my spouse actually read it, she says that there were a lot of things she didn’t know about it. Especially the bottle and safety, for breast milk and the formula” (Parent).

Although the Pack is focused on fathers, some of the participants suggested that it was perhaps a better approach to include all family members, particularly in the included pictures. Some of the participants argued that the pictures in the Pack were too focused on fathers and should include pictures of the wider family such as grandparents and possibly aunts and uncles.

“I mean pictures with families’... mean like senior, I mean like family members as well, like grandmas, granddads, or uncles. In a sort of like, way to show that look, you are not totally isolated, which we are unfortunately” (Parent).

In addition, the participants highlighted that some of the pictures in the Pack were not illustrative of real life. As a result, some fathers felt the Pack was not representative of fathers' experience and were not focussed on real-life experiences.

“But honestly, when I mean, if I had this book at the first time of doing the first child, I wouldn't have had a clue what is going on. All I would have seen, all this happy faces, I mean how fantastic, even the baby is smiling, goodness. And when I had the screaming child, I would have had the, I would have thought that something was absolutely wrong with me and my, I mean kids. I mean, why can't I have this feeling?” (Parent).

The participant felt that the positivity of the pictures produced negative feelings of inadequacy. There was a suggestion that perhaps the pictures used should be more representative to real-life. However, it could of course be argued that the Pack is working to help fathers feel more positive and knowledgeable and move their experiences towards the pictures in the Pack.

#### *How the Pack is used*

The participants described how they used the Pack once they had received it. Several of the participants shared the Pack with others while also keeping the Pack as a reference source when needed.

#### *Sharing and talking to other fathers*

After the participants obtained the Pack quite often, they would share this with other people such as their family or friends who were fathers or expectant fathers. The

participants shared the Pack with others because they felt the contents of the Pack were of value to others.

“I got to tell a couple of my friends; I found this information. There’s my friend who is expecting a child very soon. So, I got to also share with him, he should go through it, and he found some helpful information that he could find” (Parent).

“I actually did share with my brother, so yes; actually, I did share the Pack. I gave it to him to also have an idea of it” (Parent).

### As a reference document

The Pack was also a useful source of reference for the participants. When something happened with their new baby that was new to the participants, they used the Pack in the first instance. Although fathers can access information from a health practitioner, books, or websites (Johansson, 2012), the participants explained how the Pack was used as a valuable reference document because it had all the information that the new fathers needed to help with their new baby, and it was in a single document. The Pack was deemed more effective at finding information regarding their baby than searching on the internet.

“I’ve spent a lot of time reading at the Pack though. So far, I haven’t actually had to check Google for anything, I haven’t had to divert to anything” (Parent).

Another participant noted how having such a reference document was beneficial even if the new baby was not the first in the family.

“Yes, having a baby doesn’t mean you know it all. And it’s actually something you should actually look at from time to time, yeah. There's a lot of information there

that you might have skipped or something. So, I think it's something that I will actually look back on" (Parent).

### *Pack design*

Most of the participants liked that they had received the Pack as a PDF document. This was because it gave the participants easy access via mobile phones.

"I did prefer the pdf, because it's handy, and I can pick it up, and I can read it at any time I feel like. So whichever way the information is being able to be shared, would be perfect you know" (Parent).

Another participant noted how mobile phones had made a large document more portable and accessible.

"Well, the thing is [I have] a pdf file, it's actually very easy to access, and it actually is something you use on your day-to-day activity. Like for me, I have it on my cell phone, and I'm always with my cell phone every minute" (Parent).

Although most of the participants preferred a PDF file, some also suggested that the Pack would have worked better as a mobile phone app. The participants suggested an app on their phone would enable easier access specific sections of the Pack, due to the length of the PDF document.

"The difficulty with pdf is that I mean like...it's crawling through from one page to another page. Like so mobile device is probably more easier to have like, I mean apps ... rather than pdfs. Unless it's only few pages, that I mean like, it's a bit difficult to scroll back and forth okay, to get some certain information" (Parent).

The participants did have some criticisms of the Pack. It was felt that the Pack was rather large and could be seen as overwhelming.

“Yeah, I would say the Pack is really voluminous you know. Like I said, from what I've seen, it's 80 pages, yeah” (Parent).

Some participants felt that the Pack was difficult to read and because it was quite a lengthy document some of the participants found it quite difficult to find specific information in the Pack,

“So, it's a bit difficult to sort of like, whenever I'm in sort of, I'm in need of an information, I can get out this book. Because I mean, use it as a... I mean it can get over in flooded with information. There are quite a lot to sort of like I mean go through” (Parent).

There was one participant who did suggest that the Pack could be shortened to a more concise, summary-type document. It was suggested that the information could be shortened and displayed as a post on social media platforms, making it easier to engage with.

“Even like, I mean in a post, like Twitter post, or I mean a Facebook post, like the entire thing that, one sort of document, or one pictures, or one animation slide, with one agenda or one objective, could be more useful than having an entire booklet.... But I just personally feel that if you have anything, any poster or something you can, I mean strategically placed, which is very simple thing to do” (Parent).

#### Use of pictures



The pictures in the Pack were described as the participants as 'nice' and they found them to be appropriate for the topic that was being discussed. The participants stated that the pictures were complementary to the writing and made the Packs more enjoyable to read. The pictures were described as well placed in the and helped the participants with their understanding of the text.

“The pictures rather, they are very nice, and they are well placed, displaying every bit of what you need to look out for. Like...about bonding with the baby, they did a pictorial presentation of a father holding the child you know, skin to skin contact” (Parent).

“So, it was actually easy and fun to read. Whereas actually did enjoy the pictures, the graphics there, to write ups, just look at it, the pictures, and it helps a lot you know. Maybe take your attention away and makes it more fun to read” (Parent).

Participants noted how the graphics enhanced understandability.

“Yes, I love the design of it, every colour that we used, and everything that was being placed was actually nice. And they made it very easy for someone to actually understand” (Parent).

Additionally, participants also talked of the how seeing pictures of father and baby conveyed the overall aim of the Pack.

“The pictures you know, of consistently seeing the man and the baby, the bottle and the baby, the man, and the woman. Those were nice pictures” (Parent).

Some participants thought the Pack could be improved further by including more pictures. It was suggested that having more pictures in the Pack would enhance the information further.

“Everything is actually fine, but I feel more graphics should be added. You know the space that's there, and if more word you know, I actually feel that there is more to add, because it's actually for the best. So, we wouldn't need to maybe move to Google, just to find a couple of things” (Parent).

“Like I mean, those pictures could quite often like give mixed message for new fathers, because new fatherhoods are not actually as glorious as it looks like...I mean when some are father without much sleep, or wife having trying to get throughout life balance. And then see this...Hang on, am I the only one who's like struggling with parent...They're all looks nice and clean, all clean shaved, really sort of... I mean background is nice and clean. My background is, oh god, everything is sort of messed up...you've had sleepless nights...And on top of this, you need to feed your baby, because I mean your breast is hurting.... It's like those pictures are so happy and loving, I mean it just... but reality is a bit difficult” (Parent).

Although the participants enjoyed the pictures, there was a suggestion that they did not represent real life and could potentially make some fathers feel like they are not doing a decent job or looking after their baby because they did not look like the families in the pictures.

### Writing clarity

The writing and the language that was used throughout the Pack was highlighted as positive by the participants. The words used in the Pack were easy to understand and were written in a way that was accessible to all fathers with basic English language skills as explained by one participant,

“I found it very easy to read. The tenses, they are not very cumbersome...you can easily assimilate them, and the...simple English that could be understood by everyone, so far you just take your time to read it” (Parent).

#### *Benefits of the Pack*

##### General knowledge increase

The participants were asked what they learned when they read the Pack. The existing knowledge from the participants were lacking and they noted how they had learnt a huge amount of latest information from the Pack.

“Of course, of course I didn’t know a lot of things in this Pack before now. I didn’t know a lot of things. Say like 60-70% of things in this Pack I didn’t know about, yeah” (Parent).

Other participants were more specific about the type of knowledge gained, noting bonding and how to hold baby.

“So, coming in contact with the Fathers’ Information Pack had certainly you know, give me another level of knowledge. Give me a whole comprehensive knowledge about fatherhood, about how to behave with my kid, how to handle my kid, and how to handle issues relating to health and all of that. How to bond with my kid, so it’s just a whole lot of positive experience” (Parent).

However, after reading the information in the Pack, the participants stated how gaining current information gave them more confidence in themselves in looking after their new baby. By reading the Pack, it gave the participants a good understanding of their baby which helped taking care of the baby.

“Yes, it has actually given me much confidence, that's helped in a good way. So, it has actually improved my mentality, and I think I can actually handle the baby. She has actually left me alone, so I've actually enjoyed the whole situation” (Parent).

Some participants made a direct link between increased understanding and being able to reduce their own anxiety.

“Well, being a first-time dad, before I had the Pack, it was a bit was a bit stressful; you know. But being able to read and understanding that there are a couple of things that you can do, and that's put your baby at ease and everything. The thing is, I've actually improved a lot, and then it actually helps in the future” (Parent).

The Pack enable the participants to understand how to adapt their behaviour and respond to their baby.

“I read about the understanding and responding to change moods, which is actually true you know. Every baby comes with a different attitude and all that. You're able to understand your child and know when the child need something, and what's necessary to be done at that point” (Parent).

### Preparation for Birth

The Pack helped new fathers to prepare for the birth of their baby. This was most often noted in terms of what to buy, but also how to prepare mentally.

“When the baby comes, it has a different attitude, even if you had an idea having your first baby, there are still a lot of things you should know as a father you know. So going through the Pack again and again, would actually be of a good help”  
(Parent).

Participants highlight the important practical information contained in the Pack relating to what needs to be purchased in preparation for the birth.

“I was also able to read about what the baby needs, and what the baby doesn’t need you know. There are a lot of things you might actually be very excited to buy, and they are actually not necessary at that point. So, reading the Pack, I was able to know what’s really necessary, what to get, and what to get much later when the baby is born, or when the baby is a couple of months old, or a year old, stuff like that” (Parent).

### Financial help

The information in the Pack also helped with the participants knowledge of the financial help that was available to them. Participants explain how they learned about their rights as a new father and what parental leave and benefits, they could access. Several of the participants explained that they did not even know that they were entitled to additional benefits and would not have known about these if they had not read the Pack.

“I’ll say the information I found really helpful was financial benefits that are valuable for families with young children you see. Like the tax childcare, child benefit, universal credit, free education, and all of that. It was something I didn’t know could really exist you know” (Parent).

This was also the case for aspects such as parental leave:

“Right from the first page you know, that is talking about the parental leave, incentives for the father, and all of that. It’s something I didn’t know. I thought it was mostly for the women. They get all these benefits, but I didn’t know there was this for the father as well” (Parent).

### Safety

The participants noted how they found information in the Pack that would keep the baby safe. There was information in the Pack on emergency care for babies which the participants thought was extremely useful. There was also information regarding the safe way in which to hold a new baby and safe ways in which the baby should sleep.

“And it’s really helpful, there’s a place that talk about emergency illness, how to navigate, in case your child just shows some sign if illness and all of that. So, I’ll say the Pack, there is no favourite page for me, because every information is useful, is helpful, and it’s really great” (Parent).

Safety also included picking up the new baby.

“Picking up a child for me then was something I never knew much about. So, I know my wife is always like, oh put your hands there, put your hands there and all that.

But reading through the Pack was actually, it was actually, I was actually enlightened about a lot of things” (Parent).

Several participants noted how they had never been told about safe sleeping before reading the Pack.

“I never knew that there’s a way to put your child to sleep, and the safer sleeping position and all of that. But I was able to do all those things being able to read the Pack has actually helped” (Parent).

