

Insights from Working with Young Dads

Oliver Doreian – Dads Program Mentor
Clarissa Allerton- Practice Lead



Acknowledgement of Country



|| BRAVE

Let's see a quick show of hands, who's met or known a young father?





What We Know

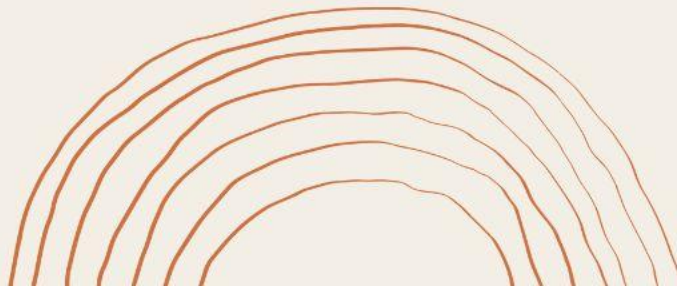
Approximately about 4–5% of all births in Australia are fathered by men under the age of 25

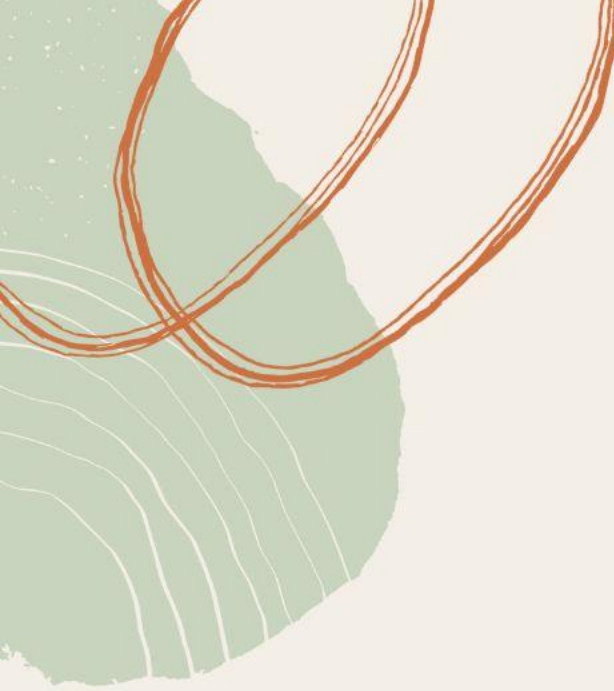
Young men under 25 have the highest rates of mental ill-health in Australia, yet they are the least likely to seek help

Young men are the least likely demographic to access health and welfare services

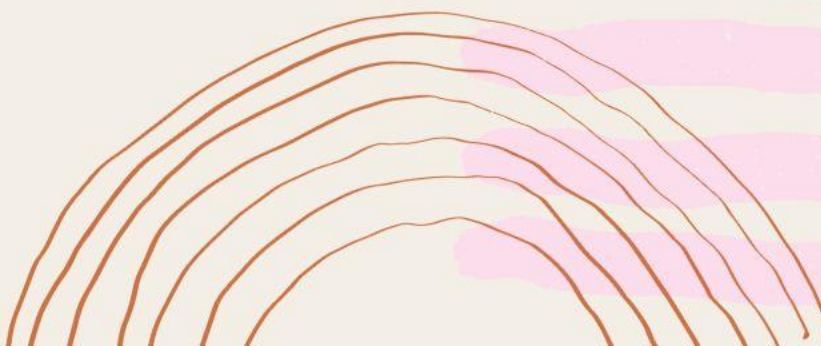
Young fathers often face stigma and judgement in their communities

Children of disengaged or unsupported fathers face higher risks





Meet some young dads



 **BR A V E**

Activity

Ask the person next to you:

