

Evaluation of the North East Young Dads and Lads' (NEYDL's) Young Minoritised Dads Project



Prepared for NEYDL by Dr Laura Way, Independent Consultant
December 2025

Contents

- 1 Overview, page 3
- 2 Evaluation Methodology, page 3
- 3 Diversifying Reach – Demographic Data, page 4
- 4 The Young Minoritised Dads Project – Successes, page 5
 - 4.1 Working with Professionals and Decision-Makers, page 5
 - 4.2 Engaging and supporting minoritised young dads, page 6
- 5 Barriers and Challenges, page 9
- 6 Conclusions, page 11
- 7 Recommendations, page 12
 - 7.1 Demographic data, page 12
 - 7.2 Working with professionals and decision makers, page 12
 - 7.3 Reaching, engaging and supporting young minoritised dads, page 12
- 8 References, page 14

1. Overview

Established in 2017, North East Young Dads & Lads (NEYDL) is an award-winning parenting support charity that works intensively with young men facing fatherhood. Their vision is for young dads to be valued and supported in their role as parents. Their mission is to enable young dads to play a safe, active and meaningful role in their children's lives, by supporting and connecting young dads and influencing wider practice. Whilst NEYDL has made a significant and sometimes life-changing impact in the lives of North East young dads and their families, reaching and supporting over 200 young fathers annually, totalling over 800 young dads to date, there has been a marked absence of representation from minoritised groups. For this reason, they partnered with University of Lincoln, Connected Voice, and Future Men, to carry out research into inclusive support for minoritised young fathers under the *Diverse Dads* project (2020-2021). The project specifically considered minoritisation with regards to ethnic and/or racial minoritisation, whilst also recognising that minoritisation is intersectional and needs to consider too religion, sexuality, and disability.

Amongst the main recommendations of the *Diverse Dads* study (2021) was to challenge myths around minoritised fathers being 'hard-to-reach' and for NEYDL to further explore the diversification of their reach. Responding to such recommendations, NEYDL secured grant funding and appointed a Senior Young Dads Worker (Minoritised Groups) to play a key and active role in increasing their reach with young dads from minoritised groups. The appointment of this role, along with the further exploration of how to diversify reach (referred to herein as the 'young minoritised dads project'), reflects NEYDL's commitment to embed equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in all their decisions, policies and day to day practices. Alongside the young minoritised dads project, NEYDL have also developed an EDI strategy (December, 2024), which is referred to in this report alongside NEYDL's Evaluation Framework, and a related values booklet for young dads.

2. Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation report draws upon demographic data collected by NEYDL concerning their beneficiaries and qualitative research carried out by Dr. Laura Way. The demographic data predominantly came from NEYDL's database which staff input dads' details into. The qualitative research carried out comprised:

- 1-1 interviews with six beneficiaries (young minoritised dads),
- Five interviews with the Senior Young Dads Worker (Minoritised Groups) (hereon referred to as the minoritised dads worker), carried out at five points over eighteen months,
- 1-1 interviews with two external stakeholders; an EDI advisor to NEYDL, and a local professional who has been working alongside the minoritised dads worker.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and coded before being thematically analysed.

3. Diversifying Reach – Demographic Data

As noted above, a core aim of NEYDL’s young minoritised dads project is to increase and diversify NEYDL’s reach; particularly when it comes to identifying and engaging with young dads who are minoritised. This reflects Outcome 4 of NEYDL’s Evaluation Framework (Appendix 1) –*Increase our reach with young dads from minority communities* (also Objective 1 of their EDI strategy), and NEYDL’s indicators for measuring this outcome are the demographic data they collect about beneficiaries. The table below presents these indicators and the current (demographic) picture.