In addition, the health and safety of a new-born baby was included in the Pack which also included information on the dangers of smoking around new babies.

“Everybody knows smoking is not really good for the child, and you shouldn’t smoke around your child; even when you smoke you know. You have a child, not do it where he is, because it could give him a lot of complication. Because he’s a new-born, he’s just coming in you know. The air needs to be fresh and all of that. Then polluting the air with a lot of smoke is something everyone should know about you know” (Parent).

### Bonding

The participants highlighted how they learned about bonding with their baby. They felt the Pack had given them lots of information on how to bond with their new baby even while their partner was pregnant. In addition, the participants did not realise that they could communicate with their new baby before birth, and this was something they learned from the Pack.

“And understanding that bonding with your child actually starts during pregnancy period. I really did appreciate that part you know. And the importance of playing with your baby and all that” (Parent).

The participants highlighted how this communication continued after the birth.

“And then a lot about the communication part, it’s actually been fun you know, talking to your baby and watching her look into your eyes and all that. It’s actually a good feeling knowing that you could actually communicate with her, and you can really understand what they are saying” (Parent).

#### *How to improve the Pack*

The participants highlighted several ways in which the Pack could be improved. It was highlighted by one participant that they did not know that the Pack existed, and it would be beneficial if the Pack could be advertised more widely. This was because several of the participants had not heard of the new fathers’ information Pack before they received it.

Several of the participants felt that there was some information that was missing from the Pack regarding feeding of a baby. This is important because previous research has identified that fathers in the UK do not get sufficient information regarding breastfeeding from healthcare professionals (Merritt et al., 2019). The lack of information in this information Pack about feeding their babies was noted by the participants, particularly in relation to expressing and storing breastmilk.

“They just wrote a little about it...I feel should be really expanded. And one of it is, talking about the breast milk expression and all of that. For me, I would say the



information provided is not enough. It should really be expanded...having the mother, trying to take out some milk from her breast to put into a bottle...I feel there should be more information to dad, because what I got to find out was that if this milk stays...maybe some hours, five to six hours, becomes bad, and it's no good for the child consumption" (Parent).

#### *Future of the Pack*

The participants expressed their desire to enable fathers from all over the UK to receive the Pack and that it should not be restricted to Nottinghamshire. Helping other new fathers was seen as being important. This was because many of the participants who read the new fathers' information Pack had gained lots of knowledge regarding their new baby and thought that other new fathers may be lacking in knowledge too. They saw the Pack as a reliable source of information that can help new fathers.

"It should be, it will really go a long way in helping, not just in a confined area. It should go wide you know, so you could... a lot of people understand on the information and what they do not know, because the information like I said, it's not just restricted to an area" (Parent).

The participants referred to the Pack being 'withheld' from others and felt strongly about a national roll-out.

"Yes, it should be available to other places, so people could know about them. Because I think this kind of information, no need withholding it, it should be, it should spread across a whole lot of places, so that people would know. Because a lot

of people like for example, checking from my own point of view, I didn't know about this kind of information" (Parent).

#### Family Mentor thoughts on the Pack

The evaluation also accessed those who were responsible for distributing the Pack to understand their thoughts and experiences. It was hoped that this would provide greater insight into how the Pack was viewed internally and also how the Pack was making a difference at this early stage. Family Mentors took part in a two separate focus groups. As noted, Family Partnership Nurses took part in a focus group that took place after the evaluation period. This data is referred to in the final project report. Unfortunately, the Midwives involved in distribution did not attend the arranged focus group.

#### *The focus of the Pack*

One of the key benefits highlighted by the Family Mentors was that the Pack had the potential to find hard to reach fathers.

"What I found it's been really good for is those hard to reach. So, the dads that wouldn't usually possibly sit in a visit" (Family Mentor).

Importantly, the Family Mentors highlighted a discrepancy in the focus of the Pack. It was suggested that the title of the Pack inferred that it was only for first-time fathers, and this does indeed appear to be the position. However, it was argued by the Family Mentors that the Pack should be for all new fathers, not just those who have had their first baby. Some of the fathers that the Family Mentors gave the Packs to initially refused because they were already fathers and said that they did not 'need' the Pack.

“We've had a comment that there's a little bit of confusion over what is a new father. So, is it a new, a new baby or is it a first-time dad? I think there's been some feedback as from a dad saying, oh, no, I've, I've got children. I don't need it. But actually, is a new father over again, so. Is this for brand new father or is it for a new subsequent baby?” (Family Mentor).

The Family Mentors explained that the Packs were for fathers with new babies, and it would still be beneficial to them because information changes.

“You hear a lot of people go ohh, I've already got four previous children like I know everything. But you know things do change. And actually, when... and even if they had a child with the programme and then they have a new child like the children are completely different and you're deliver it all differently all the time. Don't you, like? Regardless of if they've had a child or not before? It's the same with the Pack, because there's always all the different information all the time, isn't there? So much new to learn, I suppose” (Family Mentor).

Although the Pack is aimed at new fathers, the Family Mentors were keen to share the Pack with anyone involved in the new baby's life. They argued that most of the information is universal and can be understood by anyone who is caring for a new-born baby.

“Because I think as well, I was trying to say the handbook isn't for mums, it's for everybody. You know it's free, but of grandparents, aunties, uncles for everybody that's involved in the baby's life.... I've had grandads read the book where there's not dad involved, and because I could say I've been throwing them at everybody, like

when I'm Tesco at the checkout the other week. So yeah, it's not just for - it's good for male role models as well" (Family Mentor).

### *Pack design*

The Family Mentors were asked about their thoughts and opinions around the design of the Pack. Several of the FM highlighted how the Packs were easily accessible and did not have to be read all in one go. The Packs were designed for a new father to dip into the Pack for the information they needed.

"And they like how you didn't have to read it all in one go. My dad said I had just because he says I don't...he said I don't mind like picking up a magazine. I pick up a magazine, but I won't book a book, and he felt like it was a magazine like you could just flip open up. Anyway, he didn't have to have read in any particular order if that makes sense" (Family Mentor).

The language that was used in the Pack was thought to be easily accessible for all fathers. The Family Mentors explained that because the Pack contained pictures and writing, similar to a magazine rather than a book, the Pack was easy to read for new fathers.

"The fact that it's you don't have to read it like a book. You could just flip it open and, you know, sort of land where you are. So, they like the style the like the pictures and things like that makes it an easier read. It does yourself though, doesn't it? I like to. I like pictures" (Family Mentor).

The participants felt this approach made the Pack less overwhelming.

“And it's the way it's laid out as well...when I've looked at it, it's not overwhelming...It's like straight to the point. It's very key bits and bullet points and straight to the fact if that makes sense of what they need and what information is there” (Family Mentor).

As with the fathers, the Family Mentors enjoyed the graphics and pictures used in the Pack.

“It's got lovely pictures in there. It's not just all, lots of writing. It's quite bright and vibrant. It's inviting. It's amazing to read” (Family Mentor).

Overall, the Family Mentors were pleased with the design of the Pack and felt it was appropriate for its purpose.

#### *Pack delivery*

There were discussions amongst the Family Mentors regarding the delivery of the Pack as there was some confusion regarding the age the baby needed to be for the father to receive the Pack. Overall, it was suggested that the Pack should be given out early in the antenatal care period because this would give fathers the chance to gain information before their baby was born. This was not always possible to do this, as several of the Family Mentors explained that sometimes they don't see the fathers until after the baby is born.

“But we've been told not to after a certain age, not to give it out for the older ones, but like ideally, so I've just had two brand new-born babies. So, I would give it out and I would give it antenatally” (Family Mentor).

However, the main confusion for the FM related to the cut-off age at which fathers no longer qualify for the Pack. What constitutes a new father is not well-defined.

“And I think there's some confusion about because it went out at the same time as a survey that had to be done within a certain amount of time. And then I think the survey was extended or something. And so, I'm not too sure of how far... is it 8 weeks, six weeks before this book should be given out to families. I'm not sure. What was it? Anytime. How, when, is a new form, what is class is a new father? I think it's eight weeks, but I'm not sure” (Family Mentor).

The Family Mentors tried to deliver the Pack to fathers in person and thus try and arrange family visits when they know the father will be at home. However, this was not always possible due to working hours and father availability.

“Yeah, I done them both. When I know when, it's when. I've been a couple of times and I'll say ohh. You know, when do you want the next visit? Do it when dad's here sort of thing. But if you can't, then I said can you pass this to dad? And then I've sent mom a text and said can you know; can you send that to dad?” (Family Mentor).

Alternative distribution approaches appear to have been used without the knowledge of the Family Mentors, including distributing to the general public.

“I did see a pile of those books though, and it was really random, in Hucknall town centre, I see in a pile of the books on one of the tables. I think there was some kind of like health well-being stall. And as I walk past, I was like, oh, that's the fathers book. Like, what's that doing out here? They had a pile out there that was just handing out to dads as well. So, they are getting out in places not even just in Small Steps wards” (Family Mentor).

### *Benefits of the Pack*

The Pack was a source of valuable source of information, and this was the main benefit highlighted by the Family Mentors.

### *New knowledge*

The knowledge that was learned by those that read the new fathers information Pack was invaluable. The FM highlighted several situations where the knowledge that new fathers learned through reading the Pack were beneficial to the new baby. One example provided was knowledge about skin-to-skin contact.

“And Mum was very anti breastfeeding - then she's only young and she just thought it was really highly embarrassed that she would be able to do it. And in the maternity ward. Just after she giving birth, Dad took his T-shirt off. And she said, what the bloody hell are you doing? And he's like, well, you don't wanna breastfeed. But [names] book says, you know, he says I'm just having a bit of skin to skin” (Family Mentor).

There were also practical benefits of acquiring new knowledge, particularly with relation to fathers' rights.

“He said this is my book. And he said, and I've been reading so I know all about now we're not, you know, like about Dad's rights. Yeah...He was saying that it actually like really helped them in terms of social [services] and getting them off his back off the back, if you like, because it was quoting all these things in read in the book and the fact that it was out of... Oh my gosh, he is using it” (Family Mentor).

The new knowledge can be invaluable as one Family Mentor explained how some families do not know their rights or know what financial help they are entitled to.

“And yeah, there's lots of things in there, benefits and stuff like that, which actually, that gave me quite a good talking point to talk to one of my families about. And then it came to light that actually, that family didn't realize they could claim child benefit and hadn't been for the last year and a half. So, it I liked it, it helped. Because, you know, talking to families about finances, it's quite a sensitive issue, isn't it? It's personal information. But if they're but it was quite a nice, you know, to go through it and say, ohh, making sure that you get in this, this, and this” (Family Mentor).

### Evidence-based information

The Family Mentors highlighted how the information in the Pack was evidence-based and provided current and up-to-date guidance. The Pack was framed as being reliable and trustworthy because of this.

“Men don't want to do that, so if they've got something that can just take away themselves, then yeah, that gives them and it's the up-to-date correct information they need as opposed to. Ohh yeah, one of my dads said what he likes about it is you go on Google, and you get a million different ways, but because he knows we're endorsed by the NHS and it's all the latest finding, it knows what you're reading, and it is trustworthy” (Family Mentor).

Additionally, this meant that all information was contained within the Pack, and fathers do not have to search elsewhere.



“I think as well it's like reliable information where - you know, I've done it. I'm sure everybody else has done it, where you kind of just look on Google and find any answer to absolutely anything in the world. And then the next minute, you know, you need to go to hospital, and you've got a serious illness in the next 24 hours. So, I think having that reliable source that is a bit more trusted, you know where the information's come from, you know that they know through SSBC, because obviously Family Mentors and coming to groups and things like that. So, I think it's a bit more reliable” (Family Mentor).