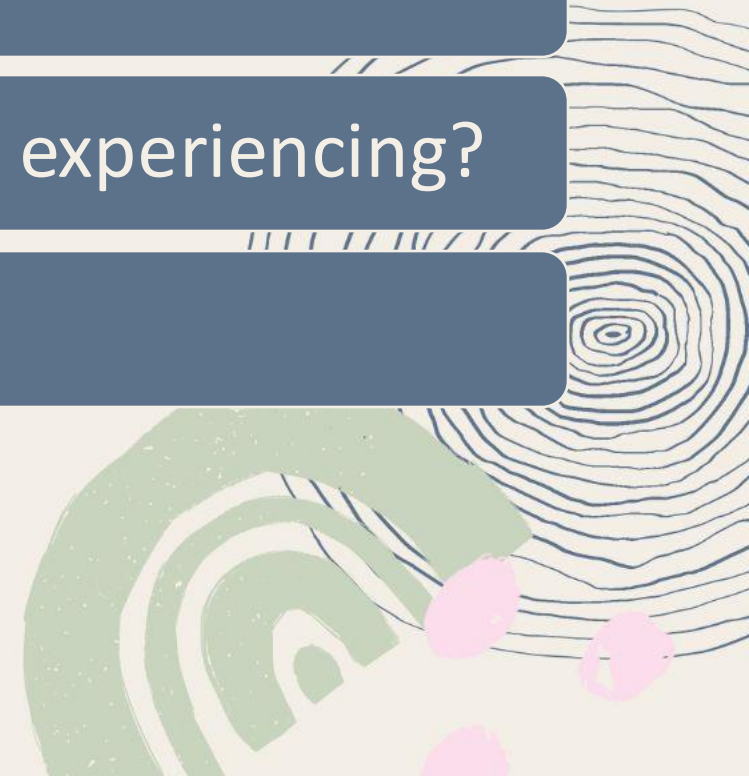
What it would be in the shoes of a young father?



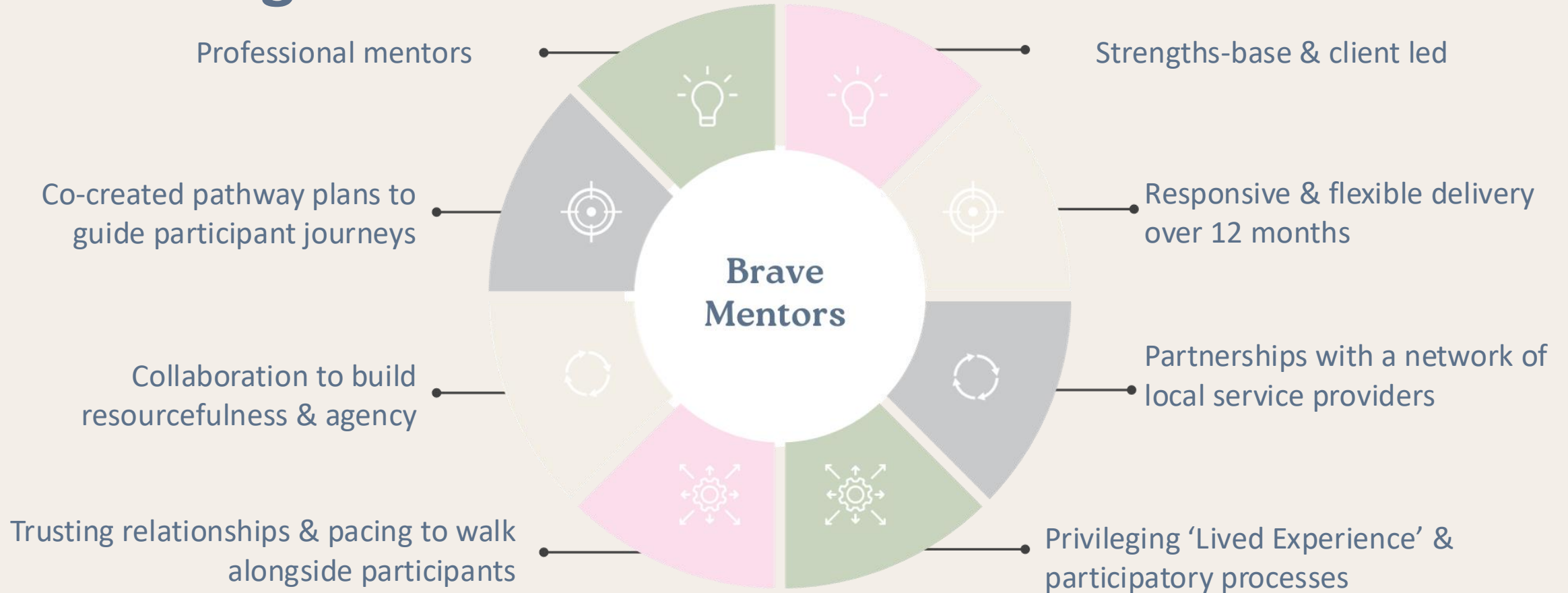
What are the challenges, the benefits?

What are some of the emotions that you may be experiencing?

What supports may you need?