| Indicator | Current Picture |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 100% increase in the proportion of beneficiaries who are ethnically diverse (non-white or white Gypsy/Irish traveller), to 4% by April 2025. Baseline: 2% of all NEYDL service users, March 2023. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The total percentage of beneficiaries who are ethnically diverse stood at 4.5% May 2024-April 2025. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2-3% of beneficiaries are LGBTQ+ by April 2025. Baseline March 2023: 2% (including Trans). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1.9 % of beneficiaries identified as bisexual May 2024-April 2025. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 25% increase in the proportion of beneficiaries who are disabled by April 2025. Baseline March 2023: 13%. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This has risen to 35% in 2025 (and 39% in the first 6 months of this current financial year). |

Table 1. Outcome 4 Indicators and Achievement

Overall, NEYDL have demonstrated achievement of Outcome 4 in increasing their reach with young fathers from minority communities. Representation of these minoritised identities with regards to the whole cohort of dads NEYDL is engaging with is, however, variable. As shown above, the demographic making up the largest minoritised identity percentage wise are those classed as disabled, with around a third of the dads NEYDL were engaging with, May 2024-April 2025, being disabled, compared to 13% in March 2023. The highest percentage within this being dads with neurodiversity (26.3%). Whilst LGBTQ+ and ethnic minorities in April 2025 do not make up a large percentage of the overall cohort of dads engaging with NEYDL, the raw number of dads NEYDL are reaching within these minoritised identities has nearly doubled. For example, 2 dads being supported by NEYDL identified as bisexual according to the 2023 data and this had increased to 4 in April 2025. With regards to data concerning dads who identified as Transgender, this was provided not by the database but by NEYDL staff. NEYDL reported that staff had been unaware of the tick-box in the database which captured this data and so this data had been held in the working knowledge of NEYDL staff themselves.

Data provided by NEYDL noted that 3 Trans young dads had been supported by NEYDL since 2022 (with some continuation between years).

Though this is positive and demonstrates NEYDL achieving Outcome 4 concerning increased reach, further work is required on increasing the percentages of LGBTQ+ and ethnic minoritised dads in relation to the overall cohort of dads engaging with NEYDL.

The significant increase over the last two years in young fathers (beneficiaries) who identify as disabled, particularly neurodiverse, with no targeted work by NEYDL, might be indicative of a number of potential factors. This could reflect an increase more broadly amongst young people in their own awareness/recognition of neurodiversity, for example. The degree of increase and the short amount of time in which it has happened, however, might indicate other factors are at play – perhaps, for example, a strengthening of NEYDL’s referral networks or an increase in peer-referrals. There is currently a lack of data to support such conclusions, and this does warrant further exploration. The key takeaway from this though is that there must be a high level of demand amongst such a demographic if NEYDL have successfully increased their reach with neurodiverse young fathers in the absence of any targeted project or outreach.

4. The Young Minoritised Dads Project – Successes

Two main areas will now be discussed which highlight the successes of the young minoritised dads project. The first concerns working with professionals and decision makers (mapping directly onto Outcome 5 of NEYDL’s Evaluation Framework - *Improve professionals’ and decision makers’ knowledge and practice to support young dads*) and data from interviews with the minoritised dads worker and the two external stakeholders is drawn upon here. The second area concerns engaging and supporting minoritised young dads; highlighting the support experienced by the dads interviewed and the value of this. The discussion here maps onto Outcome 1 (*Improve young dads’ relationships...*), Outcome 2 (*Improve young dads’ mental health and wellbeing*) and Outcome 3 (*Improve young dads’ skills (life skills, parenting skills, education, employment)*) of NEYDL’s Evaluation Framework. What follows does speak to the work engaged in by the minoritised dads worker with regards to ethnic minoritisation particularly.

4.1 Working with Professionals and Decision-Makers

The findings here concern Outcome 5 of NEYDL’s Evaluation Framework - *Improve professionals’ and decision makers’ knowledge and practice to support young dads*. When viewed in line with the minoritised dads worker’s role and job description, we can also understand this as involving, more specifically, the improvement of professionals’ and decision makers’ knowledge and practice to support *minoritised* and/or diverse young dads.

