

# The Parenting NETWORK



## Impact Report 2021/22



## Message from the Director

It's been yet another difficult year for families in Portsmouth, just as we were emerging from periods of restrictions and isolation we have all found ourselves facing economic challenges that are putting huge pressures on parents who are struggling to provide for their children.

We live and work in a city that has some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country, most recently being listed as one of the UK's 75 most deprived cities.

Referrals to our Portsmouth Baby Bank project have grown by 330% this year with many families never before accessing a similar service and not knowing where to turn for help. We do not expect this demand to reduce anytime soon, in fact as we move forward into 2023 we anticipate that we will see an increase in those needing support. It is only through the generosity of others that we are able to help so many families in need and we are so very thankful to all those who have supported this vital service that is providing breathing space to so many.

It was an immense relief when we were finally able to open our doors and start welcoming families back into our groups once more. For many children, attending our groups was their first interaction with others outside of their family bubble. Many new parents missed out on those parenting communities that we all know are vitally important in those early days of parenthood and we felt very privileged to be able to offer that experience of connection and reassurance.

All of our groups are facilitated by qualified and experienced professionals who have a passion and love for what they do and we all benefit from being part of a multidisciplinary team with access to a large network of community partners all of whom are committed to supporting positive outcomes for families living in Portsmouth.

Scientists, jungle explorers and iron age settlers have been just a few of the fun, immersive and experiential workshops delivered to hundreds of families through our very popular monthly Mischief Makers project and we look forward to bringing a magical Christmas show to everybody this December.

We have organised and shared some incredible community events with you all this year such as our Jubilee Family Festival which had us all seeking the lost fairy crown or teaming up with the mad hatter in a fashion show for the queen of hearts! We all shared a beautiful warm sunny day in Victoria Park for our community picnic full of games and activities and more recently gathered for a spooktacular Halloween party complete with mummified grown ups! Before this year is out we are looking forward to re-launching our baby massage project which we will be taking into all of our parenting groups as well as directly on an outreach basis into other partner organisations in venues such as supported accommodation for families.

We are thinking big for next year with plans to increase our capacity and reach out to even more families, deliver new and exciting projects and create more opportunities for children to grow and develop!

We have never been more needed!

**Matt Foster, CEO, The Parenting Network**

# The Parenting NETWORK

## Highlights from 2021/22

### Ukraine appeal

Thanks to strong community support we were able to coordinate a huge local effort in the first few weeks of the invasion and facilitated two humanitarian trips to deliver more than 17 tons of aid to Ukrainian refugees crossing the Ukrainian Border. Our experience was watched and followed and later paved the way for other small organisations like ourselves to be able to mount their own aid missions.

### Christmas Pyjama Appeal

Over the last 2 years, thanks to generous local support, we were able to deliver over 530 pairs of Christmas pyjamas and books to children living in refuges across Hampshire over Christmas.

The lockdowns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have seen huge rises in Domestic Abuse with charities reporting a huge surge in demands for their services and sadly more families than ever will be seeking safety in refuges this Christmas.

Most families have fled without notice and have very few belongings. We know that pyjamas and a book will not make a huge difference to the situation many of these families are going through but simple acts of kindness can mean the world and can send a very powerful message.



# Dadzclub

The Parenting Network has five years of experience delivering Dadzclub in Portsmouth & the Isle of Wight. Through this work we have established a strong reputation for our work and have collected a wealth of evidence which demonstrates the need and impact for this work in our local community. This project focuses on reducing isolation, improving access to services and removing stigma around men's mental health (statistics suggest that around 1 in every 10 fathers experience mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression).

A weekly Portsmouth group has been running every Saturday and has a well established following of regular attendees and continues to attract new families. While this is a fantastic, busy and energetic group, we felt that this could be intimidating to some Dads who have not previously attended groups and workshops. In September 2022 we started a new Tuesday Dadzclub, a group designed to provide an entry point, where more 1-2-1 time is available with TPN staff, who can provide support and signposting to other services. Over time, we hope to support Dads to grow in confidence and transition to the wider Dadzclub network of weekend and online groups.