Brave's Young Dads Program



Eligibility

Priority Cohorts

Brave supports
parents of all
genders &
identities



Parents aged under 25 who began parenting at 19 years or under



First Nations & CALD parents aged under 25 who began parenting at 21 years or under



Parents aged under 25 living with disability



Parents aged under 25 living in rural, regional, & remote locations

Participant Journey

Model of Mentoring



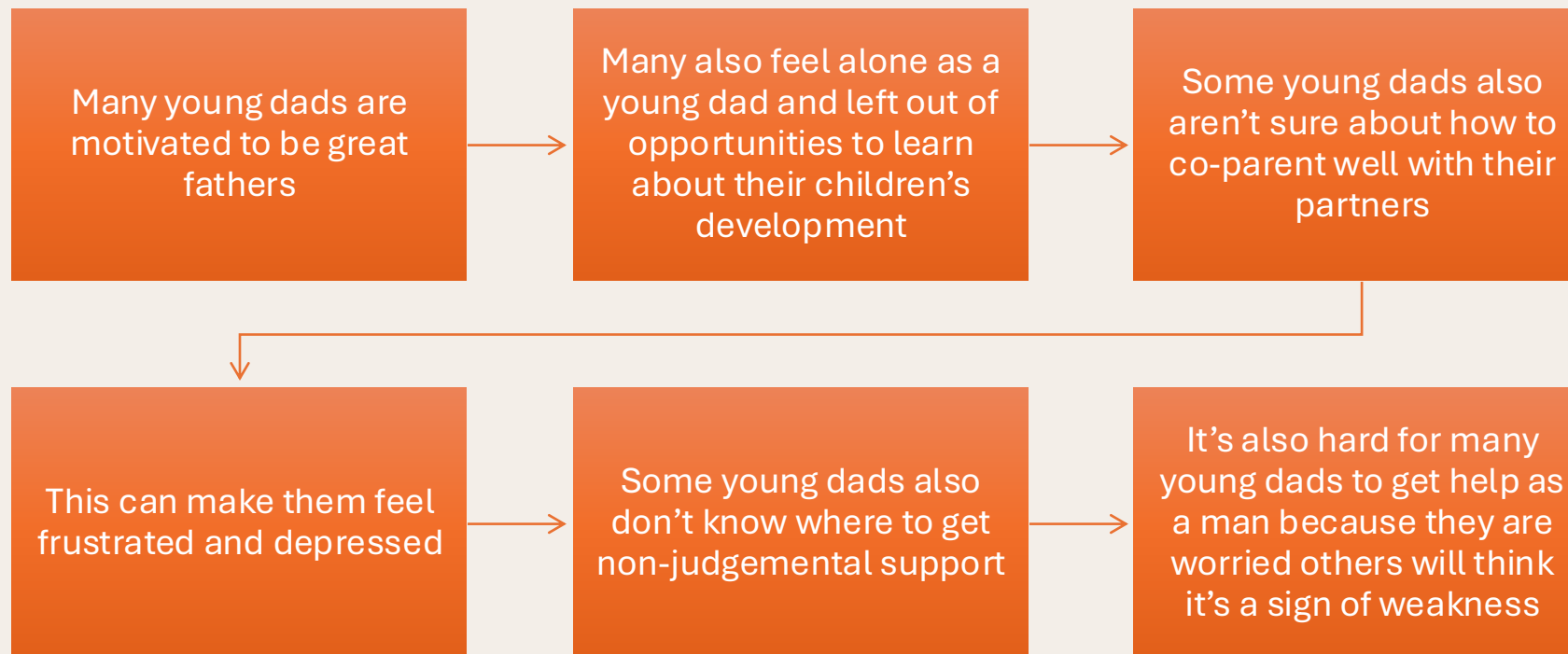
Hamish's Story

Hamish is 19. His girlfriend (Lena) gave birth to their first child 8 months ago and his relationship with Lena has been difficult since she found out she was pregnant. They don't live together and have been arguing a lot because of financial difficulties and the stress of being new parents.

Hamish has been trying to find a job so he can provide more for his daughter, but he hasn't had any luck getting job interviews. He really wants to be a good dad, but he doesn't know much about parenting or how to care for babies. He also doesn't know anyone else his age who is a dad and he wasn't included in the appointments Lena had while she was pregnant or the maternal and child health check-ups she has been going to after his daughter's birth. Lena isn't giving him much information about how his daughter is doing and he feels less and less like he's has a role in her life.