Since being in role, NEYDL’s minoritised dads worker has engaged in various activities with professionals and decision makers, travelling across the North East attempting to

challenge, change and support professionals in imbedding good practice which is also inclusive of ethnically diverse communities. He has delivered training workshops, spoken at conferences and team meetings, and met with practitioners, managers and CEOs of relevant organisations. This has included, for example, delivering workshops and training in Newcastle to 88 professionals identified as dads champions, and speaking at the 1001 Critical Days Conference (professionals in attendance ranging from health visitors to council to talking therapies).

The minoritised dads worker has also engaged with other professionals working with the dads he's supported, which has led to improved knowledge and practice concerning the support of minoritised young dads and there have been impacts evidenced from such work. Whilst supporting a young minoritised dad whose two bi-racial children were being adopted, for example, the minoritised dads worker challenged the adoption board's decision to place the children with a white British couple, without anything being put in place for the children to learn about their ethnic heritages as they grew up. Feedback received from the social worker involved suggests that this had made them rethink their own practice and they would be implementing changes in their future practice. Furthermore, as a result of this, the adoption agencies concerned asked the minoritised dads worker to be involved in their training delivery, in the future, with regards to EDI and improving knowledge and practice amongst their professionals.

The minoritised dads worker has also been working to build partnerships with Black, Asian and minority communities (addressing Point 5 on NEYDL's EDI strategy, Objective 1 to *Build more mutually beneficial partnerships with Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities*). Some of this has involved him capitalising on his existing connections and networks and this has led to some new activities - there has been, for example, an arranged football match between NEYDL dads and a Nigerian church's football team.

4.2 Engaging and supporting minoritised young dads

Firstly, with regards to engaging minoritised young dads, success in identifying and accessing these dads has predominantly been through traditional referral routes. Whilst there remain some challenges with regards to this (discussed below), this comes as unexpected given the *Diverse Dads* (2021) report's finding that traditional referral routes are often mistrusted by minoritised young dads. However, this does speak to the involvement of NEYDL's wider staff team in nurturing such traditional referral pathways for minoritised young dads, whilst also demonstrating how these young men are wanting to engage in the mainstream service offer in their locality.

In terms of the support received, the feedback from the dads interviewed was overwhelmingly positive. The minoritised dads worker, and NEYDL more broadly, were seen by the dads as not only providing them with vital support but they saw direct impacts because of this engagement both in relation to themselves and on their relationships with their children. The dads highlighted a range of activities and opportunities now open to them because of being supported by the minoritised dads worker and engaging with NEYDL more broadly. The dads spoke of becoming involved

in, for example, NEYDL's Discord video gaming group, completing various courses (including paediatric first aid), attending social activities with other dads, family days out, and stay and play sessions. Some of the dads felt such activities had led to them making friends with other young dads (Outcome 1 *Improve young dads' relationships with [...] peers*). Two of the dads had also become involved in NEYDL's AmbassaDADS community leaders programme and one spoke of attending, and receiving awards at, NEYDL's annual awards ceremony.

The dads said their general confidence had increased since engaging with the minoritised dads worker:

“He's helped me to basically stay confident because at that time I was just down. He just basically got me to get my energy and confidence up, smile and that's it really”.

“I just think without them I might not be the same kind of...like, I'd still be a happy dad. But I just won't have that confidence”.

Some of the dads also commented on how engaging with the minoritised dads worker had impacted positively on their mental health.

“He's also helped us with my mental health as well, like getting us out house and stuff like meeting for like a cup of coffee or something. Like just checking up on us pretty much every day or every day we can and stuff like that”.

For one dad this positive impact on their mental health had contributed to them gaining employment:

“It was a big impact on me being a dad, but now maybe just [as] a person. I've got myself a job now and my mental health is a lot better because of NEYDL [...] They've made us feel a lot more happier than what I used to be [...] And they've made us feel like I can do stuff because previously my depression was really bad, like I didn't want to leave the house and stuff like that”.

