



Helping each other to thrive

Evaluation of the Dudley Family Hubs Peer Support Programme
July 2025



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The vision

Peer support involves people with shared experiences helping each other, offering understanding and encouragement, and fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Our vision for Dudley is the creation of a **'community that cares for each other'**, one where parents and caregivers are supported to give their children the best possible start in life, one that enhances their future outcomes, particularly among communities and groups that currently receive less support.

The Dudley Family Hubs peer support network incorporated local services, voluntary and faith sectors to co-produce a network of peer support.

Groups were developed to provide targeted support to underserved communities including:

- LGBTQ+
- Dads
- Young families
- People experiencing financial hardship
- Minority ethnicity communities

The peer support network offered a place for local people to connect and support each other. This enabled local people to actively support the Dudley Borough Council's Family Hub Network and Start for Life Programmes.

Key points

- Caregivers felt supported by their peers.
- Peer support helped improve mental wellbeing.
- Peer support allowed some parents to build their confidence and re-enter the workforce.
- Caregivers shared knowledge and learnt valuable skills.

Making connections

"I am MEGA happy to have found such amazing people!"

-Aspire4U attendee

Building connections with other people that are experiencing similar challenge, can create a sense of belonging and foster a positive community.

"I was nervous about going, but the other moms were welcoming. We had a nice time talking about my labour and how early my baby arrived. I clicked with one of the other moms and am hoping to meet up with her soon."

-Advance Beyond CIC attendee

Parents and carers shared how the friendships they built helped them emotionally.

"Things are not as bad as you think, there is always someone who has been there and done it who can help you."

-Lions Boxing attendee

"The group has provided me with social support at a time that is wonderful and life changing but at times incredibly challenging."

-Moms Mindful Hub attendee

Volunteer Peer Supporters saw first hand the impact of the community on people who attended the peer support hubs. They shared how this support quickly became invaluable to the parents and carers.

"The peer support is paramount for new parents in Dudley. Many have stated they would feel lost without the groups and support from other parents."

-Generation Impact volunteer

***"I've found my people, my mom people.
The ones who are going on their own unique journey,
The ones that don't judge you, the ones that get it.
This mom life is worth it but my word, it's incredibly hard."***

-Real Mama Tribe attendee

Mental health

"I feel a lot happier"

-Apni Zarrorate Community Network attendee

"It's a place for Moms to talk about anything."

-Baby Bank volunteer

The primary focus of the peer support programme was to foster connections between local parents and carers so they can support each other through the ups and downs of parenting and the significant life changes that come with becoming a parent.

"I have attended a few talking therapies in the past and never really felt heard. However, I felt you held the space well and listened to what I had to say."

-Advance Beyond CIC attendee

Feedback from attendees suggest that there was a positive influence on their emotional wellbeing. Both volunteers and attendees spoke about the benefits of openly speaking about mental health, parental concerns and their experiences.

"It was a good programme that helped me to open up and share more and how to deal with different situations."

-Living Springs attendee

"Themes that have arisen are mental health and previous experiences that impact engagement with other groups."

-CHADD volunteer

"As a parent, life can feel overwhelming at times. The session gave me practical tools to manage stress and reminded me that taking a moment for myself is not selfish but essential."

-Advance Beyond CIC attendee

We asked the volunteers to summarise themes that arose during group sessions. They told us that mental health and having a place to talk come up frequently. The nature of the peer support groups provides a safe space for parents to talk about their mental health struggles, feel understood and work together to explore solutions.

"[Parents/Carers] feel overwhelmed and value time to journal, reflect, think and process their emotions."

Baby Bank Volunteer-

Key points

- Peer support provides a safe space to talk about mental health.
- Groups can offer guidance on processing emotions.
- A different way of approaching mental health.

Finding a 'village' of support

'Tracy' found the weekly walks with Without a Trace CIC to be extremely helpful during her postpartum journey. The group provided social connection with other adults. Being able to socialise with other adults whilst also being able to bring her baby helped create a 'village' of support.

"The group allows a space to visit with others, I like that the group is very welcoming and approachable. I can talk and share my thoughts with like minded people. The time after the walk is lovely for me and my baby, I enjoy catching up with others and space for my baby to play.

I can have some exercise and socialise with others. I like the Monday walk because I can bring my baby while enjoying a social walk.