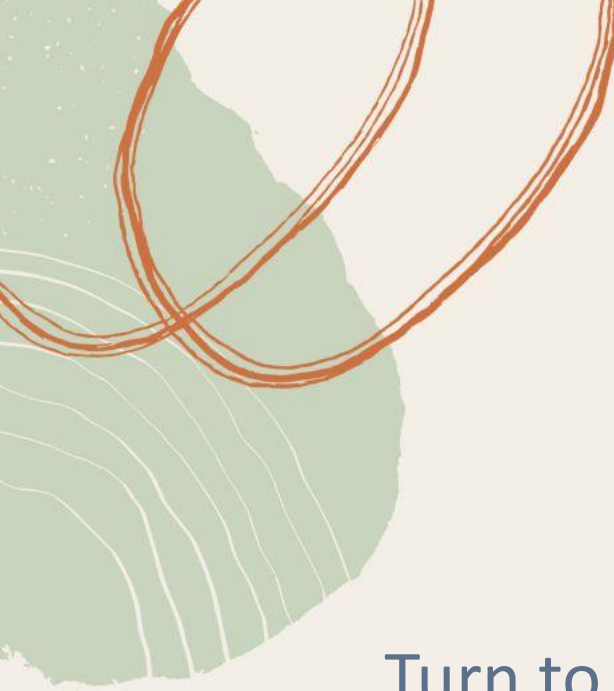
This is making him feel more and more frustrated and depressed. He is worried people will think he's a "deadbeat dad" because he's not spending much time with his child. He's not sure where to get help and he is uncomfortable asking for help because he doesn't want people to think he's a "wuss" and that he just needs to "man up".

Insights about Young Dads' Needs from 'Hamish's' Point of View



B R A V E

"Some dads are just really scared...to drop their walls and take that big step because it's a really big step...they just don't want to feel that sense of weakness in themselves." – Young Dad Program Participant



Reflection Activity



"At first, I was a bit skeptical because it's very hard for me to open up... I try to keep myself protected... because I don't know how a mentor would act or how they judge."



Turn to the person next to you and discuss:

1. What some key challenges that young men of today face?
2. How may having a baby exacerbate these challenges?

Young Fathers' Perspectives on Their Biggest Challenges

- Access to stable and affordable housing
- Age-discrimination
- Mental Health Challenges and Trauma
- Contact with child can often be determined by child's mother/and her family
- Feeling isolated and left out
- Feeling judged and wary to reach out for help due to fears of looking 'weak' or not "having it all under control"
- Managing finances



Key Insights from Young Dads

“...no one has the time, even when they want to ask for help, when they want to do things, they put work and money before helping themselves...financials and all that comes first, which is really hard to ask for help at the same time.”

– Young Dad Program Participant

Many young dads work hard but still struggle with money and housing concerns

These young dads need to be able to be part of a program that fits with their busy and stressful lives, particularly ones that can fit in with full-time work

They also need the program support to be worth their time

The responsibility to be a good dad and family provider can feel overwhelming

Young dads can feel guilty taking time out to look after their own health and wellbeing

Key Insights from Young Dads

- Traditional notions of masculinity have a strong influence on their identities as fathers and is a major barrier to help-seeking
- Many of the young dads prefer in-person support and only have a small window of time (late afternoon/early evening or weekends) because of other commitments
- They recognise the value of group-based opportunities to connect with other young dads but are generally more comfortable with 1:1 support where there is less risk of feeling judged
- Common support needs were help to manage finances and to access stable housing – many feel a lot of pressure to be “the provider” for their families. The responsibility to be a good dad can feel overwhelming
- Young dads are often isolated from other young men who share their lived experience of early fatherhood
- Young dads feel guilty about taking time out to look after their own health and wellbeing



What Support Are Young Dads Seeking?

- Young dads commonly expressed the need for support with accessing stable housing and managing finances.
- Support to learn more about their children's development and how to parent well.
- Flexible support options outside of regular business hours (9am to 5pm).
- Help to connect with other young dads.
- Help to navigate relationship challenges and support with co-parenting
- How to build strong father-child bonds when not living with their child.
- Support from someone non-judgemental, friendly and in a positive space.
- Activity based 1on1 engagement e.g kicking the footy, going fishing.
- Practical support, financial assistance and material aid.



What Young Dads Said to us About Mentoring and Being a New Dad

Quotes:

I didn't know what to think because knowing my child was so close to being here & then all the responsibilities that come with it, it was a lot... I wanted to be prepared for what is happening though.

