

# News release

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## **New Fathers' Network Helps to Change Lives**

A Sunderland dad has spoken about how his life has changed since attending a Children's Centre group, after it encouraged him to make a significant career change.

Following the launch of the Sunderland Including Men Network at the Stadium of Light, Simon Bond, 39 from Grangetown, has spoken about his experiences of attending the Dads and Kids group at his local Children's Centre. Although initially unsure about going, after one session he found that, along with children Aaron, nine, and Liana, seven, he really enjoyed himself and even stumbled upon an opportunity for a new career.

After his first session Simon was approached by a member of staff at the centre about volunteering opportunities and decided to get involved in order to help encourage more dads to do the same. What started as a small commitment has now turned into an entire career change as Simon, previously a store detective and security officer, is now training to become a youth worker.

Simon said: "My wife Diane had been taking the children along to groups at the centre and both she and the children kept telling me how much fun it was. My first thought was that it would be totally geared towards women, however when I heard about the Dads and Kids session I decided to give it a go. I'm so glad that I did, it has changed my ideas about how best to spend time with my children and has given me a new dream for my future."

He added: "I was surprised by how much I enjoyed working with the young people at the centre, as I had never considered it as a career option before. However, now I'm working towards a second youth worker qualification as well as training to be a Level one football coach with the Northumberland Football Association. Ideally I want to start arranging camping and activity trips for children to get them out and about and more active."

Thanks to Simon's commitment and enthusiasm, he was asked to speak about his experience of becoming involved in the Dads and Kids group at the launch of the Sunderland Including Men Network and now sits in on the monthly Network meetings as a representative of the Children's Centres. This allows him to share his knowledge of volunteering to help make the Network's services more effective so that even more men can benefit from his experiences.

Launched in partnership with Sunderland Children's Centres and Children North East Fathers Plus, the Sunderland Including Men Network aims to equip managers, workers and volunteers throughout the city with the skills needed to involve dads, granddads and male carers in all aspects of their children's lives. This training will allow professionals to provide advice and support to dads who want to do more with their children.

Simon said: "I am very pleased to be involved with the Network as I have always thought that it's important for fathers to be fully involved in their children's upbringing, though in the past I struggled to think how best to do this. It would be an excellent result for both dads and children if the Network can help in encouraging more men like me to make use of the excellent resources available to them while engaging with their families more."

Councillor Pat Smith, Portfolio Holder for Children and Learning City within Sunderland City Council, said: "The Sunderland Including Men Network is a great initiative which will hopefully help professionals to get more men involved in their family lives. Men can sometimes feel a little lost when it comes to childcare: by showing fathers different ways to interact with their children we can help men become more confident in their parenting abilities and build better relationships within their families.

"Simon has shown that men as well as women aspire to futures in childcare and youth work, so it is important we continue to provide support to these individuals. Studies have shown that fathers have a huge impact on the learning, achievement, health and well-being of their children so the Including Men Network will help us to support more men as they follow Simon's example and take a more active role in their child's or young relative's life."

The Sunderland Including Men Network was launched by the Children North East Father's Plus Project in partnership with Sunderland Children's Services as part of the Government's Every Child Matters agenda.

David Van der Velde, Service Manager from Children North East Fathers Plus, said: “We are working alongside Sunderland Children's Services to develop a common approach to embrace more fathers and male carers across the city. Our aim is to include men in services in order to improve outcomes for children and young people living in Sunderland.

“The Network includes practitioners, managers and policymakers from early years, health and education to provide a forum where they can come together to share and develop evidence based practice and work to encourage men to become more involved.”

Sunderland's 17 Children's Centres bring together health services, early education, childcare, parenting support, and help for parents looking to find work or training. By working with a number of partner organisations, including Back on the Map, NHS and City Hospitals Sunderland Children's Centres help provide every child living across the city with the best possible start in life.