*It means everything to me – going on maternity and going back to work can be a lonely place. The group helped me become more confident with myself and gives me a purpose to go out and be part of a group. **It's a village that I needed while on maternity leave.***

- 'Tracy' Without a Trace CIC attendee



Cost of living

Volunteers at the peer support groups said that financial pressures were discussed within the groups. The pressure of the cost of living can be felt more keenly by new parents who have to manage reduced income on maternity or paternity pay, cost of child care and the cost of accessing other services.

"Generally, parents are expressing struggles with the cost of living, accessing support through other services, and managing work and family."

-Aspire4U volunteer

"I struggle to access [other parent and child groups] due to the financial costs."

-Aspire4U volunteer

Financial difficulties exacerbated issues faced by some of the parents. This led to increased isolation and feelings of low mood.

"Cost of living is making it harder for me to do social activities which is impacting on my wellbeing."

-Genesis Tutoring and Education Consultants attendee

Parents and carers came together to share information that could help with the cost of living. This showed the impact of having people who understand the unique pressures felt by other parents and carers and the ability to provide a safe space where people can talk about money. Usually a sensitive subject between peers, the groups fostered support.

"Moms are enjoying having someone to talk to and the discussion tends to steer towards places to visit that are cheap and or free groups."

-Baby Bank volunteer

Despite the positive impact of having a supportive environment to share tips on the cost of living, sudden changes around the Christmas period financially impacted some parents and carers. One volunteer said they have run a workshop to help families budget, however some families' budgets were impacted by changes to benefit entitlements.

"Despite offering a Christmas budget workshop, a number of families reported severe cuts to their benefit entitlements before Christmas. This has plunged families into financial crisis as they were not prepared for this sudden loss of income."

-Top Church Training volunteer

Key points

- Peer support provides space to talk about financial troubles.
- Families can share practical tips and their local knowledge.
- Professional guidance on budgeting and managing benefits could aid the peer support groups with targeted advice.

Employment

The peer support groups provided a place for parents and carers to receive encouragement, training and guidance on obtaining or returning to employment.

Returning to work after having a baby presents unique challenges. The peer support groups were able to understand these challenges and parents could work with volunteers and each other to develop solutions.

"Jane, a single mother of two, joined the Connect for Success programme with the hope of finding stable employment. Through the workshops, she gained confidence in her abilities and learned valuable interview skills. With the support of one-to-one coaching, Jane successfully secured a part-time job at a local café. She is now able to provide for her family and feels more empowered than ever."

-Top Church Training Case Study

"Mark, who had been out of work for several years, participated in the Connect for Success programme to improve his employability. The personal development activities helped him rediscover his strengths and interests. Mark is now volunteering at our community coffee shop, where he applies the skills he learned and is working towards a full-time position."

-Top Church Training Case Study

By giving parents and carers a safe space to develop their skills and try new things, some have discovered passions and are using their new skills to seek new career opportunities.

"I wanted to thank you for all your support so far and for bringing my passion for play therapy back. I started to lose my passion while working and then while being off on the start of my maternity leave. And now I'm starting to get excited again about a new project and journey. I know it's just the start but thank you for your encouragement."

-Advance Beyond CIC

Parents said they were grateful for the new government changes to childcare but also felt this meant they were rushed back into work.

"The new childcare cost support coming in at nine months is great but it feels like we are being rushed back to work. It almost feels like the government are saying 'okay you've had your nine months, now get back to work and be productive.'"

-Moms Mindful Hub

Sarah's success

Sarah, a mother of three, struggled with low self-esteem and lacked the confidence to seek employment.

The support she received from our Family Support worker after attending the Coffee mornings encouraged her to engage onto the Connect for Success programme.

Sarah felt the course provided her with the necessary tools and support to build her self-confidence.

Sarah has told her Family Support Worker that she would like to look into setting up a small home-based business, making and selling handmade crafts. She now aspires to be financially independent and become a role model to her children.

Key points

- Training in a child friendly location offers parents and carers opportunities.
- Returning to work after raising a child presents unique challenges that should be addressed.



Learning

Volunteers discovered that there was sometimes a lack of knowledge amongst parents on parenting skills, budgeting and coping skills.

By providing a place for people to come together and learn new skills, peer support groups enable parents and carers to expand their skills and knowledge, and support them to care for their children in the crucial first 1001 days*.