The Family Mentors highlighted the fact that the difficulty with providing information is ensuring that it is current, particularly in terms of contact details.

“The fact that it is up to date and the telephone numbers, there is actually an answer on the other side. Companies and things change. We were sorting out the office the other week and you find leaflets and you go on the telephone number and there is no answer anymore. And you go on search from online on their e-mail address and it's not there anymore. So, it's the fact that everything's all up to date. And I think that's a really good thing for dads” (Family Mentor).

### *Making dads feel included*

Often new fathers get ignored because the focus tends to be on the mothers and new baby rather than the fathers. New fathers do want to be included in their new-born baby's life, and they want to experience this period of parenthood (Fägerskiöld, 2008). To include the dads by providing an information Pack helps fathers to feel included.

“And actually, it's made them feel included and part of the journey that you know they're on with Mom. Because sometimes I think fathers can get lost in the process. It is all about mum. You know, generally because she's the one that's carrying the baby. So, the attention is focused a lot on mum and that's quite rightly so. But actually, dad's part of that journey as well. So, it's nice for them to be included and acknowledged” (Family Mentor).

#### *How to improve the Pack*

The Family Mentors were overwhelmingly positive about the Pack. However, it was noted that the balance between information on breastfeeding and bottle feed needed to be addressed. The Pack includes more information on breastfeeding, which gave the message that breastfeeding is the only way to feed the baby. However, as the Family Mentors stated, some mothers do not or cannot breast feed and thus this may leave them feeling inadequate.

“The thing that stands out for me, it's not a negative at all, but it's just this like 9 pages on breastfeeding and two on bottle feeding. And that's what just kind of stood out for me. So, if you've got an instance in like a family where Mum's really, really struggling with breastfeeding, she's really tired, really stressed, and the best thing to do is to put baby on that bottle because she's sought help from everywhere. She's really tried and the dad's looked in here and said it says this this and he's quite not supporting that decision, because of this so much focus on breastfeeding. In the book, he's not a negative because we all know breast is best and that, but the fact that there's 9 pages to breastfeeding and only two for formula feeding. And if her mum is struggling. I don't know, I've just not solution” (Family Mentor).

Although the Family Mentors were keen to reiterate that breast is best, the imbalance could have an impact on some families.

“But it's just if Mum's really struggling and dad's more of a kind of like, well, look, it says to do this and it says that breast is best, and you must carry on and that's not gonna be every family situation. But in some families, it might be...it's just a comment like there's a massive section on breastfeeding and a very small section on bottle feeding and whether that that could be an issue for some families. But I get why I get why it's that way round and it's not a negative. It's just an observation”  
(Family Mentor).

#### *Inclusion of SSBC groups*

Several Family Mentors also noticed that the Pack did not contain information on SSBCs groups or any information on Family Mentors. This was surprising given the Nottingham only rollout of the Pack. It was suggested that the Pack needs to include information on baby groups to highlight the support that is available in their local area. By including details of the baby groups and FM, this may encourage more fathers to bring their babies to the group and understand that the play groups are for fathers as well as mothers.

“Could there be any information...So we're trying to obviously encourage dads to come to groups and there's a bit on bonding and baby massage, and it encourages data to come to baby massage. But things like our baby play groups. And I don't think I've seen anywhere in here about encouraging dads to come to groups with mum, if possible. And welcoming them to groups” (Family Mentor).

The Family Mentors highlighted issues of accessibility and how the Pack may not be suitable for every father. This was acknowledged when one FM stated that they were working with a father that could not read and thus did not have the access to the information in the Pack.

“But one of my dads can't read. So, I know this is probably...I mean this is probably just a ridiculous amount of money. So, could it be done? You get audio books and things, and we offer things in different languages, I've got quite a few dads that can't read, actually, on my caseload, and mum can, it's a bit embarrassing to, sort of, and I can get that, I do get that, but that that's just one of those things that's not anything to do with the handbook” (Family Mentor).

## Conclusions

This evaluation has analysed the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of fathers who have recently received the Pack and from practitioners who gave the Pack to fathers. In general, both the fathers and the Family Mentors spoke positively regarding the Pack. The fathers highlighted how they engaged with the information Pack by reading the Pack as and when they needed, noting its importance as a reference document. Having a something that was specifically for fathers had a positive impact of feeling important for the father participants and it was a positive aspect in being included in their new-born baby. The Pack was well received by the fathers and because they thought the Pack was a valuable resource for new fathers, they emailed copies of the Pack to the friends and families of new or expectant fathers.

The Pack was positively discussed by the Family Mentors. They noted how it was important for fathers to be included in their new baby. Generally, in healthcare settings, fathers may

have been excluded because the focus tends to be on the mother and baby (Burgess & Russel, 2004). The Family Mentors found the Pack a useful resource to include fathers in the care of their new baby and a way for the fathers to improve their knowledge of fatherhood.

The Pack was highlighted by both fathers and FM as being easy to read and containing reliable sources of information. However, there were some concerns regarding the pictures in the Pack and a feeling that they did not portray reality. The pictures were of happy babies and happy care givers but there were no pictures of crying babies or fathers/babies with disabilities. This could potentially make the fathers reading the Pack feel inadequate because their baby did not look like the ones in the Pack. In addition, there was some confusion around who gets the Pack, whether it is new fathers or fathers of new babies. There were some fathers who already had a baby, but they found the information valuable even though they had already experienced fatherhood before. The Family Mentors were unsure of which fathers to give the Pack, to but to counteract this, they gave the Pack to any fathers that had a new baby regardless of how many children they already had.

Overall, the Pack was seen as a valuable document for fathers because it made them feel included in the caregiving of their new-born. Some fathers have stated they often feel excluded or ignored in the care of their baby while other fathers have described positive interactions of becoming a father (Baldwin et al., 2021).

## Recommendations

We recommend:

- That the title of the Pack could be revised to be more inclusive. Perhaps changing this from 'New Fathers' Information Pack' to 'Fathers of a New Baby Pack' so that all fathers are included and not just first-time fathers;
- The Pack should contain a more diverse range of images of families and babies (such as fathers/babies with disabilities);
- There needs to be some consideration about the positivity portrayed in the pictures. Fathers felt that this was unrealistic it and prompted a negative response for them; and
- There should be further thought about the balance of some of the information, particularly in relation to feeding. The disparity between amounts of information may be construed as saying that bottle-feeding is to be avoided.

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# Evaluation of the Ideas Fund

## Introduction

The Ideas Fund is based on the principle of community-based commissioning and launched in 2016 (it was initially called the SSBC Innovation Fund). The Ideas Fund was established to meet the fourth A Better Start (ABS) outcome – System Change. Its secondary intended benefits are the three A Better Start (ABS) child development outcomes: social and emotional learning, diet and nutrition, and language and communication. The Ideas fund was £5,000 for one year's funding between 2016 and 2021 and up to £30,000 for three years in 2021 to 2024.

The aim of Ideas Fund is to help services develop their grassroots projects, share their experiences and learning, and enable them to be sustainable beyond 2025 when SSBC funding comes to an end. The Ideas Fund encourages local innovation and engagement in the design and delivery of activities that will help local children to:

- Eat well and be healthy;
- Talk and communicate; and
- Be confident, friendly and understand their emotions and behaviour.

And will:

- Support families during pregnancy;
- Improve access to diverse communities; and
- Be father inclusive.

(SSBC, 2021).

Organisations applying for funding through the Ideas Fund are required to meet the following criteria:

- Activities must be geographically located within at least one of the SSBC wards, i.e., Aspley, Bulwell, Hyson Green and Arboretum, or St Ann's;
- Activities must be restricted to children and/or expectant parents' resident in a SSBC ward;
- Eligible children must be aged from 0 to 3 years old;
- Activities must contribute to at least one of the SSBC children's outcomes (i.e., eat well and be healthy; talk and communicate; and be confident, friendly and understand emotions and behaviour) or be focused on increasing the engagement of local people in the SSBC Programme;
- Activities must not duplicate current commissioned services;
- Activities must not duplicate current agreed programme activity;
- Activities must be able to incorporate an evaluation; and
- The planned approach should align to the SSBC brand and values.

(SSBC, 2021).

Four projects have been included in this evaluation: New Shoots at St Ann's Community Orchard; Shifting your Mindset's BAME Dads Project; Berridge Nursery and Primary School's Let's Talk, Let's Be Healthy, and Let's Be Happy programmes; and Education FC's Grow Together.

The BAME Dads Project was chosen for inclusion as it aims to support diverse communities and improve father inclusivity by empowering and supporting dads from black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities within the SSBC wards. The project aims to equip dads to support their children through knowledge, activities, and emotional engagement with their children from pregnancy onwards. It is a two-hour session delivered weekly at the Vine Community Centre.

New Shoots has been included as they have been funded by SSBC previously and are well established, which could offer learning opportunities in terms of sustainability and community funding. New Shoots is a child-centred outdoor space where children and parents play, learn, and have fun together through creative activities, singing and popcorn cooked around the campfire. The session runs for one hour and 30 minutes and it is delivered weekly.

Grow Together is delivered at Melbourne Park in Aspley and includes sessions that involve sensory play, toddler sign language, music, dance, and crafts (indoors and outdoors). The project aims to support children with their feelings and aspirations to achieve their developmental milestones. Sessions include a weekly one-hour Sports and Movement session, a weekly one-hour Tiny Talk session, and a weekly one-hour Parent Led session. The project has been included to ensure representation from the North of Nottingham and due to the high frequency of the sessions.

Berridge Nursery and Primary School deliver three projects to pupils aged three which are: Let's Talk, Let's Be Healthy, and Let's Be Happy. They include structured taught lessons and the use of resources. The projects run throughout the academic year and are embedded

into children's daily routines within the Nursery. Let's Talk is a daily programme supporting children in accumulating vocabulary. The Let's Be Healthy project supports children to make healthy choices by giving them opportunities in physical development and health, and self-care. Let's Be Happy concentrates on the mental well-being of the children in their Early Years classes and the impact COVID-19 has had on them.

Further information about these projects can be found on SSBC's website:

<https://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/>

### Aim of the evaluation

The aim of this evaluation is to explore the perceived impact and benefits of the Ideas Fund and subsequent projects and sustainability by exploring:

- The difference the projects have made to parents and children from birth to three years old;
- Co-production in terms of how parents from the local community have been involved in the design, set up and/or delivery of the projects;
- Further opportunities for parents who have attended the projects;
- The extent to which the projects have integrated into local communities and developed community connections; and
- The sustainability of the projects.

### Methodology

Data collection

Data was collection through interviews and focus groups. The focus groups and interviews explored parents,' childminders and staff's experiences and views of the benefits of the projects funded by the Ideas Fund, co-production and further opportunities for parents, and community integration and connections. The staff interviews also explored the Ideas Fund application process and the sustainability of the funded projects.

The parents and child minders interviewed were recruited by a member of the evaluation team who attended the sites or recruited by staff from the projects. For the former, parents were informed of the study verbally and provided with a participant information sheet that provided further details. Those interested in participating took part on site or gave their contacts details to the member of the evaluation team in order to take part via telephone at a later date. For the latter, staff informed parents of the study via an email (provided by a member of the evaluation team) which included details on the study and an information sheet. Those happy to take part provided their contact details to be passed onto the evaluation team. The focus groups held at the BAME Dads Project were organised by a member staff from the project.

