

Case Study: Vikki Lowther, Primary School Librarian, Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service

Men in School at St Anne's Primary School

Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service offer professional librarians to primary schools on a part-time basis. Vikki Lowther works for the Library Service and one of her schools is St Anne's Primary. She launched a group specifically for fathers and male carers at the school to celebrate the influence they can have on both their children and the school, and to encourage them to read with their children. The school has a number of pupils being brought up by just their dads but it also recognised the huge influence that a male role model can have on the lives of all children. The project was designed to encourage a greater involvement in order to benefit the dads /male carers, their children and the school community. The focus of the project was male involvement in school life but building in a strong element of encouraging dads /male carers to read for pleasure with their children.

Four events have been run this year:

1. Bring Your Dad to School Day- All father figures were invited to the launch event; they were able to visit their children's classroom and then spend the rest of the afternoon with Wapping FC coaches with refreshments afterwards. At least 80 father figures attended. The session included a discussion of the benefits of reading for pleasure and a reading pledge to read with their child for 10 minutes a day

2. Breakfast Together - This was a great opportunity for father figures to enjoy a delicious breakfast with their child/children and read together from the range of reading matter supplied i.e. comics, newspapers, picture books and non-fiction books.

3. Word Up - The spoken word artist, Adisa, was invited in for an event where he worked with father figures and their children to create and deliver poetry/rap. This session was followed by refreshments.

4. Mad Science - The company, Mad Science, was invited in for a fun-filled science show/workshop that the children enjoyed with their

father figures. This was also followed by refreshments and looking at science books their father figures. This was also followed by refreshments and looking at science books.

These events were been much more successful and well supported than Vikki imagined they would be. The time and day of each event was varied to accommodate as many dads as possible and there are two more activities planned over the next term, one around Maths and one a final celebration.

This series of activities is designed to engage fathers in the education of their children, improve community relations and parent participation, and encourage them to be role models for reading for their children. The school wanted fathers and male carers to be more comfortable around the school in general and in the school library.

There were several pieces of evidence that inspired this project:

- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, State of Victoria Australia (2012) Reading to Young Children: A Head-Start in Life, www.education.vic.gov.au/documents/about/research/readtoyoungchild.pdf.
- Clark, Christina (2007) Why it is important to involve parents in their children's literacy development – a brief research summary, National Literacy Trust, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496346.pdf>.
- Science Daily (2017) Reading with children starting in infancy gives lasting literacy boost, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/05/170504083146.htm.

The outcome of these events is that they have benefited both the children and the father figures. The father figures have commented that they would never have spent so much time in school if it wasn't for these events; dads clearly feel part of the school community now. One quote from a child regarding the breakfast together event: *"I was hoping he would come, I don't get that much time to have a one to one with my dad so it was good to spend time with him."*

After Vikki discussed the benefits of reading for pleasure and encouraged dads to complete Reading Pledges at the launch, dads have had the opportunity to assess how they could get more involved in reading with their children. The variations between each event have given children and their father figure the chance to take part in an enrichment activity that they may not necessarily have had the opportunity to do. From the evaluation questionnaire distributed, 89% of parents said they feel more part of the school community now.

Some comments from fathers:

- *It brings us together and I as a father have more contact with the school*
- *It has given us a connection with school life*
- *It just means we spend good time together at school*
- *Time to bond together*
- *We enjoy our time together which leads to my children being able to approach me with home learning*
- *It makes her really happy to see me get involved*
- *It has helped us bond*
- *Given us both confidence*

Tips:

1. Do not underestimate the popularity of these events!
2. Hold events at different times of day and vary the programme to give more fathers the opportunity to participate.