**100%**

of Dad's surveyed in 2022 would recommend Dadzclub!

**More than 500 Dads & 750 children have attended Dadzclub in the last year!**

**100%**

of new Dad's attending Dadzclub have returned for future sessions

"It's been a great place for me to meet other dads, share stories and experiences and see how other dads do it"

Dadzclub member, 2022





In 2022 we piloted a new addition to the Dadzclub programme, a workshop supporting Dads perinatal mental health in partnership with Talking Change.

**"We identified that a significant barrier to fathers accessing support in the perinatal period is not being aware of any support available for their mental health. Many did not identify that they needed support at the time and many others even if they did identify they needed support did not feel comfortable accessing this." - Talking Change**

A pilot workshop was provided for Dads in Portsmouth, to come together, discuss and share experiences and develop a supportive, inclusive community. The session encouraged Dad's to share personal stories and provided opportunities to discuss the challenges of parenthood, as well as seek information from the team at Talking Change about great ways to look after ourselves, our mental health and our families.

Our aim is to support men with mental health support, focusing on reducing isolation, improving access to services and removing stigma around men's mental health.

**Statistics suggest that around 1 in every 10 fathers experience mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression.**

Following this session, we have committed to working in partnership with Talking Change to deliver a monthly Dad's Mental Health Toolkit programme throughout 2022/23.



**Dadzclub groups - Our free healthy eating provision has been a really positive and well received part of our sessions, with everyone coming together to enjoy a tasty & nutritious snack!**



## Case Study

Dad, G, attended our new midweek Dadzclub on advice from his social worker. He had been given emergency full custody of his son the week before. Until then he had limited access to his son and had never taken him out. His life had completely changed overnight and he had to learn to be a full time Dad on the job.

The group was well staffed and one coordinator was able to give his time to listen to G's story.

He was frightened, overwhelmed and had never been to a Dads group before. He was finding it difficult learning the system and going to court to secure custody. He felt isolated and unsure where to turn. He wanted to know if he was parenting correctly and what milestones to expect.

We were able to offer him that group and the opportunity to attend on Saturdays when he felt more comfortable, as it is a larger group. We also offered him the opportunity to join our Mens Toolkit monthly event and help him to connect with other Dad's going through the same thing. He joined the closed facebook group and asked questions in our forum and heard back from other Dad's going through the same thing. He eventually felt confident enough to come to the Saturday groups and connect with others.

He has now signed up to the Toolkit workshops and we are continuing to support him with our partner organisation, Talking Change.

**"This is just what I needed, I felt like a deer in the headlights. I was scared to go to groups, especially as it's all women there. I feel really encouraged, thanks for everything."**

**Dad G, 2022**



Families started on Saturday 30th April 2022. This new programme came from a need from many families who felt there was a lacking of provision available to them on the weekends. Many of the family groups currently running locally, take place on weekdays, which for parents who may work full time or see their children on the weekends, there isn't an opportunity to access these services.

We wanted to provide a welcoming and inclusive group, that is free to attend. The group brings people together to have that all important family bonding time, but also provide an opportunity for parents to meet other parents, combating the isolation they can feel on the weekend - this can particularly be the case for single parents or military families where the spouse is deployed.

Families has evolved and grown over the past 6 months, with many families becoming regulars, and new families joining most weeks.

**Many of the families attending include:**  
Full time working parents  
Single Parents  
Military Parents

**175 families have attended Families since April 2022!**

**"I thought it would just be another playgroup, but it's so much better than that!"**  
Parent, 2022

**There is a gap in the market for this provision!**  
- Parent, 2022





## Case Studies

We had a Forces mum whose partner was on leave before the summer, who found the group a really supportive space to come with her two small children. It was lovely for her to be able to chat with Kelly, who has her own experience of being a Forces partner, and to have the chance to talk about how hard it can be with small children.