Issues such as low confidence, poor mental health, or unemployment can impact young dads' ability to be the dad they want to be and at times 'be there' for their children (Ladlow et al, 2023). It logically follows, then, that improvements in such areas will contribute positively on dads' parenting and consequently on their children. Receiving parenting advice and support from NEYDL had also contributed positively:

“[Since] becoming a part of NEYDL, I've become a lot more of a fun dad [...] I've become more interactive [with my children]. I know now more things to do, more places to go, different coping mechanisms for certain behaviours and it's definitely improved. So, I'm now seen as fun dad. I'm not just a grumpy dad who tells us off. I'm fun dad”.

Dads spoke too of how the support received had been inclusive with regards to disabilities. An example of this was NEYDL's adaptation of ways of communicating with dads:

"I got diagnosed with ADHD. [NEYDL] make things more easier to understand and not like an overload of information all the time, because that would be quite a lot sometimes for myself [...] like if there's certain things on during the week or the upcoming month, they'll put in a little bit there rather than sending the full itinerary out [...] so it's a lot easier to look at dates and see if you're available for whatnot".

The minoritised dads worker had played a key role in facilitating minoritised dads exploring their own identities and heritage. One minoritised dad, for example, had grown up unaware of his heritage. The minoritised dads worker was able to recognise this, and he supported the dad in exploring this, even taking him to his first Black barbers. The dad, because of this support, was able to recognise his ethnic identity in a new way. Another dad spoke about how he had previously been bullied for his skin colour, but that the minoritised dads worker had helped him "embrace [his] culture" and, similarly, another dad reported increased confidence concerning his skin colour and being "mixed race" as a result of the support provided. This really does highlight the value of professionals who are not only culturally competent but also confident in discussing issues pertaining to race and identity, and racism. This kind of 1-1 learning by the dads facilitated by the minoritised dads worker, could be built upon as a part of NEYDL's dedicated EDI learning programme for dads (EDI Strategy, Objective 2 - *Develop a learning programme for everyone to further increase our collective awareness of EDI*). Coincidentally, the only recommendation for improvement which came from the interviews was feedback from one dad who said he would welcome even *more* opportunities for learning about his heritage and these being provided by NEYDL at an organisational level, in addition to the learning received in 1-1 sessions with the minoritised dads worker.

When NEYDL were recruiting for their minoritised dads' worker, their recruitment material specified that they were looking for a man *from a minoritised community*. Engaging with a support worker who was themselves from minoritised community was raised as important by one of the dads interviewed who spoke of being supported by the postholder:

"He's not just your old normal English dad. He's a person of different background, a different background where obviously he'll understand the family differences".

Whilst existing research is conflicted on the degree to which shared identities between a beneficiary and support worker is beneficial, the importance of this to minoritised young dads was also expressed by the minoritised dads worker in his own interactions with dads new to NEYDL. Thought might be given then to how this might be

communicated to minoritised young dads by those referring them into the service and through the promotional/information publicly available about/by NEYDL.

This also speaks to NEYDL's EDI Strategy (Objective 1 – *Continue to increase diversity across the charity: young dads, volunteers, staff and trustees*) regarding representation amongst their own staff and the importance of (potential) beneficiaries seeing themselves in the professionals who are engaging with and supporting them. There is also added value of, for example, the minoritised dads worker presence within NEYDL engaging with and building relationships with predominantly White British young dads, as part of NEYDL's mainstream service office, to foster understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity as well as addressing the undercurrent of racism which exists in the region. In a similar manner, two of NEYDL's young dads workers are women, which is unusual for a single gender focused service but again speaks to that diverse representation and understanding. Moreover, 35% of the charity's workforce possess lived experience of young fatherhood, 7% are LGBTQIA+ and 21% identify as disabled. Attesting to NEYDL's commitment towards increasing diversity across the charity when looking at the diversity of their Trustees, 18% are ethnically diverse, 27% are female, 18% are LGBTQIA+ and 45% identify as disabled.

The interviews with young minoritised dads highlighted their own experiences concerning representation amongst the demographics of NEYDL beneficiaries, recognising how they saw themselves as a minority. One dad, commenting on his skin colour, said:

“when I first joined [NEYDL] I did feel like ‘why am I the only one here?’”