Twenty-four parents and two childminders participated in an interview or a focus group. This includes 10 participants from New Shoots; 10 from The BAME Dads Project; and six from Grow Together. Fifteen participants were female and eleven were male. Whilst parents from Berridge Nursery and Primary School were invited to participate in an interview, only one parent came forward and this was not deemed a sufficient sample size for this project. Focus groups took approximately one hour and interviews between 15 and 30 minutes. As a thank you for participating, parents received a £20 high street gift card.



Interviews were also undertaken with staff involved in delivering the projects. Seven members of staff participated in an interview. Staff were recruited via an email to relevant professionals. This comprised: two members of staff from New Shoots; one member of staff from the BAME Dads Project; three from Grow Together, and two from Berridge Nursery and Primary School. Six interviews took place face-to-face on site and one via video over Microsoft Teams. Interviews took approximately one hour.

### Data analysis

Thematic analysis was undertaken to identify patterns through a process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development. A deductive approach was undertaken in which data coding and theme development are directed by the research questions. Where quotes are used, names were not used to ensure anonymity.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Nottingham Trent University Business, Law, and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee prior to commencement of the evaluation. The evaluation was also registered with the Research and Innovation Department within Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

Verbal and written informed consent were obtained from all participants (parents, childminders, and staff). Participation was voluntary and participants were assured that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to.

All data was anonymised as soon as possible after collection. Participants were assigned a unique identification number and data was stored against this number rather than against the names of the participants.

With participants' consent, audio/video recordings of interviews and focus groups was undertaken. Transcription of the interviews and focus groups was carried out by an authorised university transcriber who is fully aware of requirements of confidentiality. Data from the focus groups and interviews (e.g., video/audio and transcripts) were stored in a restricted folder on the NTU drive. Consent forms from the interviews and focus groups were stored in a restricted folder on the NTU drive or a locked filing cabinet.

## Review of the literature

### Introduction

Funding for grassroots community projects in England can be obtained through various sources including, but not limited to: the Big Lottery Fund; Comic Relief; The Arts Council; and BBC's Children in Need. This type of funding provides communities with the opportunity to improve local services and community infrastructure. It is often awarded to fund projects that might otherwise find it difficult to obtain funding from elsewhere (Local Trust, 2020) and often in deprived areas, although this is not always the case with community funded projects widely spread across the country (Hornung, 2020).

Types of projects funded vary substantially and include those related to wellbeing, community connectedness, arts and culture, sport and fitness, education and training, religion, and green spaces (e.g., allotments, gardens) (Hornung, 2020). Grants can be used to fund a one-off event (e.g., a festival, concert, celebration); to pay for equipment for

example, furniture, computers; for repairs/maintenance or the hiring of space; or longer-term project provision (Hornung, 2020; Davis et al., 2022). They can also support existing local provision; sustaining existing services (Davis et al., 2022).

Those receiving funding can range from established organisations and schools, through to smaller community groups and individuals (Hornung, 2020).

### Successful grant provision

Davis et al (2022) identify successful community grants as those that respond to community needs, balance the funding of New Ideas with supporting existing projects, and inspire interest in the community project.

Key to the successful provision of grant funding is:

- Ensuring that there is a shared purpose and vision, which helps ensure there is clarity on what community grants are and what they can be used for;
- Having an understanding of local needs, which is essential to be able to encourage grant applications and make decisions about what to fund;
- Accessible, informative, transparent and inclusive grant processes that are streamlined and fair and support those working at community and grassroots levels;
- Monitoring and capturing learning (including the collection of data) to establish the difference the projects funded are making to local communities; and
- An enthusiasm to take risks and try new things, for instance funding projects the grant makers have not funded before.

(Davis et al., 2022; Thomson & Caulier-Grice, 2007).

Thomson and Caulier-Grice (2007) point to six principles that should inform grant making:

- Accessibility (making sure all information about grants is available and the process is simple);
- Decentralisation (funders close to 'ground' who are well informed of the local area);
- Choice and competition (a range of funding sources and areas covered to meet local needs);
- Capacity (support for community projects before, during and after to support their development and ability to secure further funding);
- Appropriate funding tools (forms of funding that are suitable for different organisations, services, groups, and types of activities); and
- Accountability (funding processes should be transparent and fair, and there should be accountability to prevent poor organisation).

### Grassroots projects

Grassroots as a term has its origins in political activism; however, its meaning has expanded to include any social initiative that has emerged from civil society and is collaborative, and more specifically is planned at the community level and includes local communities in decisions (Grabs et al., 2016).

Grassroots projects are vital to local communities taking action for themselves and they develop from the knowledge and experiences of local communities (Hornung, 2020).

Grassroots projects include people from local communities who are involved in the development of projects that aim to benefit their community (Stevens & Morris, 2001).

Central to grassroots projects is giving communities the opportunity to participate in

decisions that affect them and their community (Stevens & Morris, 2001). Therefore, even if even the project comes from outside of the local community, the knowledge, needs and interest of the local community is key and should frame and lead its development (Smith et al., 2014).

Grassroot projects are not run by businesses or the government, nor do they have commercial or state interests or seek to make a profit; their focus is on meeting social needs (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). They are decentralised and small-scale and are often run by voluntary organisations, local community groups, cooperatives, and social enterprises (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Thus, they provide alternative forms of service provision in local communities.

Grassroots projects aim to address local needs through bottom-up decision making, i.e., decision making that involves people at the community level (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). They are community led and differ from the usual top-down approaches, through adopting a bottom-up approach that is led by the needs, values and interests of the local communities involved (Dana et al., 2021; Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Kelly & Caputo, 2005; Martin & Upham, 2016). The purpose is to develop bottom-up solutions that respond to a local community's needs, acting upon issues not addressed by mainstream services (Martin & Upham, 2016; Seyfang & Smith, 2007). As a result, they are often considered better for communities (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Bottom-up projects are more effective in addressing local needs, and grassroots projects have been found to be particularly effective in empowering marginalised and disadvantaged communities (Hossain, 2016; Stevens & Morris, 2001).

## Benefits of grassroots community projects

The success of grassroots projects includes their impact, i.e., intended outcomes/contribution to the community; empowerment of local communities; and their sustainability and ability scale up.

The main benefit of grassroots projects is that they help to meet the needs of local communities. The provision of community grants gives local communities the opportunity to identify local needs and respond to them with appropriate services (Local Trust, 2020). They also provide the means for communities to implement New Ideas and in particular those that meet changing local needs and interests (Davis et al., 2022).

Community funded projects are also a vehicle for community connectivity and cohesion due to their ability to develop social links with members of the local community, and ability to help foster a sense of community through communities working together (Kirwan et al., 2013; Rogers et al., 2008).

Another benefit of community funded projects is their empowerment of local communities in terms of their ability to give local communities control over how money is spent and what services are provided (Feola & Nunes, 2014; Davis et al., 2022; Thomson & Caulier-Grice, 2007).

Community funded projects are also important to the infrastructure and resilience of communities (Hornung, 2020). They support community regeneration and the development of social structures; and build capacity amongst communities through generating local job opportunities and developing the skills and confidence of those involved (Kneafsey et al., 2016; Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Kirwan et al., 2013).

Community grants have been shown to encourage local community organisations to successfully apply for larger grants to continue beyond local funding and to sustain their project or to branch out and set up a new service or activity (Davis et al., 2022; Local Trust, 2020). Community grants therefore support the sustainability of projects by acting as a 'stepping-stone to further funding' (Local Trust, 2020).

### Co-production of grassroots community projects

Co-production is an approach which citizens are involved in and contribute to the production of services (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2016.; Brandsen, 2018; Realpe & Wallace, 2010; Boyle & Harris, 2009). It refers to when members of the public are included in deciding on, designing and/or developing their own services and was developed out of the realisation that services are likely to be more effective and of better quality if they include service users in their production (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013; Realpe & Wallace, 2010; Boyle & Harris, 2009). Co-production requires a sharing of power, information and decisions with service users and challenges the regular relationship between service users and professionals (Realpe & Wallace, 2010; Boyle & Harris, 2009). It is based on the principle of equal partnership and built on the premise that local communities and service users are experts in their own circumstances and should be involved in decisions that concern them and be active citizens (for discussion see Realpe & Wallace, 2010). Boyle and Harris (2009) argue that "the central idea in co-production is that people who use services are hidden resources, not drains on the system" and suggest that by ignoring this, services are less efficient (p. 11).

Including communities and service users in the co-production of services contributes to ensuring they meet the needs of communities, in terms of what services are required, for

whom, where and with what desired outcomes (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013). There are many benefits to involving citizens in decisions around services. These include:

- Their insider knowledge - they might possess knowledge that professionals do not have;
- Ideas - they may have innovative ideas about approaches to services and outcomes;
- Resources - they may have time, skills, and other assets they can contribute; and
- Legitimacy - they may have a greater ability to identify and influence their peers

(Loeffler & Bovaird, 2016; Realpe & Wallace, 2010).

Co-production can lead to cost savings, better services, and further opportunities for citizens to participate (Verschuere et al., 2012). Thus, it is an important aspect of enhancing community services (Verschuere et al., 2012).

Co-production can include co-commissioning, co-design, and co-delivery. Decisions around commissioning have traditionally been top-down with decisions being made by politicians and managers. However, these days communities and service users are often involved in decisions about what services to commission due to the belief that they are best placed to know what their own communities need (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013). Co-commissioning helps to ensure that services funded are those relevant to communities and focus on the outcomes they want, meeting their needs, instead of services that the public sector are accustomed providing (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013). Furthermore, co-commissioning stimulates New Ideas in terms of what services might be better suited to communities (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013).



Co-design is based on the premise that members of local communities know what services are best for their community and how they should be designed and delivered in order to meet local needs (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2013). It involves including local communities in the design of services through listening to and acting on their views and experiences (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013; Voorberga et al., 2015).

Co-delivery of services involves members of the community delivering services with professionals (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013). The community members bring their lived experiences to the service to support its delivery (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013).

However, there are challenges to co-production. Unequal power relations can be an issue, with previous literature finding that 'elite actors,' i.e., staff from organisations, academics etc. have more time and resources, knowledge and skills, and often initiate and decide on the scope for participation from citizens. This puts them in an advantageous position as they hold more power and have a greater say in the decision-making process (Turnhout et al., 2020). Power imbalances can have consequences for grassroots community projects as it means they are less likely to meet the needs of their services and/or local communities and thus intended outcomes (Turnhout et al., 2020). Another issue is which members of the community are involved in co-production of local services. There is some evidence that individuals who are more educated, wealthy, and not from minority groups are often more likely to participate in co-production, meaning that those who are most likely in need of such services are often not included in their production (Verschuere et al., 2012). Similarly, Turnhout et al (2020) argues that those who already have established relationships with organisations are often more likely to be invited to participate in the co-production of services than those who do not. Thus, there must be measures in place to ensure that those

who participate in co-production are not only those who are more “able, articulate and socially advantaged” (Boyle & Harris, 2009, p. 17). Another issue is accountability. Where citizens are involved in co-producing services, who do they hold accountable if the service is not a success (Verschuere et al., 2012)?

### Challenges for grassroots community projects

Grassroot projects face a range of challenges including financial, developing links with communities, and learning (Feola & Nunes, 2014). Grassroots projects can struggle to develop links with local communities, and this has been shown to be particularly difficult where the grassroots project does not reflect the diversity of the local community (Seyfang & Smith, 2007).

Previous research has found that short term projects rarely evaluate or document their project for the purpose of learning (Seyfang & Smith, 2007), resulting in missed learning and a failure to identify problems (Dana et al., 2021). Furthermore, projects that have failed are rarely evaluated and studied in order to develop learning (Dana et al., 2021).