We also have a family where the parents have recently separated. They still attend the group, sometimes individually, but also sometimes all together. The group provides somewhere they can do this, and provides consistency for the little girl, who loves coming along, and who has built great relationships with those of us running the sessions.

**"There are so many weekday groups which is great but everything shuts down on weekends. When you're on your own it can make the weekends quite lonely"**  
- Parent, 2022

**"You can come to meet new people, kids can learn new things and explore different activities."**  
- Parent, 2022







Mischief Makers began in April 2021 to provide access to free, inclusive live experiences for the local community in Portsmouth.

Prior to introducing Mischief Makers, we looked at the number of children from lower socio economic backgrounds attending live performances and asked families what would make them more accessible. Many of them cited cost as being a barrier and a perception that it's not for 'people like them'.

Through monthly workshops we have delivered a wide range of artist led performances, workshops and experiences:

- Groovy UV Puppet show
- Spooktakular
- Steel Drums workshops
- Santas Grotto
- Barnicle Bill
- Iron Age Workshop
- Funk Format
- Samba Drums
- Zoo Labs
- Mysterious Challenges

**406 children** have taken part in **Mischief Makers activities in the past year!**

All of the sessions are very well attended, with the majority at full capacity.



# Young Mums' CLUB

Nurturing and supporting young mums in Portsmouth; we work towards tackling isolation and building a supportive network of mums aged up to 25 years old. The Young Mums' Club promotes positive parenting, with the wellbeing of children and parents at the heart of all we do.

Following the success of the Thursday Young Mum's Club at Buckland Family Hub, the project has expanded to create a second weekly session on Monday's at Somerstown Family Hub. This new group is already developing a good following, with new families regularly joining and some families attending both groups!

Our relationship with Talking Change has also enabled us to provide more access to further support and we have taken that a step further this year by bringing this more to the groups. Tamsin from Talking Change is actively engaged with the groups, attending some sessions to provide 1-2-1 support in a space that is safe and comfortable to the Mum's.

"If they just go away knowing that I'm just a normal person, who joins with with playing and singing, and they are able to share that with someone who does need support, then I'm happy"

- Tamsin Rowe, Talking Change

We will continue to build this relationship, recognising the importance of getting past the stigma of accessing support, or admitting you're struggling, and encouraging the mums to access support if they need it.



**Families have attended  
Young Mum's Club 410  
over the past year!**

# Young Mums' CLUB

Supporting mums with accessing the baby bank has been a big part of our role recently, with lots of referrals being made. One mum in particular arrived at group one week and asked if she could have a biscuit or something as she felt light headed. As the conversation continued it turned out that she was really struggling financially at that point, and was barely eating as she hadn't been able to buy food, and wanted to make sure her 18 month old daughter had the food she needed.

We put in an immediate referral to the Baby Bank for basics (nappies, milk & snacks for her daughter), which was brought over from the office before the end of the group. Kelly arranged a food bank voucher for her, and made sure she had what she needed before leaving.

We kept in touch with her over the weekend to make sure she was ok, and provided another bag of food for her daughter the following week.

- Sarah Lewis, TPN



"I was very anxious about taking my son to groups and avoided it at any cost, but this group is so lovely, welcoming and friendly!"

- Parent, 2021



## Case Study

Me and L have been attending play group since she was around 5 months. She loves running around and enjoying everything Young Mums has to offer. She has now been crowned The Messy Queen as she seems to always get stuck into every activity and always comes out the messiest. Attending play group also gives her a safe space she can experience different messy play activities that I cannot offer her at home and it gives me new ideas on activities I can do with her,

There is also the opportunity to be around new people and learn from them. L has grown so much confidence in herself while attending the play group. She was born just into lockdown so hasn't been around a lot of new people or children. I was worried when we started attending to how she would react to be around other children and adults but since attending I have seen how happy she is around other children and how much she loves playing and sharing with them.

I have also found that attending play group helps keep a good routine going, not only for L but myself. It is a time during the week that gets us out of the house, go for a walk and do something different. She gets to see new people, experience new activities, but I also get to talk to new people, talk to other mums, ask for help or advice. With Covid a lot of mums have struggled with not being able to have somewhere to go and we have been lucky to attend this group.

