

## **Strengthening support for fathers: Ini Brown's Fatherhood Champions journey**

Ini Brown is a Health Visitor at Whittington Health NHS Trust, working with families across Islington. With a background in midwifery, her role focuses on supporting parents and babies during the early stages of family life, a period when effective engagement with both parents can have a significant impact on children's wellbeing.

Through her work, Ini regularly supports families navigating new parenthood, including challenges around bonding, parental wellbeing and adjusting to new roles. Recognising the importance of fathers in this process, she completed the Fatherhood Champions training delivered through Islington Council.

The programme is designed to help practitioners strengthen father-inclusive practice across services. By building knowledge, confidence and practical strategies, Fatherhood Champions are equipped to improve how organisations engage and support fathers, and to influence practice within their own teams and professional networks.

### **Turning theory into practice**

For Ini, one of the most valuable aspects of the training was its focus on translating knowledge into real changes in service delivery.

She explained that many professionals already understand the research about the importance of fathers, but that the challenge often lies in applying that knowledge in everyday work.

"Sometimes you can do the research and have the theory about the importance of fathers, but what helped me particularly in that training was thinking about how we actually put it into practice where we are."

As part of the Champions programme, participants completed follow-up work examining how their own services were engaging fathers and where improvements could be made. For Ini, this process helped her reflect on current practice within her health visiting team and identify opportunities to strengthen father inclusion.

### **Practical changes within health visiting**

Some improvements were already underway within Ini's team. Health visitors had begun proactively inviting fathers to attend new birth visits rather than communicating solely with mothers.

Previously, appointments were typically arranged through the mother's contact details and fathers were not always explicitly included in the conversation. By intentionally inviting them to attend, the team began to see significant change.

Ini reported that around 60 percent of new birth visits now include a father, demonstrating how relatively small changes in approach can lead to meaningful increases in father engagement.

The Champions training also strengthened the team's thinking about how fathers are represented in documentation and records. Historically, fathers' perspectives were often captured only within the mother's record. Following the training, Ini began encouraging colleagues to consider creating separate records where health visitors were actively supporting fathers.

This shift helps ensure that fathers' voices and needs are recognised more clearly within the system.

### **Making services visible to fathers**

Another change inspired by the training involved making health visiting services more visibly accessible to fathers.

Ini and her colleagues reviewed the information materials used in children's centres and recognised that although some resources included images of fathers, they did not always speak directly to dads themselves.

In response, the team created new posters specifically aimed at fathers with messages such as "health visitors are here for you too, Dad."

These posters include QR codes linking fathers to relevant information and support resources, including guidance around emotional wellbeing.

The team also took part in a men's activity day at Arsenal Stadium, where a health visiting staff member attended with resources and information specifically designed for fathers. The event created an opportunity to engage directly with dads in a setting where they might feel more comfortable asking questions or seeking support.

## **Becoming a voice for father inclusion**

Following the training, Ini also became part of a local Fathers and Male Carers Working Group. The group brings together professionals from a range of services across Islington.

Participants include representatives from health visiting, early years services, mental health teams and parent and baby psychology services. The group provides a space to share learning, develop ideas and promote father-inclusive practice across different parts of the local system.

Ini explained that the Champions training played a key role in bringing these professionals together.

“It made sense that we would all come together and think about how we work together as champions in Islington to support our colleagues and push those ideas within our teams.”

By representing health visiting within the group, she helps ensure that father-inclusive practice remains part of ongoing conversations about family support across the borough.

## **Seeing the difference for fathers**

The impact of these changes is visible in everyday interactions with families.

Ini described how some fathers are initially surprised when health visitors speak directly to them and ask about their own wellbeing.

“One dad said to me, ‘You’re asking me? I’m not important.’ And I said, ‘No, you do matter.’”

While the reaction sometimes begins with surprise, the response is overwhelmingly positive. Fathers often appreciate being acknowledged and included in conversations about their child’s development and family wellbeing.

Health visitors are also becoming more confident in recognising when fathers may need additional support. In some cases this has led to further conversations about bonding with the baby or referrals to specialist services where appropriate.

These interactions demonstrate the importance of creating space for fathers within family services and ensuring they feel comfortable seeking help.

## **Lasting impact on practice**

For Ini, the Champions programme has strengthened both her confidence and her ability to influence practice within her team.

It has helped her translate research into practical action, from encouraging colleagues to invite fathers to visits, to improving record-keeping and creating resources that speak directly to dads.

Just as importantly, it has strengthened collaboration between professionals across services who share the goal of improving support for fathers.

Ini's experience shows how Fatherhood Champions can help turn awareness into action. By equipping practitioners with the knowledge and confidence to lead change, the programme supports services to recognise fathers as vital partners in their children's lives and to engage them more effectively in the support families receive.