Funding can be a big challenge for grassroots community projects. They obtain funding through donations, charging for their services and selling goods, and through the receipt of funding (Hornung, 2020). However, grassroot projects often struggle to secure funding and have to rely on short-term low-level funding (e.g., grants, lotteries, donations, local authorities, sponsors and fundraiser events); and experience difficulties obtaining long-term funding and sustaining their projects, due to the competitiveness of grant funding and funding cuts (Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Middlemiss & Parrish, 2010; Local Trust, 2020; Thomson & Caulier-Grice, 2007). In addition to competitiveness, there is also evidence to

suggest that those more familiar with funding bids are more likely to apply and be successful than those who are not, raising concerns about reach (Local Trust, 2020). Previous research has found that it is common for established institutions and organisations (e.g., schools, scout organisations) to be in receipt of small grant funding and whilst this is unsurprising due to their record of good work and strong links with the local community, they have a greater pool of funding to work with than less established organisations or individuals (Local Trust, 2020). This raises questions about access to and equity of funding (Local Trust, 2020). Concerns have also been raised about smaller grants being used in place of more long-term funding streams, which brings into question the ability of community projects to sustain themselves in the future (Local Trust, 2020).

## Findings

### Application process for an Ideas Fund grant

The process for applying for an Ideas Fund grant appeared to be robust, simple, and supportive. Furthermore, it was noted by one interviewee that there are opportunities to provide clarification upon submission of the application form, for example where further information is required in order to decide on whether to award a grant.

“We obviously wrote the application, that was fairly easy to do... I think the process is straightforward; we’ve been supported on that” (Staff).

“It’s very thorough and robust you know, because they have to make sure they’re giving people... When you get that funding, you know yes, you've done a good job in getting that funding, it’s very robust. However, they do support you, in areas where you’re lacking, they will ask you questions. If you didn’t describe it properly, they

will ask you, what is it you mean when you say this, what is it you mean when you say that? So, they give you an opportunity to think through, which makes it better” (Staff).

One interviewee suggested that the application process could be daunting for individuals inexperienced in applying for grants. However, they noted that support is available throughout the application process including workshops, reminders, and a key contact whom applicants can get in touch with if they require further information and guidance.

“I think you have to be quite experienced to actually do it. I mean I've been in education for a long time, but you know, I think I think back that it was sort of, if I was 15-20 years younger, it might have been quite daunting. But you've always got someone there to get in touch with. They do a day first of all about doing the application forms you know, and your ideas, and the monitoring. So, you do have someone linked to you... If you don't understand about things, you can always contact them, and they'll remind you of deadlines and things like that” (Staff).

Overall, the support provided by SSBC was considered very good. Support was provided during the application process and beyond, i.e., throughout the delivery of the projects. The interviewees spoke of how they received support, encouragement and ideas for their services and felt support throughout.

“So, they're very, very supportive, the support they give you throughout. So, I've got [name of staff at SSBC removed] who has just been like, she's amazing, she's very proactive you know, she's always there like to help me, to say, 'oh why don't you do

this?’ You know, like the voice of reason... And you know, without having to worry, she has been there to help me do the project, like the logical side” (Staff).

“They’ve had the support days that I’ve been to, that have been beneficial, and we’ve taken ideas from. So as a whole, it’s been a good experience” (Staff).

The amount of data required for monitoring purposes was more than one interviewee expected. It appeared that it may have been helpful if data monitoring requirements were clearer at the start so that time required to undertake data collection could be planned into the Ideas Fund application. However, it was apparent that there was some flexibility with regards to monitoring data, with one interviewee reflecting on how they were able to make amendments to the data set required.

“I think, it’s interesting how much data they want actually, yes. Because it’s a lot more detailed... The allocation of time required to do it, is a lot. I think if we were looking on things again, we would possibly put more, perhaps need more time for data collection” (Staff).

“We’ve been able to make some adjustments that fit our needs around the data... Which has been helpful” (Staff).

One interviewee would have liked more information on what to expect at the initial Ideas Fund meeting. Another interviewee would have liked further information on the number of networking events so that time could be factored in to attend these events.

“When we went along to that initial meeting, probably wished I knew a little bit more about what to expect” (Staff).

“There's lots of networking meetings around St Ann's as well, that would be, it would be great to be able to attend, that we actually haven't yeah, possibly didn't allocate time to that" (Staff).

### Co-production with parents

Two of the projects included in this evaluation have included parents in the design and/or delivery of their projects: the BAME Dads Project and Grow Together.

#### BAME Dads Project

Consultations were carried out with fathers from BAME communities prior to developing the BAME Dads Project. During these discussions it was discovered that there is very little support available to fathers from BAME communities in Nottingham. This finding was one of the reasons the project was established.

“They'll be talking, they'll be like, oh it's a good thing that you have this, but there is nothing out here for us men, you know, better have things like that. So, they kept on saying these things...but at that point, it didn't click to me. I would have conversations, I'd be like, 'oh there's nothing'. But then as I was progressing and praying, and my own experiences, and all the dynamics that were around me, it all came to a full circle where I was like, right we have a gap” (Staff).

Fathers have continued to be involved in the development and delivery of the BAME Dads Project. The fathers attending the groups are encouraged to raise awareness of the project and they lead on engagement activities. They actively raise awareness of the group and

encourage fathers from BAME communities to attend, through word of mouth and via local television and radio shows, and their own podcast.

“The dads are involved in the outreach, community, outreach, involved in running and delivering the activities or events. They coordinating things, they’re hands on. They’re involved in doing the groundwork of getting other men to come [to the BAME Dads Project]. The engagement activities, they lead on that” (Staff).

“We’ve been shouting at all these radios we’ve been on, Notts TV’s just gone. Radio Nottingham, podcast. So, the Radio Nottingham’s more for literally about the dad’s group [BAME Dads Project], and the dads’ garden” (Parent).

“I went on Nott’s TV, when we were on Nott’s TV that time. I was talking about my experiences as a dad and what we [BAME Dads Project] was trying to do” (Parent).

In addition to raising awareness, the fathers attending the BAME Dads Project also get involved in outreach activities. Outreach activities include a podcast, ‘acts of kindness,’ a WhatsApp group where fathers can chat and provide ongoing support to each other and sourcing an outdoor space where fathers can meet in the summer.

The podcast is something that can be accessed by anyone (as long as they have access to a mobile device/tablet and the internet) and is aimed at spreading positive messages and supporting men from BAME communities around the world.

“The podcast is just basically, to just get, to encourage anybody out there. Because the podcast is worldwide basically, it’s national, international. But it’s just spreading the positivity” (Parent).

The outdoor space was a neglected community garden which the dads have transformed into a place where they can meet to chat and share food. They are also planning to hold events in the garden, for example barbecues and Easter hunts and dads attending the groups have been encouraged to put forward ideas.

“I say to him [father from the BAME Dads project], I was just in prayer, and I was just thinking, we need something you know, for the dads, and all of that, an outdoor place... He's like, ‘yes I do, I know of a garden that has been abandoned’... We're growing things. It's growing things, it's gardening for flowers. We're going to put a bench for wellbeing. We've got... yeah, we do fires around it, when the men are just sitting with marshmallows and having food after a long day” (Staff).

“We've got like, it's a part of the community garden... We call it the dads' garden. And you know the later end of this summer; we were just going there every week, meeting there. And as well as speaking [to each other], we was getting things done in the garden. And we really transformed it you know... So, we was getting all the dads to come across with ideas what we could do at the garden or whatever. Some people said a barbecue, or like an Easter hunt, or you know, like little things through the year” (Parent).

The ‘acts of kindness’ involve the men from the BAME Dads Project going out into the community and carrying out acts of kindness, such as handing out food to those in need.

“So basically, after work, went there, and just was delivering food all round Nottingham. And I didn't think much of it at the first; I didn't think it would be you know, I just thought it was just delivering food, so what. But it's an experience I'll



never forget. Because there were moments in there when you know, where people who were struggling, just couldn't believe that we were giving food away" (Parent).

In addition to the above, a key element of the BAME Dads Project is peer support with those attending the group supporting each other. They are also actively engaged in identifying other sources of support and professionals that could help and aid those attending the programme.

"The idea is, we all help each other. So, I think we are all kind of facilitators in a way or another. Like [name of participant removed] was saying, some are more involved than others. But really and truly, everybody gets involved, and we're all about supporting" (Parent).

"I've even got other people that want to come in and offer more services and whatever" (Parent).

It was also apparent that the skills of those attending the BAME Dads Project were utilised, with one attendee reflecting on how he was approached to support the podcast due to his expertise in this area.

"They talk to me because I'm a little bit like, about streaming and everything. So, it's like, it's looking into the people who have skills as well, in the sector, in terms of trying to get them to see if they can help them in any way as well. No problems with, I was more than happy to help" (Parent).

### Grow Together

The initial concept of the Parent Led session was that parents would put forward ideas for activities to do during the session. However, there have been difficulties in terms of putting this into practice. Getting ideas from parents has been a challenge and as a result the employed staff have often led on the activities instead, choosing what activities to do during these sessions. However, more recently one of the parents has taken a lead role, by running craft activities every week.

“It was ideas from the parents. So, one week they may want to go out into the park, and you know, pick up leaves for us to dry out, and the week after, we make cards and things. We do cakes... It hasn’t worked out that way very often. I tend to have to come up with a lot of the ideas. But just recently, a parent has got involved, and she actually takes, not a massive chunk of it, she more does the arts and crafts side. So, she’ll come herself, she’ll set up a little table, and she’ll come with the idea” (Staff).

Initially this parent attended the Parent Led sessions as a service user only, as she had been searching for local groups to take her daughter to. The collaboration came about after she offered to deliver some arts and crafts sessions, because she had a substantial amount of experience delivering these types of activities (having previously worked as a teaching assistant and trained as a teacher) and wanted to contribute to the sessions. This collaboration came about organically with the parent offering to take an active role in delivering arts and craft at each session.

“We talk about what we always used to do, and my history has always been working with children. So, I was a teaching assistant, then I did my teacher training. And it just kind of came up in conversation that way. So, when I was offering to [name of

staff removed], saying you know, would you like me to do the arts and crafts”

(Parent).

### Further opportunities for parents

#### New Shoots

Several parents attending New Shoots had gone on to: take part in the Talks and Tours at the site; attend community activity and open days, and workshops including Wreath Making and the Family Grow, Cook and Eat sessions; and a one-off Story & Rhyme Time session at the orchard. Some parents and grandparents have also gone onto volunteer at The Growing to Grow Project.

“Some of the parents have gone onto Talks and Tours. They’ve been involved in volunteering. I mean some workshops that have been coming, that are on. They come along to our community activity days, the come along to our family Grow, Cook and Eat sessions. So, they do a lot actually” (Staff).

“We did the one which the, is it Small Steps Big Changes, is that the name of the charity, Small Steps? Yes, they did a sort of crossover library, reading thing at the orchard, which I think they usually do at the library, but they did a session at the orchard... And I just thought, ‘oh I wish they did this here sometimes actually,’ because we really liked it” (Parent).

“I’ve done something on my own... which was the wreath making thing last year, a Christmas wreath... I really did like the Christmas wreath making, that was good” (Parent).

“I mean, we have been to a couple of the community open days actually” (Parent).

### BAME Dads Project

Attending the BAME Dads Project had led to several opportunities for the fathers, including running the sessions, attending training, and raising awareness with local MPs about the prejudices and discrimination fathers from BAME communities face.

Two of the fathers attending the BAME Dads Project help to deliver the sessions when the founder is not there. They have completed the Care for the Family’s Facilitator Training to carry out these sessions.

“I’ve got two volunteers, two dads volunteers, that help me, so it’s a contingency plan you know. If I’m sick, or if I can’t be there, there are two other dads that step in... I went through parents’ facilitating course, with Care for Families... And they’ve gone through the courses as well” (Staff).

