



Lads, dads, men and boys' club

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| Location | County Londonderry, Northern Ireland |
| Programme | Active Lifestyles, Small Grants |
| Contact name | Ken Mcayghey |
| Address | Teachers Centre, 24, Temple Road, Strathfoyle, Londonderry, County Londonderry, BT47 6TJ |
| Phone | 028 82240613 |
| E-mail | |
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Project description

The Lads, Dads, Men and Boys club was started by a father who could see missed potential benefits of getting dads more involved in their children's activities. Asking around some other fathers, he discovered that many men held back because the mothers seemed to take the lead on school activities. With this in mind, he created a programme of events for dads and sons to take part in activities on their own.

A 'Scary Walk' was the first project activity. Between 180 and 200 fathers and sons came to the school and walked with their sons through the local park late at night. Since then the project has produced more events including 'Build a Boat', where fathers and sons would build model boats and sail them on the local river.

From all this success girls at the school started to feel jealous and left out. Thus Ken organised more inclusive family events including mother and son days and father and daughter days. The Lads, Dads, Men and Boys project is now registered as a charity with its own constitution, and is run by a formal committee of parents.

Project aims and objectives

Like many small grants, the project aims to use physical activity to lever wider benefits:

- o fun learning and family building through educational and recreational activities;
- o first, involving fathers in their sons' lives; and
- o now, also engaging all parents with their children at the school.

Project delivery and impact

The project is run by a committee of volunteers, who have been easy to recruit to the popular project. The founder is still head of the project, but he plans to train his volunteers in leadership and childcare so he can eventually move aside and leave them to run the programme. This training has been put in the development plan. The programme receives great support from the local council, local schools and local businesses.



The Active Lifestyles Small Grant allowed the group to go for trips and outings, removing the barrier of parents having to pay for transport. Ken was delighted with the grant, and was very grateful to receive such a helping hand for his innovative project. The grant has made the project more mobile now. However, a larger grant would have had a significant impact on the project. More money would mean they could buy more equipment and have more trips, outings and opportunities.

Progress and impacts

The project is more than meeting its aims and objectives so far. Its main aim was to get fathers more involved in their children's education, and male relationships in the school are improved between pupils, teachers and parents. Fathers are taking a more active role in their children's education and becoming more interested.

There have been many other, unplanned benefits.

- The level of anti-social behaviour from the children has decreased;
- The community has a friendlier atmosphere, now that more people know each other;
- Parents are on first-name basis with teachers through the programme;
- Children are finding it easier to make friends as their parents become more involved in their school lives;
- Children have more social skills;
- The children are becoming more confident and motivated to do well at school.

The project has worked so well that the project leader now shares these activities with other schools and community groups, spreading the benefits further.

Issues or barriers to progress

At the beginning, responsibility for the project rested solely on the project leader. It was time-consuming and stressful, and he had no experience of applying for funding to help them overcome the costs of travel and to buy new equipment.

The Lottery funding helped in two stages. One of the women on the committee applied to the Lottery and received £3000 for transport costs. The project leader then went on to apply for a grant from 'Awards for all' and received £5000 to spend on new equipment. These grants have made the project more mobile and better equipped.

There was also the issue of cultural awareness at the start of the project. The project leader had to be aware of what was going on in and around the school to engage successfully with parents and children. For example, the programme couldn't take army cadets to certain areas in Northern Ireland. But with patience and mutual respect, the project has learned how to work around challenges that have some up.

Good Practice

Ken is proud of the projects success this far. He has shown that you can get fathers and father-figures in families more involved in their children's education.



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Although parents can be shy about getting involved because they do not feel they have anything to give. The project has shown how to overcome this barrier and engage them:

- approach parents in the right way to tap their enthusiasm;
- give people an opportunity to take part, it will motivate them; and
- recognise the wealth of expertise they have for children and others to learn and benefit from.

Flexibility and growth has been important to the project's success. Not only fathers but father-figures were invited at first. Then activities for girls were added and now whole family activities. This has shown the benefits of targeting one particular group, which in turn reaches out to other groups.

The project makes good use of the local press, including local papers and radio stations to advertise their activities. The project leaves an open invitation to the local press to attend their activities and events. Further, with the success of the projects so far word of mouth has been useful for promoting the project. The Big Lottery Fund also has a leaflet that features the project on the front cover, as a successful initiative.

Other schools in the local area cannot run these kinds of activities alone but they do get involved with the Lads, Dads, Men and Boys project because it is so successful.

Future

The programme will keep running and expanding as long as it has the support of the local parents and children. The project leader will look to access funding from wherever possible. The project is now registered as a charity and has received money from BIG and Children in Need. The local businesses also contribute with prizes for events. The army base next door to the school has become involved in some of the activities as well as providing resources for activities. These resources include expertise and equipment.

The project wants to expand into home learning, and to continue to positively influence family building.

Staff development is also in the plans for the future:

- Training volunteers to be able to take over the project
- Taking on more experienced people to help access funding and work on fund-raising and earning income through events.

The project found the Big Lottery Fund helpful to work with and would like to make use of further funding programmes.