Parents and carers learnt:

- Baby massage
- Budgeting
- Coping skills
- Breastfeeding

"We love baby massage! It's a really relaxed class and a special bonding experience for you and the baby."

-Generation Impact attendee

"[Rob] has attended every session and has demonstrated a keen interest to learn new skills."

-One Love Community and Arts CIC volunteer

Volunteer Peer Supporters were also able to grow and learn through the groups.

"I'm really enjoying working with Generation Impact and learning new skills. I have recently completed a baby massage course and I'm feeling confident to take a class. This is also helping towards my college course."

-Generation Impact volunteer

"I was excited to be able to offer the same support I'd had from the people around me."

-Real Mama Tribe volunteer

We heard stories of people who attended groups, learnt new skills and are now looking forward to becoming a volunteer Peer Supporter to share what they have learnt with others.

Key points

- **Sharing skills offers parents and carers new knowledge and increases their confidence.**
- **Building a community encourages parents and carers to share knowledge with their peers.**

**The first 1001 days are the 1001 critical days through pregnancy to the age of two. These critical days are when the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid down (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021).*

Volunteering

"Volunteering on the programme has opened my eyes to what other moms are facing and has made me feel less alone."

-Strike Youth volunteer

The Peer Support programme was delivered by trained volunteer Peer Supporters. These Peer Supporters were people in the community who had the experiences and skills needed to relate to other parents and carers who may be facing difficulties. By utilising the knowledge and skills of the volunteers, and by providing training to give them the skills and confidence, they were able to help other people in their community.

"I started volunteering for Mom's Mindful Hub on a casual basis a few months ago and I loved it so much I have become an official volunteer. I help to set up groups and to run activities with the parents and children. I have really enjoyed helping out at the workshops, the Halloween one was my favourite. The range of activities on offer plus the quality of the support is second to none and all of this has inspired a passion within me to work in the community sector."

-Real Mama Tribe volunteer

Some Volunteer Peer Supporters were unaware of the value their experiences held. By providing training and encouraging the local community to volunteer, skills were built beyond the attendees.

"I'm so glad you asked me to help, I didn't know I had anything to offer."

-Revival Fires volunteer

"There is a wide range of experiences in the group and the more mature members are able to mentor others which, in my opinion, has a real positive benefit."

-Without a Trace CIC volunteer

Some attendees of Peer Support groups grew in confidence and then trained as volunteers to use their experiences to help other parents and caregivers. The Peer Support programme allows for a continuation of support as attendees and volunteers grow in experience and skills.

Key points

- Volunteering created a cyclical process whereby people who attended peer support groups could use the skills they learnt to help others.
- Volunteering was a positive experience.

Single parents

Single parent households make up 12% of all households in Dudley borough (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Single parents are more likely to experience difficulties with parenting, including experiencing financial hardship and poor mental health (Robinson et al., 2023).

Peer support can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation in single parents.

Feelings of loneliness in single parents can come from different places. For one attendee, Kaylee, she felt judged by other people:

Kaylee, a single mom of two children felt overwhelmed going out with her children as she felt people were judging her. Kaylee settled into her peer support group and talked with other parents and volunteers about how to cope. The peer support group responded by ensuring two people attend the group specifically to ensure single moms are supported.

Kaylee's story highlights that single parents have a unique experience that may require additional support and understanding. By providing tailored peer support, single parents can grow in confidence.

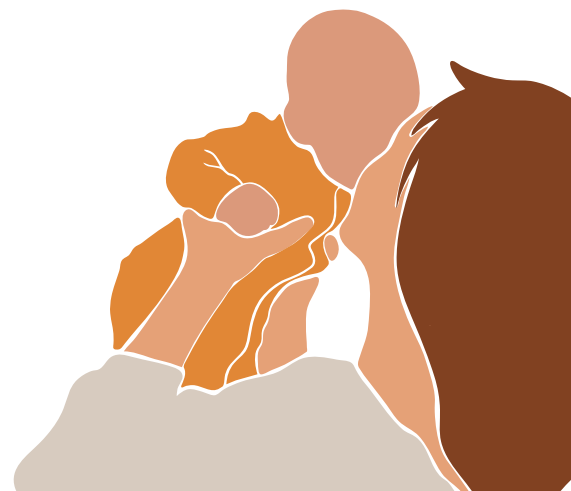
"I have gained my independence living on my own with my son for the first time and I can see that my confidence is growing."