Fathers also have access to courses including the equipped2succeed programme (a 10-week course accessed through SSBC). The programme’s focus is on self-development and aims to give individuals the tools to succeed and maintain their well-being.

“Equipped2succeed, I’m on that course” (Parent).

“She's always putting out like courses that are coming up, online or not on thingy.

You know what: I've got to actually put my hands up to [founder of Shifting Your Mindset] because I've got a lot of opportunity” (Parent).

Several fathers have had the opportunity to meet with local MPs to raise awareness around the difficulties and prejudices fathers from BAME communities experience when going to court to gain contact with their children.

“That's why we kind of went down to the root of levelling up and meeting MP's just to tell them about obviously like, when we're going into court and stuff like that. We've been judged before we even walk through the door... And that's kind of another thing that I like about this group. They want to try and get down to the root, and try and get to at least touch someone like an MP, or, you know what I mean? And just say, look, this is an actual thing" (Parent).

#### Benefits for children and parents attending the projects

##### New Shoots

Several benefits were identified for children attending the New Shoots sessions. Being outside in nature was perceived to be beneficial for children's physical and emotional wellbeing and considered therapeutic. Having an outdoor group for young children was deemed by one parent to be a more calming environment than groups indoors, due to the amount of space available.

“Fresh air.. Health wise, mental health, wellbeing, it's so important” (Parent).

“It just helps kids to relax as well. Like sort of trying to get out. There's something quite calm about it. Whereas a lot of other toddler groups, it's quite busy, and you know, sort of a lot going on. But I think because it's outside, because of the large amount of space, I think I've seen my children like be you know, like quite calm and

relaxed in a very positive way... Maybe it is just being outside, it is kind of therapeutic” (Parent).

New Shoots was seen to support children’s socialisation as they were able to meet and play with other children in a familiar environment. This was deemed particularly beneficial for children that were shy around others.

“Socially you know, they grow socially, because it’s a place where they can meet other children” (Childminder).

“I think the social aspect, he is quite nervous with new people, although he's getting better. And I think going to the same place every week, so that he can have that safe space to meet new people” (Parent).

New Shoots was deemed to have supported children’s confidence due to several aspects of its sessions, including singing round the campfire, opportunities to explore the orchard, and interacting with other children and adults. Singing around the campfire appeared to support children’s confidence through encouraging children to select a song to sing and to sing in public with others. Interacting with others was considered to have supported children to develop their confidence, because they were meeting and communicating with adults and other children. Spending time outside in the orchard was deemed to have contributed to developing children’s confidence, because it is it a safe place for children to explore.

“She [child] would always sing in front of me, it was just never in public. Now she’ll do it in front of adults, she’ll sing on the bus. So, it [singing around the campfire] really does build that confidence” (Childminder).

“Round the fire, they often ask the children if they want to choose a song. I think my little girl’s grown in confidence in that. Probably at the start, she maybe wouldn’t have been able to say what song she wanted to sing, but now she’s a bit more you know, if they ask her if she has a song to sing, and then she can tell them” (Parent).

“He's off with the other kids sharing, so yeah, his confidence has come out a lot more... Just being around children generally. Because he wasn't too great with new people. But then going there, because he's sort of got to know everyone there, so he’s like, sort of goes to other people now... Before he was a bit wary, but I think having loads of kids there, he's definitely come out of it... He’s not as shy” (Parent).

“I think it really does benefit children to just be outside. I think it like increases their confidence” (Parent).

Children learn words during the New Shoots sessions, for example the names of the fruits, vegetables, and birds they see in orchard and the words they learn when they sing nursery rhymes around the campfire. This was perceived to have supported children’s language and communication development. Socialising and interacting with other children and adults were considered by some parents to have supported children to develop their vocabulary, as they learned new words from others. Being around older children was thought by one parent to have supported the early language development of her child in the form of babbling.

“The birds, the bugs. So, colours, fruits, vegetables, all the words, they’re learning. They will be taking that to pre-nursery school, so that’s getting them ready, that's

part and parcel, A, B, C, D, E, 1, 2, 3, 4, nursery thymes. I think that is so beneficial” (Parent).

“The interacting with other people, and like I say, with the adults and with the children, like just having that space again, to yeah, I guess communicate. So, he will be learning words while he's there” (Parent).

“Because there's other older children talking there, I think he has started to babble more” (Parent).

Children learn how fruit and vegetables are grown during the New Shoots session and they can eat the fruit they have picked at the orchard, which encourages healthy eating. They are also allowed to take the fruit home with them to eat as a snack or to use in recipes. For some families it was a treat to have access to wild blackberries, apples, plums, and raspberries, with one parent noting that berries can be expensive to purchase.

“We don't go and buy blackberries and raspberries and strawberries, they're just so expensive... I suppose, actually, monetarily, it kind of helps as well... So, we don't go to the orchard specifically to have cheaper food, but it does actually help for him to have that experience, that food... I think it's learning about where the food comes from... If he sees a blackberry, he automatically picks it... He understands he can pick things and eat things. We take them [apples from the community orchard], and we cook together when we get home, sometimes, not always. I'm not trusting him with a knife just yet, I'll cut the apples, and then he'll help with the crumble” (Parent).



“Collecting the fruit and having the plums and the raspberries. I would say that is an amazing bonus or having a space that is so filled with different things for them to taste and experience, and actually go ‘oh these things grow near us, they are free’” (Parent).

Access to outdoor space, in an inner-city area, where children can safely explore the environment around them, was deemed particularly important. Access to green spaces was considered especially important for those who may not have their own outdoor space or limited outdoor space.

“I think it gives him the outdoor space, which is good. I mean we have a balcony, and actually, he uses that and that's great, but we've got cars going like right under the balcony, and stuff, so it's a different thing” (Parent).

“I like that it is you know, aimed at people who are living in St Ann's. So, like in quite an inner-city area. And like giving those children who might not really otherwise have that opportunity, to like explore the kind of natural world around them. It's like really special. You know like, I guess the children who you know, that might not have a garden, or might live in flats” (Parent).

There were also benefits for parents attending the New Shoots sessions. Many parents reported that attending New Shoots gave them the opportunity to connect with other parents, with some discussing how attending had helped to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

“There’s a dad who speaks another language. And he's very new to the area, and he came, and he was very isolated. And now you’ll see him talking to other parents”  
(Childminder).

“It’s nice to be able to go somewhere where you know, where you know there’ll be other parents. Because sometimes being a parent you know, it can be a bit lonely. So, it’s really nice to know that, okay I can go, and there’ll be other people that I can talk to and connect with. Which is really nice when you know, if the alternative is, you’re just going to be on your own with your toddler. That can be quite hard”  
(Parent).

### Grow Together

Grow Together consists of three programmes: Tiny Talk; Sport and Movement; and the Parent Led Sessions.

The key benefit of attending Tiny Talk was perceived to be, parents and children learning to communicate with each other through using simple signs. Parents reported that they were able to communicate with their babies before they were able to speak, by using the baby sign language they had learned at Tiny Talk. Interviews with parents showed that their babies understood the sign language and in some instances were able to sign back. Parents reported that they used baby sign language at home and that this had helped them to understand what their babies wanted rather guessing and becoming frustrated. One parent reflected on how her daughter had attempted to say the word being signed and how Tiny Talk was subsequently supporting her baby’s early speech.

“Parents share little videos of the children you know, signing and things” (Staff).

“I think nappy she understood from quite an early age. She never did it back to me, but every time I’d do the nappy sign, and she’d know that we were going upstairs to have a nappy change. And I think the past two months, we were in the back of the car, and I was giving her snacks, and I was like, ‘oh okay, this might be a good teaching moment.’ So, I stopped giving her snacks, and I showed her the sign for more, made her do the sign for more, and I kept on repeating it and she did it. And she did more, and obviously I gave her a snack, and it was amazing. I was like wow, she's actually learnt... We’ve taught her the sign for finished as well. So, she can say, more food, and she can you know, she can communicate that she's finished, and she wants taking out of the highchair, which is brilliant” (Parent).

“When he starts wanting milk and getting upset, it tends to like buy you a little bit of time when you sign it, because he knows it’s coming... I guess it’s helped communication” (Parent).

“She understands milk, she understands dog, she understands cat, she understands cow... She understands eat, she understands drink, thank you, she understands in fact, actually she had the sound of thank you the other day, just at the right time” (Parent).

“A lot less frustration I would say, between the two of us. Been able to communicate... she's absorbing what [name of facilitator removed] teaching her, teaching us, and what we’re doing at home with her. So, it’s, I think it’s made things a little bit easier than what it would have been. Because now, rather than kind of

screaming, and me not knowing what she's wanting, she's looking, she's touching for a feed you know, she is doing that little hand thing... But she understands when I say, do you want the milk, she looks at my chest, or she'll do a kind of a mmm noise. So that's her telling me that yes, that's what she wants, rather than her just screaming and playing a guessing game" (Parent).

Attending Tiny Talk also provided opportunities for socialisation. Some parents reflected on how interacting with other babies and adults had been beneficial as it had encouraged their babies to interact with others. One parent reported that previously her child would not be comfortable leaving her side but since attending Tiny Talk had developed the confidence to do so. Another spoke of how being around other babies supported her child's development, indicating that her daughter learned from the other children attending Tiny Talk.

"Like everyone's just sat there while the babies are crawling about, and it gives him a chance to approach people on his own. And like when we first went, he wouldn't move very far away from me. But now, he's quite happy to crawl around and see different people" (Parent).

"It's brought her on as well, with her confidence. She watches the other children, and the way they're moving, and what they're doing, and she takes it all in. And it's helped her with her physical development as well as obviously the mental development with the learning and the social side" (Parent).

Tiny Talk also had benefits for the parents attending. Tiny Talk was described as a supportive and relaxing environment where parents could socialise and interact with each other. Some parents reported that Tiny Talk offered them the opportunity to share their

experiences of parenting with other parents and to give and receive advice around a range of topics including sleeping routines, feeding, and other local baby groups. It also helped to reduce feelings of isolation amongst some parents and enabled parents to meet other adults with children of similar ages. One parent described how Tiny Talk motivated her to leave the house on a Monday morning and how it lifted her mood. Some had made new friends at the sessions and in some instances, they provided support to each other outside of the sessions.

“So, in terms of like sleeping, schedules, obviously is the biggest thing, the biggest topic for parents. Feeding, just getting an understanding of what other babies are doing, and how they’re managing... So, it helps, it’s just very informative, and you can also obviously give your insight as well and advice to parents and see if it helps them” (Parent).

“I think the social aspect is good as well. Sort of being able to interact with other mums in the local area that you know, have kids similar ages, and so therefore are going through similar things. So, when we get to chat, sort of at the end you know, you’re comparing stories and sharing stories, and getting tips and tricks from each other, ‘like this works with mine’, ‘well this didn’t work with mine’ etc, etc. So that’s nice as well, to be able to do” (Parent).

“It’s got me and her motivated to get out on a Monday morning and go down there... I feel good afterwards as well... You can go down there in the foulest of moods, and you come out and you know, you’re alright, you’re set ready for the rest of the day... Made a couple of friends down there, that I chat to you know. One of

them, we sort of pass on information about where the nearest childcare groups are, and the mother and toddler groups are... Send text messages and chat over text messages and stuff... It's nice to have somebody at the other end of the phone that you can you know, you can sort of talk to, or just ask little tips" (Parent).

"So, I do enjoy the social times... I know it's away from home, and you just get to kind of like relax. And you know, your main purpose is just to engage with other parents. And it's just a bit of a relaxing 20, 15 minutes" (Parent).