The dads did feel this was changing and saw this as impacting positively on their level of feeling comfortable within their NEYDL peer group:

“I think ever since there's been like more dads like me coming in, I felt more comfortable because previously it was all white dads and stuff. But now there's me and then one dad who is mixed race as well, so that's made us feel like a lot more comfortable and stuff like that”.

Experiences, such as those noted above, really speak to the need for NEYDL to continue the positive work they've been engaging in to continue diversifying their reach and also thinking how else they might increase the visibility of minoritised young dads in their outward facing presence.

5. Barriers and Challenges

Barriers and challenges experienced to date with the young minoritised dads project were identified from the interview data with the minoritised dads worker and the data with the external stakeholders interviewed. When referring to minoritised young dads, minoritised here concerns ethnic minoritisation, reflecting a key focus of the

minoritised dads worker's work over the last 18 months. A key challenge has been in reaching higher numbers of young minoritised dads. One of the recommendations from *Diverse Dads* (Diverse Dads Collaborative, 2021) report was to consider friends, family and communities with regards to reaching young minoritised dads as research indicates that traditional referral routes – via health and social care services – are often mistrusted by minoritised young dads. The minoritised dads worker has indeed been exploring such alternative routes in his outreach whilst also maintaining relationships with local professionals. Despite what was suggested by the research, referrals by traditional routes (e.g. professionals) have featured more prominently than, for example, self-referrals. Despite this, there have been persisting challenges in increasing the number of referrals professionals are making of young minoritised dads, despite these young dads being known to the professionals. An anecdotal example of this from NEYDL being that in the last 6 months there have been over ninety young dads passing through a local hospital's maternity ward with three of these young dads being asylum seekers, yet none of these dads have been referred to NEYDL. Thought needs to be given as well to dynamics at play which might increase the likelihood of minoritised young dads being 'hidden'.

A recurring experience by the minoritised dads worker has been professionals not following through on referrals after acknowledging to the minoritised dads worker that they were engaging with such dads. The external stakeholders considered that possible reasons for this might include a lack of prioritisation or even bias against the minoritised young dads work being done. There was also a suggestion there could be a worry amongst professionals that by referring into NEYDL, the young men they were engaging with would be 'taken away' from them. A further issue concerned the eligibility of some of the dads who were being referred into the service, with the minoritised dads worker being asked if he could work with minoritised dads who fell outside of NEYDL's age bracket (e.g. older minoritised dads). All of this points to the continued need for what might be considered a work culture shift in changing the way professionals think about and approach their engagement with young minoritised dads – something the minoritised dads worker has been exploring through his work – as well as continuing to raise awareness of NEYDL's offer and who this is aimed at. Furthermore, when referrals of young minoritised dads do take place, the minoritised dads worker noted that the context of these are particularly challenging, often involving complex needs and situations.

Another challenge was presented concerning the prevalence of referrals through more specialist referral pathways. There appears a failure of more specialist services – those with a focus on supporting minoritised communities – to identify and refer young fathers from within their own communities. There is something here, then, about the failure of more specialist services to 'get behind' this work and actively identify young dads from within their own communities.

Insights from the minoritised dads worker also highlighted the importance of wider context compounding the work NEYDL are doing. There is a recognition here of the

challenges of working within hostile contexts; contexts in which racial tensions exist. Since NEYDL appointed their minoritised dads worker, there have been various local and national incidents – the riots in Newcastle in 2024, for example – and the minoritised dads worker raised how several of the minoritised dads he worked with had reported a nervousness in manoeuvring in public as well as himself feeling unease when out on visits. Thought then needs to be given to how such wider contexts can pose a barrier for the young minoritised dads engaging with NEYDL but also impact the professionals navigating work within it.