-CHADD attendee

Key points

- Tailored support for single parents is needed to provide unique understanding and guidance.
- Peer support can help reduce feeling of loneliness and isolation in single parents.

12% of households in Dudley have a single parent.



Dads

There are around 2400 single fathers in Dudley borough. The Dads Included project found that local dads, both single parents and coparents, often struggle to find support that encourages their role as a father (Dudley CVS, 2024). The goal of peer support groups was to provide a space where dads could provide this support to each other.

One father who attended peer support, Nathan, explained there is pressure put on dads to “get it right”. He said that different cultures, societal expectations and barriers can make these difficulties worse.

Dads often feel like existing support is not tailored to their needs, and even excludes them altogether. This means that targeted support for dads, and single dads, could provide resources for an often forgotten cohort of parents and care givers in our community.

Dads reported that the support available to them is more focused on how to support their partners and there is little in the way of how to look after themselves. One father shared that the advice and support offered to new dad’s boils down to “Look after your wife and don’t shake the baby”.

“Having the dads group has really helped, the WhatsApp group is a big support. I feel like dads are the lost part when a family have a baby.”

-Strike youth attendee

Dads felt that the peer support helped them to understand how they feel. As men are less likely don't discuss emotions with their peers, peer support provides guidance and a safe place to explore feeling that they wouldn't normally (Wagner and Reifegerste, 2024).

“Both Moms and Dads have found it very helpful speaking to other parents with lived experience.”

-Lions Boxing Volunteer

Key points

- Dads can benefit from peer support as well as moms.
- Peer Support can provide a space for men who feel that existing support for families doesn't recognise their needs.



A place for families

The Peer Support Programme was developed for families and their feedback has led to changes in some of the groups to allow them to serve the community the best.

Childcare often prevented parents and carers from attending groups and activities for themselves. By providing a space where they can bring their children, but not have the children be the focus, was invaluable to providing parents and carers with space to take part in activities, have an adult conversation and take time for themselves.

"Families valued time away from children. Parents found doing crafts recharged them. They had more energy after for their children."

-Living Springs attendee

"It's great place to meet other mums, for my little boy to relax (or indeed play/kickabout depending on his mood!), and to learn some lovely baby massage techniques - and the cuppa at the end is just the icing on the cake."

-Generation Impact attendee

"My little boy has multiple health conditions and needs a oxygen a lot of the time. I love this group because the space is always 100% clean and everyone understands how difficulty it can be being a single parent but the team are really understanding around my sons needs."