The Sport and Movement sessions were seen to support children prior to entry into school, by developing their language and numeracy skills. The sessions were seen to develop children's vocabulary, listening skills and numeracy.

"It was very much about listening and attention skills, and taking direction from an adult, which is obviously really good in preparing them for moving up to school... Alongside other things, they even incorporated numbers, and reading and things, into the session at different points... Communication and language" (Parent).

"And try and get the kids to kind of learn communication skills. So, we talk about colours, we talk about numbers, we talk about skills. When I try and give them a word associated with an action. So, we're developing communication... So benefits the kids in terms of like learning more about their bodies, so I'll talk to them about labelling, trying to teach them left and right. Talking about their feet, their arms, their hands, and giving them like specific labels for them. And then maybe more anatomically correct. So, it's talking about stomach rather than your belly" (Staff).

In addition to developing language and numeracy skills, the Sports and Movement classes benefited children's physical fitness and fine motor skills.

“And then it's physical as well... It was primarily based around football skills, which they were very much into... And just help them develop some gross motor skills” (Parent).

“Football tends to be a good one to engage in, because they might have older brothers who play. So, they're already playing in the house, or they play at home. But it's just maybe giving them more structure to it... There's maybe like progressions for them to follow rather than it being completely random” (Staff).

The Parent Led sessions include a craft activity run by one of the parents attending.

Interviews revealed that children enjoyed these sessions, and it was an opportunity for them to be creative and to express themselves, learn to share and develop their vocabulary.

“It's just more enjoyment, and to be creative... I think just for the children to express themselves. I think you know, just being given a blank canvas with a bit of paint, and you know, they can be so expressive... And there's so many skills they can get from an arts and crafts activity you know, for the sharing, the turn taking. And then there's the vocabulary that comes along with that, your colours you know, there's so many benefits that come from that too” (Parent).

“They've recently acquired some now sort play equipment, to that's great for the age group that I've got. The children all enjoy using that” (Childminder).

Producing something to take home at the Parent Led session, through the arts and craft activities, was seen to give the children a sense of achievement.

“And then it’s the pride of the achievement as well. I remember one little girl [name of child removed] and it was like, ‘whoa look what I've made,’ and you know, it was that sense to achievement for them is valuable too” (Parent).

The Parent Led sessions were also seen as beneficial because they provided an environment for children to explore safely and opportunities to try a variety of healthy food options, which encouraged healthy eating.

“The parent led session that we go to is very much sort of, for want of a better word, a sort of free flow playgroup, that the children can safely and freely, and independently move about... There's always a snack time, so that the children can experience a variety of foods and healthy and get used to healthy eating and things like that” (Childminder).

### *BAME Dads Project*

The fathers participating in the evaluation reported several benefits from attending the BAME Dads Project. A key benefit of attending the sessions was the peer support provided. The fathers supported each other by sharing their own experiences and providing each other with advice and information.

“You get advice and hear what’s going on in your life, and you’ve got someone who’s been through something similar, that will give you an opinion” (Parent).



“We all share the same thing, we all hear different opinions from each other, and it does help” (Parent)

The BAME Dads Project was considered particularly valuable because groups for fathers were reportedly rare, especially support groups for fathers where they can meet and talk to others who have been through similar experiences.

“But it’s a rare thing isn’t it, there’s groups for women all over the place, and all over the world, but there’s very rare... Yeah, let’s go down to the pub, or like, that’s the only thing for a man really. No groups where you can come and talk, and have honest opinion about what you’re going through, and no-one’s judging you” (Parent).

“It’s like somewhere that you can refresh, and you can actually feel that, do you know. I’m amongst other men, but I can talk in the same way that women do talk, you know. When women are like you know, ‘oh this is what happened to me, my partner’s had to miss x, y, z.’ Men haven’t really got that outlet, like we’ve got that outlet [now]” (Parent).

The group actively check on each other's wellbeing at each session and fathers attending can share what they are going through and receive emotional support from other fathers in attendance. The group was deemed to have supported the mental wellbeing of fathers as they were able to open up about their experiences and difficulties at the sessions.

“They were asking me, ‘how do you feel mentally?’ I said, ‘I’m fine,’ but I wasn’t. I wasn’t all right. It helps a lot being around these people you know, because you get

to hear different stories you know. So helped me a lot to be here. I'm not alone. Hearing from their situations, I know I'm not alone, I can always talk to them, I can open up to them... We try to check everyone's mental wellbeing, make sure everyone's good, everyone's fine. If there's any main problems, like even me a couple of weeks ago, I've had a main problem. So, I came in, and I just let out you know, I just wanted the group to know it, so I just let it out. And then after that, you know what I mean; I was just like, phew" (Parent).

"It's good, it's been a good thing, this is just what we needed, like the mental health for like males in the city, is very, very rife. And we haven't got no-one to talk to, or we don't find people to talk to. And this was just like a flood gate for us when, as soon as it opened, it was just like, this is something what we need, and it's helped so much" (Parent).

Attending the BAME Dads Project had supported some fathers to gain contact with their children and to continue to have a relationship with them, despite separating from their mother and no longer living in the family home. In some instances, support and advice obtained at the sessions had prevented the need for fathers to go to court to obtain the right to see their child[ren], with arrangements being made in agreement with their ex-partner instead.

"They [BAME Dads Project] really were trying to push for sort of like a mediation first. Because I think they understand that nobody really wants to go down that route [court], not really... I mean it has helped, I've had my son stay over now, like two, three times. I've seen him on some like weekends, and like you know, I was

able to say that, well to my ex that like you know, 'I've got this organisation behind me, and they're really helping me'. And like you know, 'I don't want to take this to court, and like I have people behind me who are helping me.' And like, after that, like there was such a switch off and I was able to start seeing my son again... Honestly so helpful" (Parent).

In addition to peer support, the fathers attending the BAME Dads Project receive practical support, including access to solicitors, information on their rights as a father, where to go for financial support (e.g., child benefits and job seekers allowance), support to complete the C100 Form (to make arrangements for a child or resolve disputes about their upbringing), and the provision of food.

"So basically like, we've got, sometimes we have like some fathers coming in and you need to fill in like C100 forms and stuff like that. And we attempt to do it, but some of the questions are just mad, like crazy words. We don't know what was on the words. So, the woman that... she's not professional, but she just knows her stuff" (Parent).

"It costs me a lot of money, and as a full-time dad, you know when you've got to work in that time. And I was struggling financially. So, once I came here, these people showed me the right places to go. Contact this place, contact this place. And the very next day, I started contacting these places, things start happening for me, like straight away you know.... It's like the child benefit. So last week, a week today, to job centre, and they gave me some money as well" (Parent).

“Like I was struggling for food as well, I wasn't eating properly, they helped me... I've gone to the sessions, I've been fed, I've been properly looked after” (Parent).

“She [founder of the BAME Dads Project] tried to get me to go to, into the, I can't even remember what the name is; I don't remember what the service is called. But it's a free solicitors. Yeah, she tried to get me to go in. But by that time, I was starting to get more communication with my son, and I was actually starting to get through to my ex” (Parent).

“They told me I can go into the school and get like more information there. Like the schools are definitely an important place, honestly, that's somewhere I can go and put my name down. Because how my ex be like trying to go and take my child away. And then like when we have all, like, my parental responsibility” (Parent).

The BAME Dads Project also run family events and have access to a community garden. The community garden is used as a meeting place in the summer, but fathers also engage in gardening which had reportedly offered a therapeutic distraction and helped to relieve stress. The family events were run to support fathers' relationships with their children.

“Gardening, and like you know, just getting your mind just totally distracted, and you know, just doing something. Like furthering you know, different skills whilst you're just out there. Like it like helps you” (Parent).

“We call it the dads' garden. And you know the later end of this summer; we were just going there every week, meeting there. And as well as speaking, we was getting things done in the garden. And we really transformed it you know, we got a lot more

work done than usual. And yeah, it's really good to have this. And it's practical. Stress release" (Parent).

"We've also got other schemes that we do where we will do like you know, day events... We did the Jubilee, events which actually help fathers get involved with their children" (Parent).

*Berridge Nursery and Primary School's Let's Talk, Let's Be Healthy, and Let's Be Happy programmes*

The Let's Talk programme had supported children's communication and language development, with speaking, listening and understanding early years foundation scores reportedly increasing by 15%. In addition, children were apparently talking more in school and feedback from parents revealed that children were also talking more at home.

"I actually talked about the Let's Talk programme at the Early Years conference just before lockdown. And our data for our speaking and listening, and understanding in nursery, went up probably about 15%. But it's more about the actual day to day impact. Those children were talking more; it's the feedback from the parents that the children were talking more. They had, because they had those visual resources, not just a picture, but an actual resource to hold in their hand and walk round with and talk about. We heard a lot more language being talked about" (Staff).

"I think the Let's Talk; definitely the parents saw how much they [children] were talking more" (Staff).

"I've had parents saying to me, 'they're talking a lot more now, since they've been in nursery'. But it's when parents say to you, 'are you doing work about bees?' Then you know that the language is going home" (Staff).

The Let's Talk Programme had supported children with English as an additional language to talk with more confidence. Additionally, some parents had reported that their children were talking much more often at home.

"I had a parent that come up to me and said, a child who wasn't speaking in English; 'he won't stop talking now'" (Staff).

"And you've got children coming up to you, who are three years old, and they start talking, and they'd not spoken before. Or you've got children who've got English as an additional language, and then all of a sudden, they're speaking to you quite confidently about magpies, pigeons, or worms, spiders, 'that's a grasshopper'" (Staff).

Let's Be Healthy had encouraged children to try different fruit and vegetables and to exercise. It was also suggested that the programme may have contributed to fewer children at the school being considered overweight or obese.

"I think the impact was really on those children. And having you know, trying different fruits and vegetables... And talking about it you know, talking about how they keep themselves healthy. Talking about you know, making sure you exercise all the time" (Staff).

“I mean I must say, I have noticed a couple of the year 1’s has lost quite a bit of weight actually. I don’t know if that was anything to do with it or not, but you know, we don’t have a lot of issues with obesity. So obviously, what we’re doing and what we’re talking to children about, is having some kind of impact hopefully you know” (Staff).

The Let’s Be Happy Programme had encouraged children to consider how they feel and to talk about their emotions with teachers. This programme had also reportedly supported children to develop empathy for others.

“I think they talk a lot more about their emotions now” (Staff).

"I don’t think we’ve got any children that don’t really talk to us. If they’re looking sad, they will talk about why they are you know, because they know, they’ve had those opportunities to talk about it throughout. So, I think that's had an impact on it” (Staff).

“Another little boy fell over, hurt himself. This child, who we really wouldn’t have expected him to do it, went up and picked up the sad card, and gave him the sad card. And it was a huge moment for all the staff. Because of his empathy, that so and so’s crying, but the fact that he was crying, and recognised that” (Staff).

## Community integration and connections

### New Shoots

New Shoots has encouraged more families from the local community access the orchard by establishing a group that welcomes families with children under three years of age. As noted

earlier, previously groups attracted families with older children and establishing a group targeting families with younger children has integrated the orchard further into the community, by widening access and participation.

“I think New Shoots have really helped bring in local families with the young kids. Because that’s what we’re starting to see now” (Staff).

As a result of their relationship with SSBC, staff at New Shoots have been able to further develop connections with families in the local community. They have done this by attending events organised in St Ann’s by the Family Mentor Service at Framework.

“I would say with the Family Mentor service, when they have got networking days, the idea that we would be specifically invited along as STAA to come along to these big events. Which are based down at the Chase. And it was a good opportunity for us to engage with families there, in the community” (Staff).

Some parents reported that the New Shoots sessions have a ‘community feel.’ This was due to its social aspect, in which families gather around the campfire at the end of the session for a song and to chat.