6. Conclusion

As reported here, there is much to evidence NEYDL achieving a number of their outcomes (see, Evaluation Framework), particularly Outcome 1 (*Improve young dads' relationships...*), Outcome 2 (*Improve young dads' mental health and wellbeing*) and Outcome 3 (*Improve young dads' skills (life skills, parenting skills, education, employment)*). There is much evidence from the demographic data of NEYDL achieving Outcome 4 concerning increased reach especially with disabled groups and with a particular mention of neurodiverse young dads, though continued work is required on increasing the percentages of LGBTQ+ and ethnic minoritised dads in relation to the overall cohort of dads engaging with NEYDL. There are some recommendations made below concerning how this might be taken forward. Work towards Objectives 1 and 2 particularly of NEYDL's EDI Strategy was identified in this Evaluation. A number of the recommendations made below align with Objectives 3 and 4 of the EDI Strategy. Overall, it was clear from the interviews with dads how much they value NEYDL and the support provided to them. The stakeholder interviews attested as well to the positive work NEYDL were engaged in as well as their commitment to embedding EDI throughout their offer.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Demographic data

- NEYDL staff to ensure demographic data is captured and stored in the database, rather than held in the working knowledge of staff (referring specifically to the example of 'Transgender' data referred to earlier).
- To more easily be able to distinguish in the demographic data what number of dads were new dads to NEYDL in that last year for a more nuanced picture of changes.
- Greater recognition of identity as neither fixed nor static. Consider whether retrospective changes to the demographic data collected is actionable. Some dads, for example, might not recognise themselves as a particular ethnicity, for example, until after support and awareness being built or they may hide their ethnicity due to lack of confidence or previous experiences of racism, bullying etc.
- Some additional categorisation to be considered for inputting demographic data into the database. With regards to ethnicity, 'Showman' to be added (in line with a dropdown option under 'White – Other' now used by the Census). With regards to gender identity, have 'Genderqueer' and 'Non-binary' as distinct, separate options.
- There are issues with using regional benchmarks for LGBTQ+ data when the regional data, as NEYDL recognises, does not include those who are Trans. Are there any scoping activities that NEYDL could engage in to try and get a clearer sense of this demographic in the region?

7.2 Working with professionals and decision makers

- Continue strategic work with local professionals whilst also making clear the focus of the work at hand, recognising that work culture shifts do take time.
- Consider whether further exploration is needed of why professionals do not follow through with 'promised' referrals. Would a focus group with some local professionals help to understand the situation here better?

7.3 Reaching, engaging and supporting young minoritised dads

- To continue to have EDI as a standing item in team meetings and board meetings and ensure EDI becomes a standing item in NEYDL staff supervision so that barriers and achievements can continue to be highlighted and understood.
- Continue to explore learning opportunities with dads to explore their identities (recognising how this too might impact on clearer identification in the demographic data). The 1-1 learning by the dads facilitated by the minoritised dads worker could be built upon as a part of NEYDL's dedicated EDI learning programme for dads.
- Consideration of NEYDL's presence outwardly and who is made visible and represented. The photographs currently on NEYDL's website's front page, for example might be considered to reflect a greater diversity of not only young

fathers but also staff members (thinking about diversity in terms of ethnicity particularly).

- With regards to increasing reach of young dads who are trans, build and draw upon relationships with organisations who might already be engaging with these dads.
- With dads who are disabled – particularly those who are neurodiverse - making up such a large proportion of NEYDL’s overall cohort of dads, consider and share what good practice is already taking place amongst NEYDL staff for supporting these young dads and explore how else support can be tailored to their specific needs.
- Related to above, to explore a greater focus on the support needs of neurodiverse young dads as a core feature of a minoritised young dads service offer going forward (particularly given the size of this cohort and their unmet needs).

8. References

Diverse Dads Collaborative (2023) *Researching inclusive support for (young) fathers: A community led study, Project Report*. University of Lincoln/North East Young Dads and Lads Project.

Ladlow, L., Tarrant, A. and Way, L. (2023) *A Dynamic Perspective of Young Fathers' Well-Being. Predictive and protective factors across their mental health pathways*. Briefing Paper 4. Following Young Fathers Further. University of Lincoln.