-Without a Trace CIC attendee

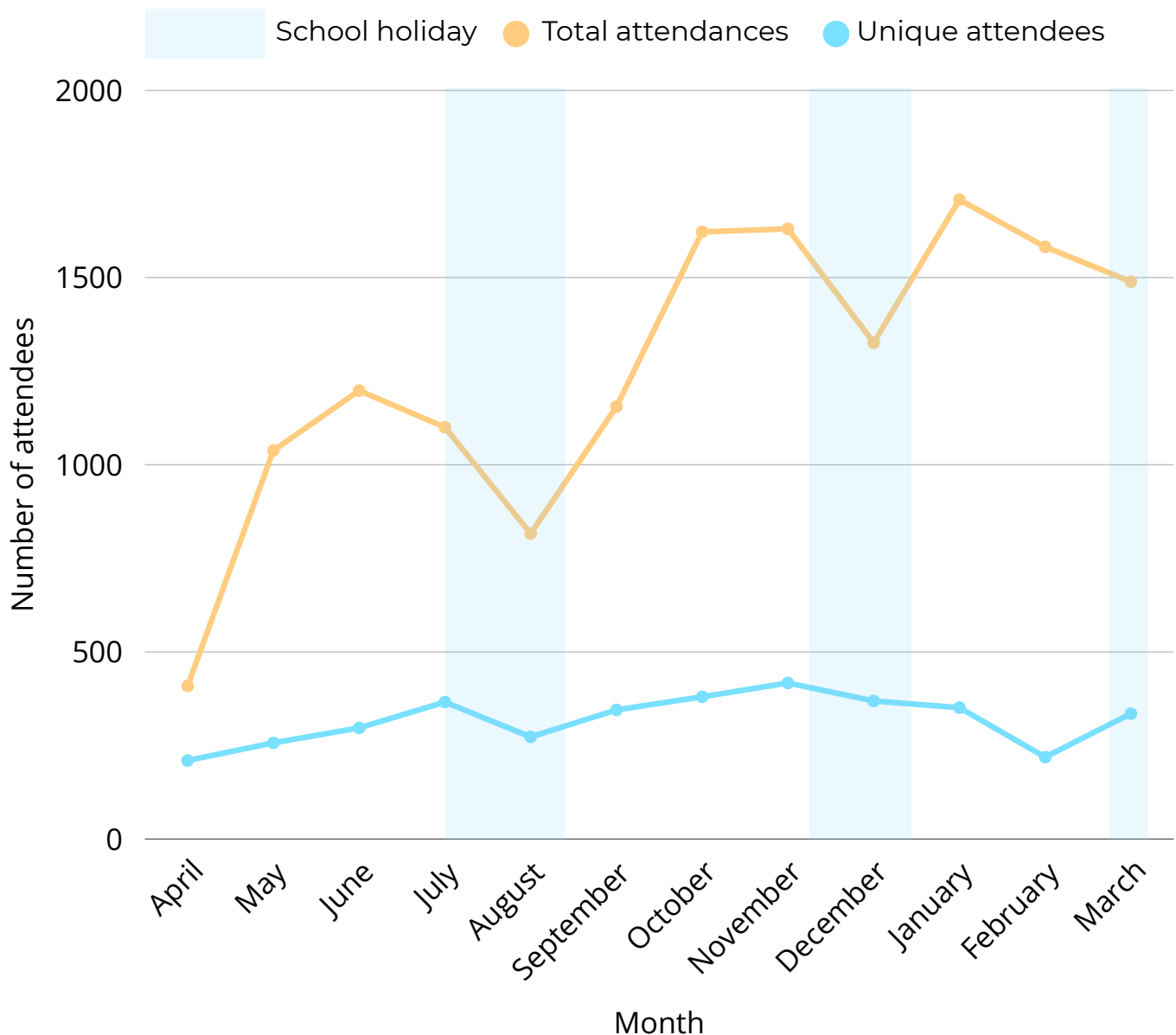
"Sarah has two children ages 1 and 3, who are very active and have tantrums and screaming episodes. She felt overwhelmed going places with them both as she feels people are judging her but she has now settled into the group and we have talked about how to try and cope during this stage. We now have to have two people in the room for the single moms to ensure they are supported."

-Baby Bank volunteer

Key points

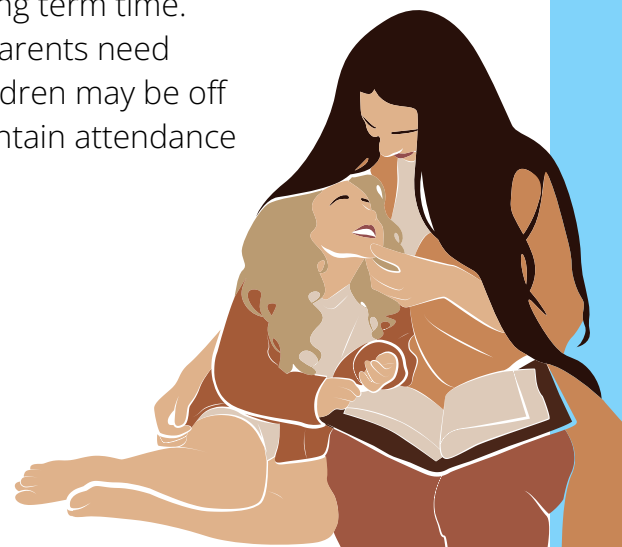
- Adapt to meet the needs of different families.
- Activities for adults and children.
- Groups need enough supporters to provide parents and carers with a break.

Attendance

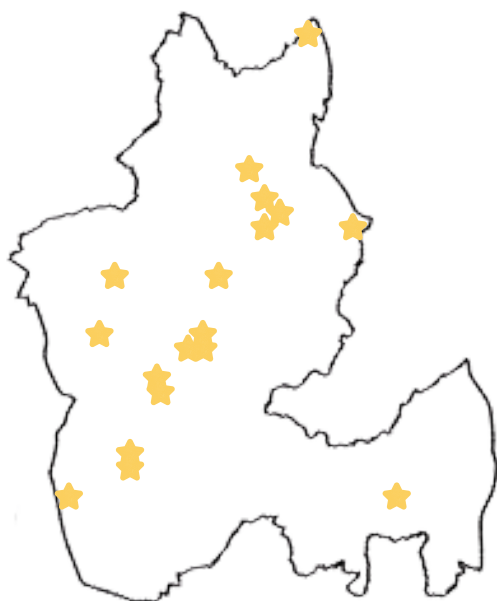


The number of people attending peer support groups grew exponentially in the initial quarter and remained steady in most months during term time. Attendance dropped during school holidays. This suggests parents need more support to attend groups during times when older children may be off school. Providing childcare for older children could help maintain attendance during school holidays.