Young Mum's is special where it is exclusively for younger parents that may feel judged by older parents or who just want someone more their age to talk to, as they are more likely to understand the situation they are in or have been through something similar.

Overall, I don't think L would be so happy around children as she is now if we hadn't started coming to this group. Play group has been an amazing opportunity for us both and has helped us both so much.

**I was nervous about going along to a new group when I had spent the first few months of motherhood in lockdown but we really look forward to going every week now. I get to have my cuppa and chat mum stuff whilst my little one can have some play time in the baby room. We've done messy play / card making / hand print painting it's so well run by Kelly and we love our time at young mums. Definitely recommend to anyone needing some mum company! Wish there were more groups like this for all .**

**- Parent attending Young Mum's Club 2021**



The Portsmouth Baby Bank started in September 2020 in response to the financial hardship imposed on families in Portsmouth due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We have seen our referrals grow enormously over the past year, demonstrating both the need for the service but also the reach of the service to other providers. More and more professionals from around the city are referring to us, they hear about us from their colleagues, this includes an increase in health visitors, social workers, family nurse partnership and organisations such as stop domestic abuse.

The most requested items continue to be nappies, toiletries & formula, as well as blankets & bedding and toys & books. We also supply larger equipment such as cots and highchairs and In the last year we have more referrals for safety gates and baby monitors.

As well as a general increase in referrals, there has also been an increase in self referrals, with individual families seeking out urgent support. Families have also been asking for more food vouchers in recent months.

**Reasons given for referrals:**

**68%**  
low income

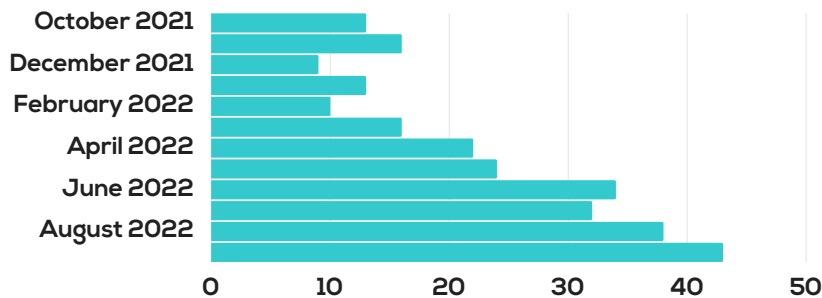
**16%**  
Refugee & Asylum seeker

**20%**  
Young Mums

**17%**  
Mental Health difficulties

**8%**  
Homeless/  
at risk of homelessness

**Number of referrals received:**



**69%**  
stated the service provided immediate crisis support

**31%**  
also requested Food bank vouchers

From October 2021 to September 2022 we have seen a **330%** increase in monthly referrals

"I have referred a number of my clients from Migrant Help to the Portsmouth Baby Bank, and have been very impressed with the support they have offered. My clients are very vulnerable, having undergone Modern Slavery experiences, as well as often being asylum seekers and single mothers. The provision of baby items which they likely otherwise wouldn't be able to afford has enabled them to look after their children better and provided them with essential support.

Portsmouth Baby Bank are always excellent at responding to referrals and go above and beyond with providing high quality items to those that need them the most. They often offer to deliver the items to individuals who would struggle to collect them themselves. I highly recommend them to other support services, and am very grateful for the meaningful support they provide to families in need. "

- Migrant Help UK



## Case Study

'A' had fled his home country with his wife and two children; they arrived in the UK with nothing but the clothes they wore. 'A' came to the baby bank for some support. We gave him nappies, wipes and clothing for his children as well as a food voucher. We also provided 'A' with a stroller and highchair.

We also supported them when seeking a doctors, in order for his wife to get the correct mental health support.

We have continued to support 'A' and his family when they require it, they are expecting their third child soon and are preparing a bundle for the new baby.