“Bringing everyone together and having that community feel of everyone around the fire, and then the songs... But I think for me as a mum, that community sense, and that community feel is so important... For me, like that just gathering around a fire and being together feels really lovely every week” (Parent).



“They ask, how are you, but they start talking to the children, ‘oh what are you doing?’ and ‘oh thank you.’ And it just kind of comes a kind of community rather than just a play session, it really does” (Childminder).

“It’s funny, even though I’m not in St Ann’s; I do kind of feel like there’s a bit of a community vibe... So, I suppose it’s kind of a community spirit, just not everybody living in the same postcode” (Parent).

### Grow Tother

A key aim of Education FC is to build a community hub and the Grow Together sessions has supported this goal by allowing the organisation to provide group activities for children from birth. The addition of the Grow Together sessions means that Education FC now has group activities at Melbourne Park for children of all ages and not just those over three years of age.

“And the fact that we can show that we’re doing multiple sessions, and we’re trying to build a community hub... We want to show, when you come onto the park, we can say right, you’ve got a kid this age, this is what we do for you... So, we’ve got a range of things... ‘We’ve got this session, we’ve got this session, we’ve got this age group, this age group.’ So, it’s got more community cohesion than just the project itself... Providing 0-15, 16 years old long term, we’ve got something for you, got something for your brother and sister. We do different things, it’s really nice that we can provide that route all the way through [to adulthood]” (Staff).

“Before, it was the 5-14 year olds. And even though we do the after-school sessions and things, it was always for that age. So now we’ve gone to the lower ages” (Staff).

“A lot of the people for instance, that we go to playgroup with, frequent more than just the playgroup. They seem, to go to a couple now, and so it’s very much got a sort of family feel to it” (Childminder).

Establishing groups for families with younger children was seen to support the organisation’s integration into the community further as it enabled them to develop relationships with the parents as they spoke more to the parents in these sessions in comparison to groups with older children. Establishing good relationships with parents was seen as key to securing Education FC as a community hub and encouraging families to access the different groups available to their children up to age 16.

“It [introducing groups for younger children] has probably given us an opportunity to speak to parents more. Obviously with babies, you like, you interact with them, but you speak to the parent about our experiences as parents.... We’re able to build that relationship with parents much more, integrates the community to what we do, and again, we’re much more approachable” (Staff).

“I imagine [Name of parent removed] will come to everything that we do for the next 10 years, because we’ve built that relationship with them... It means that they probably trust us more, and therefore they’re more likely to bring their kids to us, or their kid continues to come to us, because we have that relationship with the parent and the kid” (Staff).

Two respondents mentioned how much Education FC are integrated into the local community and more specifically how much they do for the local community, including their groups for children of all ages and other outreach activities such as handing out Christmas hampers. The organisation appeared to be popular with the local community with many families attending the groups.

“I am aware that they are, for lots of different things, for the community as a whole... I mean I never frequented that park before; you know; there wasn't any facilities as such. Definitely no groups or anything. Now you see all of the things they do, sort of like, I've seen them hand like Christmas hampers out to the local community in previous years” (Childminder).

“I think it's amazing how much they do for the community. And I hear a lot of people going to the events... I think they are very popular within the community” (Parent).

### *BAME Dads Project*

As mentioned earlier the dads' garden was a community garden that was not being used and has been restored by members of the BAME Dads Project. The garden is used by the group to meet and for gardening but will also be open (once further work has been carried out) to the wider community in the future where events can be held.

“A community garden, helps with community development, where we develop things for the rest of the communities... We have managed to build other things outside that we didn't anticipate. We have managed to implement other

programmes like the dads' garden, it has come from the dads... And we are opening, once we've finished developing it, we're opening it up for the rest, we're doing a launch, and then the rest of the community can come in. So right now, we're working, building it. And then we get ready to launch, and then we open it up for summer" (Staff).

As mentioned earlier the fathers attending the BAME Dads Project carry out acts of kindness in the local community. This has included handing out food and drinks at a local school and to those in sheltered accommodation in Nottingham. The acts of kindness have also included approaching others in the local community to get involved, including requesting a discount on fruit to be handed out. They have also provided opportunities for networking and meeting others supporting local communities. Both of these have supported community connections.

"The random acts of kindness... I was fortunate enough to be a part of that first one... And so basically, after work, went there, and just was delivering food all round Nottingham... And you had to offer people who are kind of, lived in a shelter... We ended up as well, speaking to another person that worked, that volunteered, and just, he was sharing his story of helping people in the community and everything. So, it turned into a bit of a networking as well" (Parent).

"My act of kindness... I said, 'I've got a friend who owns a fruit market, I went to school with him.' So, I went and approached him, asked him, if I could get like a hamper of fruit at a discount price. So, I'm going out into the community, and I'm using my influence, and like people to get involved... A Saturday school... So, I've

gone down there with a popcorn machine, some fruit, fresh drinks, and yeah, gave out drinks and popcorn to like 180 kids” (Parent).

One member of the group spoke of how they felt part of the community through being given the opportunity to meet MPs and share their insight into the difficulties fathers from BAME communities experience.

“I think it has made me more part of the community. So, when they’re doing a festival, obviously getting to like rub shoulders with like MP’s and stuff like that. And you know, just to getting that open dialogue and just having a conversation with these people about our issues” (Parent).

### *Berridge School and Nursery*

Berridge School and Nursery are already integrated into the local community. However, the Let’s Talk, Let’s Be Healthy and Let’s Be Happy programmes had helped to develop relationships and connections with parents further, as they have opened up discussions about children’s experiences of these programmes.

“I think, because we’re a school, we’re already part of the community. But I must say that it’s helped in having those conversations with parents. Because when parents, at parents evening, or at the end of the school day, have made a comment ‘well they [children] were telling me about this, they were talking about that,’ then you can actually, you can open up a wealth of conversations. And that’s where I think it’s been useful” (Staff).

## Sustainability of the projects

### New Shoots

Staff at New Shoots have attended meetings with SSBC to explore funding opportunities, which have included the signposting of possible sources funding, provision of advice on the process of applying for funding, and information on how to promote existing services to potential funders.

“They have directed us to potential funders. And we had a conference meeting, where somebody was brought in that talked about funding strategies or ideas that would support funding. So, like, looking at how governments look ahead as to what would be flavour of the month, or flavour of the year when it comes to funding... That idea of a project being able to flex and shrink as well. Or investing in ideas so that you can show funders what you’ve already done” (Staff).

In recognition that community projects often rely on short term funding, New Shoots had a list of funders they often approach for grants. They are currently exploring other funding opportunities and have recently appointed a funder to explore this further.

“These sorts of projects are very hard to mouth as well. We have got various funders, or trust funds that we apply to. And it’s finding trust funds that, where their interest is Early Years actually... Well, we’re looking. We’ve actually brought in a funder to look at our funding strategy for the future. So that we can identify, or use her expertise in, because she's a fundraiser... So actually, to have somebody’s expertise has been really useful” (Staff).

### Grow Together

The provision of three years of funding from the Ideas Fund has enabled Education FC to carefully consider how they plan to sustain their Grow Together sessions in the long-term. Thus, medium term funding had the added benefit of negating the need to look for other funding revenues straightaway.

“Having a three-year project, means that from our point of view, from a community point of view, where we know we’ve got this revenue coming in, it gives us actually time to kind of build, which I think is a nice, and a bit less stressful... that piece of mind. Looking for different sustainability options” (Staff).

Education FC are considering applying for funding to continue to deliver the programme.

“The main thing for us would be probably looking for more funding to deliver it”  
(Staff)

### BAME Dads Project

The founder of Shifting Your Mindset raised concerns about the sustainability of the BAME Dads Project and in particular how the funding received was not enough to employ the staff required to deliver the programme due to demand. Some of the funding had been used to pay for things that were not initially considered, for example food for the fathers attending which was considered key to encouraging fathers to attend the project.

“We’re not in a sustainable phase... And the demand has increased. And the funding that we get is obviously spread over three years, which is 10,000 every year. So, if

you calculate that, the professional fees you know, the training, the volunteers and everything, it's not enough for me to be a programme manager full time... So that has been the challenge of, because with regards to our internal structure, it's still so small, and the demand is bigger than the structure" (Staff).

"One thing I learnt is, you have to entice the dads with something, which is food. Yeah, it's food. Food is the way to get the men out, and that is no lie. We have like different meals, that's why they will show up... I've had to invest a lot in the little things that I didn't anticipate, to get the dads to come" (Staff).

The funding received by SSBC was considered a stepping-stone to further funding. It has allowed Shifting Your Mindset to build a track record and to evaluate the BAME Dads Project. Plans are in place to apply for further funding to fund the recruitment of more staff and to expand their service to include supported living for men experiencing homelessness.

"The sustainability plan is, at the moment is, we needed to build a track record for us to be able to apply for funding, that can help us have an infrastructure. And I think, and that's another thing, SSBC has enabled us to build a track record, where now, we can now apply for funding for roles like director roles, project support and a programme manager role. So that our plan, our plan was to do an evaluation, build our track record, and then apply for funding... We want to be able to provide a service where we supported living for homeless men. So, which will then enable us to have like, apply for tenders and contracts with the councils and all of that. But we need that track record first. They have provided that steppingstone. Here are the tools, here's one rod, and here's one worm, now fish" (Staff).



### Berridge School and Nursery

The Let's Talk, Lets' Be Healthy and Let's Be Happy programmes were already established prior to receipt of a grant from the Ideas Fund. The funding was used to invest in resources to enhance the programmes. Consequently, the programmes are sustainable as they are delivered by staff already employed at the school and if new members of staff join, they would be trained to deliver the programme. Furthermore, any resources lost or broken would be replaced with money put aside.

“I used it to buy the resources, and those resources are being used all the time. So, you know, and we're building on those and building on those. So definitely there's sustainability there... So, the funds weren't actually paying for an extra adult, I used it to buy the resources, to enhance what we were doing, so we can carry on doing that. So, although the funding has stopped, we can carry on using that you know. And if things do get broken or lost, we've got some money to replenish them, but it keeps going and going and going, because we've put those things in place. And it's just about retraining new staff that come in, on those programmes, and now we use the resources to enhance them” (Staff).

### Conclusion

The evaluation explored the application process for an Ideas Fund grant, co-production with parents and further opportunities for parents, benefits for children and parents, community connections, and the sustainability of the projects from the perspective of parents, childminders, and staff. The application process was perceived to be simple and supportive but potentially daunting for those without previous experience of applying for grants.

Improvements suggested were further information on what to expect from Ideas Fund events and data monitoring requirements. Two of organisations included parents in the co-production of their projects and this consisted of putting forward ideas for the sessions and also co-delivery. Further opportunities for parents appeared plentiful amongst three of the projects and included training courses and volunteering opportunities, and access to other groups and activities. The projects have been beneficial for the children and parents attending them. Benefits include improvements in children's communication and language; healthy eating; and social and emotional wellbeing. Benefits for parents included: enhanced mental wellbeing; reduced isolation and loneliness; and practical support (e.g., financial aid, support to see to their children). Funding from the Ideas Fund had supported the projects' integration into, and connections with, local communities by widening their reach, through developing groups for families with younger children; outreach activities in the community; and opportunities to develop relationships with local parents. All the projects were planning to continue beyond the three years they have been funded for. Approaches to sustainability varied with one organisation hiring a fundraiser; applying for further funding; and using the Ideas Fund grant to buy resources so that the project can run beyond the three years without further funds being required.

### Recommendations

- Provide information about future Ideas Fund events in advance; and
- Be clearer about the amount of monitoring data required of projects receiving grants from the Ideas Fund.

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