14,471 attendances



Reaching the whole community

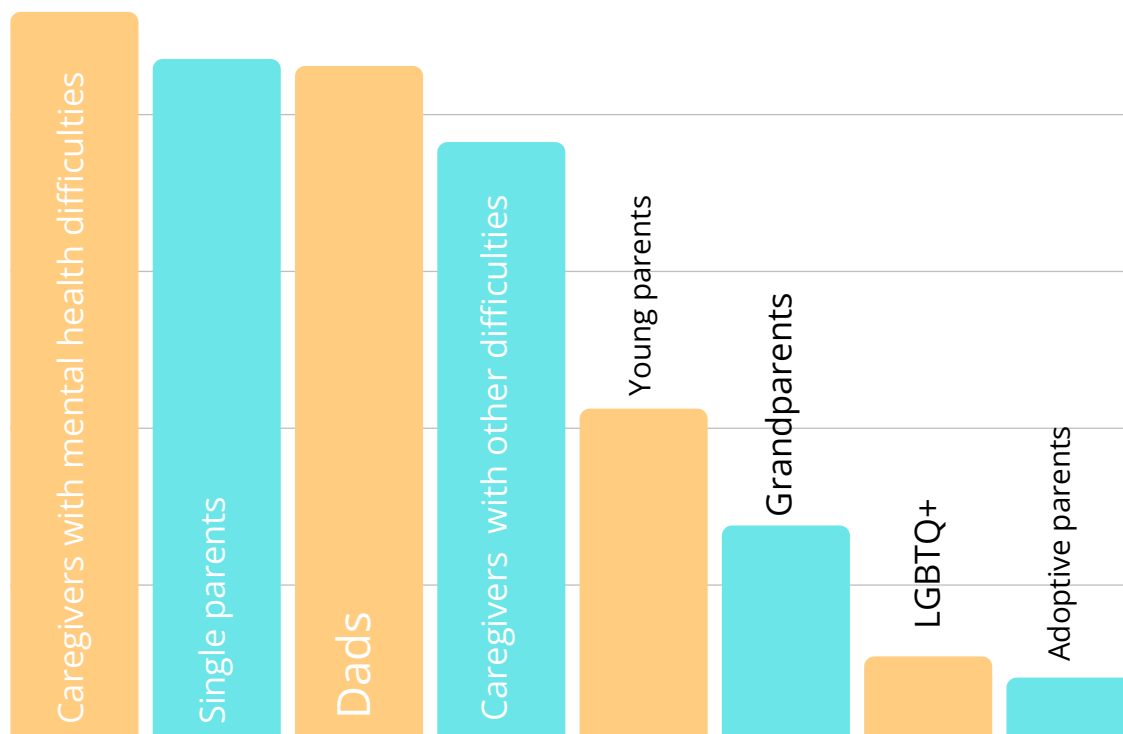


★ Location of peer support hub

The Peer Support programme aimed to reach out to those groups that are typically more isolated or underserved.

Peer support groups were held across the borough, with more groups held in the Dudley centre and Brierley Hill areas.

Attendance by underserved communities is shown below.



Single parents and fathers had the biggest increase in attendance over time. This shows developing a network for those who are less likely to engage with services can encourage attendance.

Challenges & opportunities

The Peer Support Programme presented both success stories and challenges. Parents and carers learnt that they are not alone and that there are other people who have faced similar challenges.

Whilst some of the challenges may be the same, every family is different. Peer Support Groups must have the ability to adapt to the needs of their members.

Examples of adaptations made throughout this programme include: providing a clean space for a child with health conditions, providing additional peer supporters for a single mom with multiple children, changing meeting times to fit around school drop offs and adapting meetings during school holidays.