**"Social worker RE recently gave feedback about a drop off to a Mum with a small baby. The mother asked RE to sit and look at all the clothes and items with her., The mother was overwhelmed with all the lovely items, so much she cried.**

**The mother was very grateful."  
- Rachel Hance, Baby Bank Coordinator,**

**"The service supported one of my domestic violence clients. The client left her home with nothing for her baby and was provided with baby essentials whilst she was in a refuge.**

**This service is really needed in Portsmouth and you are all doing an incredible job supporting the families in Portsmouth.'**

**- Service User, 2022**





# The Team

## 2021/22

### **Matt Foster, CEO**

Portsmouth born father of two, Matt has worked in the third sector for more than 23 years supporting some of our city's most vulnerable people and is now using his skills and experience as a leading social entrepreneur across several sectors. For Matt, becoming a parent brought about deeply repressed feelings of paternal abandonment and rejection from his absent birth father and this had a huge impact on choices he made around being a better father for his children, including one child with complex additional needs. His experiences also highlighted gaps in support for a growing number of Dads who wanted to be more involved in their children's lives. From this journey into parenthood, Dadzclub, a supportive community for fathers was conceived.

The Parenting Network was established a year later after Matt also identified gaps in support for other marginalised parent groups, in particular, young parents. Today with the support of a very talented team of professionals, The Parenting Network has grown into one of the area's leading third sector family support services delivering 6 programmes across Portsmouth and the Isle Of Wight. When not at work Matt enjoys simple quiet time with his family, beach walks, bike rides and subjecting his family to duvet days watching 80's movie marathons!

### **Shelly Crocker, Chief Operations Officer**

Shelly is a mother of two with a background in primary school teaching and a degree in art. She has experience and training in safeguarding, postnatal depression, attachment and bonding. Shelly is passionate about empowering people to achieve their potential. She believes that empathy, connection and investment in people is paramount to a happier community.

### **Ian Reedy, Finance Manager**

Ian is a fully certified Management Accountant and has an extensive background in both government and commercial finance. He spent over 30 years working in various roles and locations within the Civil Service, achieving Financial Controller status before moving on to working in commercial organisations. His recent experience includes working as a Finance Manager in the recycling and reuse sector. Having recently joined TPN, Ian is now refining the finance and reporting processes for the organisation.

### **Rachel Hance, Baby Bank Coordinator**

Rachel has worked at TPN since it began, starting as an office manager, she then took on the role of Baby Bank Coordinator when the project started in 2020. Once the lockdown was over she coordinated all of the donations and put all the processes into place to make the Baby Bank run effectively. Rachel has been responsible for sourcing all of our donations and products and has built strong relationships with other support services and businesses locally.



# The Team

## 2021/22

### **April Gilbert, Dadzclub Coordinator**

April is a mother of three with a background in nursing and also creating and running a large hospitality business. She has experience in trauma recovery, addiction recovery, restorative practice and safeguarding. April is passionate about empowering people to access support and enjoy the best life possible. She believes that it takes a village to raise a person and that if we can create community and connection in Portsmouth, we will improve quality of life and outcomes

### **Kelly Livingstone, Project Coordinator**

Kelly joined us in April 2021 taking over as programme coordinator for Young Mums' Club. Having worked for over 10 years in Children's Services, most recently as a social worker within a Disabled Children's Team, Kelly brings a knowledge base of child development, safeguarding, a passion for supporting children and families and ensuring people feel valued and supported.

### **Sarah Lewis, Project Coordinator**

Sarah has been running antenatal and postnatal baby classes for the past 10 years, having spent 10 years as a primary school teacher before that. She's passionate about all things birth and baby, and supporting families at a really important stage of their lives.

### **Dan Churchley, Project Coordinator**

Dan has over 14 years experience in the family entertainment sector, from performing as a holiday park entertainer, running family events, to being the Entertainments Manager responsible for creating an entire entertainment programme. More recently he has worked as a freelancer putting on children's entertainment packages.





# The Parenting NETWORK

## With thanks to our funders & supporters:

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