

# Fathers' days

Encouraging fathers to play a more active role in life at nursery is resulting in happier children with more self-esteem, one setting in north London tells **Nicole Weinstein**



**W**hen Chris's son joined Langtry Nursery in Kilburn, north London, three years ago, he was one of the dads who occasionally dropped his son off on his way to work or picked him up but didn't stay around for long to chat. When practitioners spoke to him about his son, he was likely to defer to his wife and say, 'Speak to his mum', which was a common response from many male family members.

All that changed two years ago, when nursery head Aisha Ashanti introduced a fathers/male carers initiative. The project was shortlisted for the *Nursery World* 2019 Working with Parents Award.

'It was a turning point for me,' says Ms Ashanti. 'We saw that fathers wanted to be more actively

involved, but perhaps they didn't have the tools to do so. So, we put the ball in their court: we gave them ownership of the initiative and it has sky-rocketed.

'The children are thriving; the fathers are taking what they've learnt from nursery back into the home and the practitioners are reaping the benefits of children whose personal, social and emotional development outcomes are among the highest on record at the setting.'

## MEN ON BOARD

Involving fathers begins with the initial home visit before a child starts at the nursery. 'The children's home environment is hugely impactful on their outcomes. Therefore we've always provided a home visit, but I decided to make a new stipulation when we introduced the fathers' initiative:

**Children's outcomes have improved at Langtry Nursery in Kilburn**

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**MORE INFORMATION**

- [www.fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org)
- For Fatherhood Champions training, visit the Fatherhood Institute website or contact Jeszemma Garratt, head of training, at: [j.garratt@fatherhoodinstitute.org](mailto:j.garratt@fatherhoodinstitute.org)

that both parents, whether or not they lived together, be present,' Ms Ashanti explains.

After the home visit, the parents are invited into the setting for a minimum of two weeks while the child settles in. Although the nursery doesn't have designated Children's Centre status, it is a satellite centre that provides care and education predominately for children who are at risk of falling behind, living in deprivation or with SEND.

'Working in partnership with both parents to support their children's learning is vitally important,' Ms Ashanti says, 'particularly as we are working with some challenging families around issues such as safeguarding.'

The second step to involving all fathers or male carers was to have them attend a morning launch of the initiative. Earlier attempts to

## case study: a child's experience

When four-year-old David (name changed) took up a funded two-year-old place at Langtry Nursery two years ago, he was shy and quiet, and needed a lot of support to settle in. At first, his mother was the main person involved in his transition: she stayed for the two-week settling-in period and took part in stay-and-play sessions. His twin brothers also attended.

David had various interests, including animals, transport and being outdoors, but his levels of involvement were low. Despite being 32 months old, his PSED levels were that of a 16- to 26-month-old.

One day, his key person invited his father, who often dropped him off and picked him up, to stay and play and join the father's group. 'From this point on, we observed David become more confident in the nursery,' Ms Ashanti says.

By the age of 45 months, his levels of engagement rose

from low to moderate and his PSED was within the 30-50 months age range.

'Having his father more involved in his play supported his learning and had a positive impact on his all-around development. His father understood that being more involved with his children and supporting their schooling had made a difference.'



involve fathers had been poorly attended, so in the weeks leading up to it, practitioners spoke to fathers about the benefits of attending, for their children and themselves. They were assured that the meeting was about them and their children, not about what the nursery wanted them to do.

'We explained the importance of male role models and how we could help incorporate more male input into the nursery,' Ms Ashanti says.

Two fathers decided to take the lead, and with significant input from the group, they decided on three main events for the year and a series of mini events that would also be part of the initiative. They planned a kite-flying afternoon, a visit to the RAF museum and a football tournament. They also launched the Fatherhood Institute's Fathers Read Every Day project, to support early literacy.

Nineteen fathers and male carers attended the trip to the RAF museum, while 15 took part in the football tournament at the local park (see Case study, right).

### BENEFITS

Involving fathers from the time their child starts nursery creates a positive relationship that is 'very likely to endure,' according to research from the Institute of Fatherhood. It was the institute's three-day Fatherhood Champions training course that made Ms Ashanti aware of the potential impact that a father's involvement can have on their child's development. The scale of the benefits made her determined to launch the initiative.

She explains, 'Research indicates that children with highly involved fathers tend to have higher

educational achievement; increased emotional security; greater capacity for empathy; greater social mobility and earnings relative to parents; and higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction. Also, school readiness in young children is associated with high levels of paternal sensitivity, over and above mothers' sensitivity.

'It was important to have the facts at hand so that I could inform all members of staff of the benefits of the initiative. After all, it's a team initiative that wouldn't run smoothly without everyone working together because when staff attend the meetings and the days out, other staff members have to cover for them.'

### MARKED IMPROVEMENTS

Two years on, nursery staff believe that a father's involvement has



### MORE INFORMATION

- Sarkardi A *et al* (2008) 'Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes', <https://online.library.wiley.com>
- Flouri E (2005) 'Fathering and child outcomes', <https://psycnet.apa.org>
- Pleck JH and Masciadrelli BP (2004) 'Paternal Involvement by US Residential Fathers', <https://psycnet.apa.org>

made an important contribution to their child's development. Ms Ashanti explains, 'We use various tools to assess the children, one of which is the Ferre Laevers levels of well-being and involvement, which are tracked as low, medium and high. The more engaged they are, the happier they are to stay at an activity for a sustained period of time.' (See Case study, above.)

The data also revealed that 65 per cent of children whose fathers or male carers were involved in the nursery met the expected level in personal, social and emotional development. Ms Ashanti explains, 'It clearly demonstrates how having both parents involved makes a significant difference in children's learning and development and helps with their sense of identity and self-esteem, which goes a long way towards being ready for school! ■

## case study: a dad's experience

Bujar Danini, father of three-year-old Chloe (name changed), has gained much from being involved in Langtry Nursery's dads initiative.

He says, 'I've lived in London for 20 years and although I've been interested to visit places like the museums, it's taken having children to open me up to a whole new world of what's on offer in London. Being involved with the other fathers has given me lots of ideas of what to do with my children at weekends.'

'Having children has been the most important thing in my life. I work shifts in the City and I often don't see them before nursery or at bedtime. So, it's even more important that I make time for them. I take days off to attend the nursery events, like kite-flying on Primrose Hill, which was such a fun, bonding experience.'

'And all the dads got really involved in the football – it got

quite competitive at times, and all the children were all cheering us on. There were even medals at the end. It was great to play football, as I often don't get the chance to play with other adults due to work commitments.

'By doing activities [with my children] – getting outside to parks and doing jigsaws and puzzles and drawing with them – we talk more and I understand what makes them happy. Each night, we read to them and this is a great bonding time.'