Attendance was affected by school holidays. Parents and carers who had school aged children face more barriers to attending groups than those without as they had to balance childcare needs of children of different ages.

Future peer support programmes should consider coordinating with other providers that provide support for older children. Particularly during school holidays.

When recruiting Peer Support Volunteers some people may lack the confidence in their own experiences and abilities. Volunteer outreach should focus on promoting the value of personal experience and provide support with training.

A wrap-around peer support service that encompasses: groups for different cohorts, training for volunteers, meets the needs of working parents and care for children whilst parents receive support requires substantial resources. Investment in a comprehensive peer support network that meets the needs of the community provides opportunities for improving wellbeing and cost saving on other services.

"I really just want to thank you for welcoming us into such a special group. Your dedication, care and thoughtfulness really doesn't go unnoticed. This group has been a life line for me and my mental health."

-Moms Mindful Hub attendee



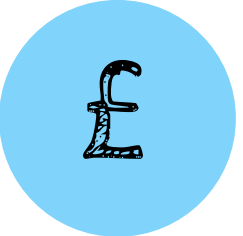
Investing in families

The total number of attendances to Peer Support Groups was, 14471 the total cost of the funding received by peer support groups was £201,088.44. This means the average cost per attendance was £13.90.

The total funding received by the Dudley Safeguarding Children People Partnership in 2023-2024 was £316,003.40 with 20,258 new case contact to Dudley Children's services in 2023.



Targeted approach to support families prior to professional intervention



£13.90

Cost per attendance at peer support

Groups

Thank you to the local charities and community groups that helped to deliver the peer support programme and provide a space for local families to build connections and find support. Thank you also to the peer supporters who undertook training and facilitated the connections created.

£201,088.44 was given to 22 local community groups and charities to run Peer Support groups. The average amount given to a peer support group was £9140.38.

The peer support programme supported 20 local groups to provide much needed support for a range of local parents and carers. Details of the groups are listed below.

Group	Target Group	Description
Advance Beyond CIC	Parents / Carers	
Apni Zarrorate Community Network	Parents / Carers	Build the confidence of parents and caregivers, reduce social isolation and provide trained peer support to those finding it difficult to cope with the transition to parenthood.
Aspire4U	Parents/carers from minority ethnicities. Neurodiverse parents. Adoptive parents/foster carers.	Peer support groups for people with lived experience
Brierley Hill Baby Bank	Young moms and prenatal	We would also like to start new parent classes for single, coupled, same sex, previous bereaved families young mums sessions (under 21) with peer to peer support.
CHADD	Parents / Carers	Targetted support to young parents (particularly mums) to offer 1:1 support and group activities around life skills led by volunteers.
Generation Impact	Young parents/carers	Support for younger parents.carers with support around mental health and mindful activities.
Genesis Tutoring and Education Consultants		Parent support group for expanding nit and natter offer, provision on the side for young people to allow space for parents to meet. Second group seems aimed at young people.

Groups

Group	Target Group	Description
Lions Boxing	Parents / Carers	
Living Springs	Parents / Carers	Initial training for volunteers to support other volunteers, in addition wellbeing group for young mums, single parents who have been discriminated against
Moms Mindful Hub	Moms	stay and play wellbeing groups, and a group based outdoors, workshops for perinatal & dads workshops. New groups of 6 weeks turnaround support
New Baby Network	Neurodiverse families and LGBTQ+	One specifically targeting neurodivergent families and one specifically targeting LGBTQ+ families
One Love Community and Arts CIC	BAME Dads	Support peer programme training dads from BAME community to build network of dads, Rotating groups
Real Mama Tribe	Moms	6 different offers varying in activities including soft plays, walking groups, intergenerational, coffee groups.
Revival Fires	Parents / Carers	Parent support group and pregnancy support group
Strike Youth	Moms, Dads, Parents/carers	Dads project. Moms weekly pushchair walks and a parent power gym talk.
Team Pumpkin ABC	Dads	Peer boxing sessions with built in time for peer support around Dads
Time Step Dance	Parents	Music and Melody sessions with time built in for support and any professional input
Top Church Training	Parents / carers	Extension of family work for new parents around self-esteem, parenting skills and support.
Without a Trace CIC	Parents/carers	Buggy sessions in Halesowen
Tough Enough to Care	Men / mental health	

Notes

Names and identifying details have been changed throughout this report to protect the anonymity of parents and caregivers who attend peer support groups.

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