My [Mentor] supported me by giving me the motivation to pretty much get up off my arse & get on with my life & do everything I can...

No one has the time of day, even when they want to ask for help... they put work & money before helping themselves... financials & all that comes first. Which is really hard to ask for help at the same time...

With my busy schedule, I don't really have much time so we worked around times... & managing other activities... seeing baby, hang out with friends...

..it was a bit rocky because me & my ex-wife we had a kind of rocky road... I had to take care of both kids at the same time, I couldn't work...it was just hard

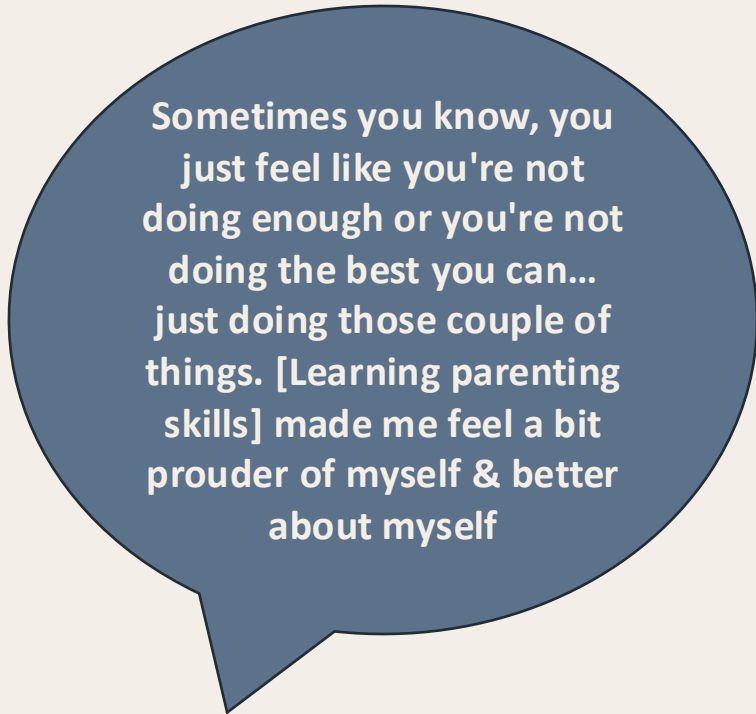
Hear from Godfroid :





Video Debrief

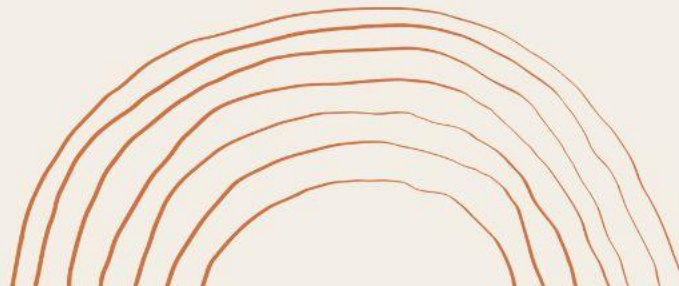
What stood out from watching the video? Is it what you expected? Is it how you see the stereotype of young fathers?



Sometimes you know, you just feel like you're not doing enough or you're not doing the best you can... just doing those couple of things. [Learning parenting skills] made me feel a bit prouder of myself & better about myself

Benefits of Young Fathers Engaging with Support Services

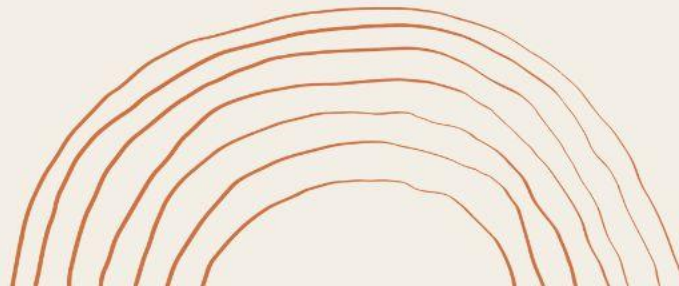
- Early support for young men (under 25) reduces their risk of post-fatherhood depression, with mental health improving in the early stages of fatherhood when support is present
- Children with positively engaged fathers show significantly better behavioural and developmental outcomes.
- Integrated support services for young people aged 12–24 lead to measurable improvements in housing, education, and wellbeing—key protective factors for young fathers.



Final Reflection Activity

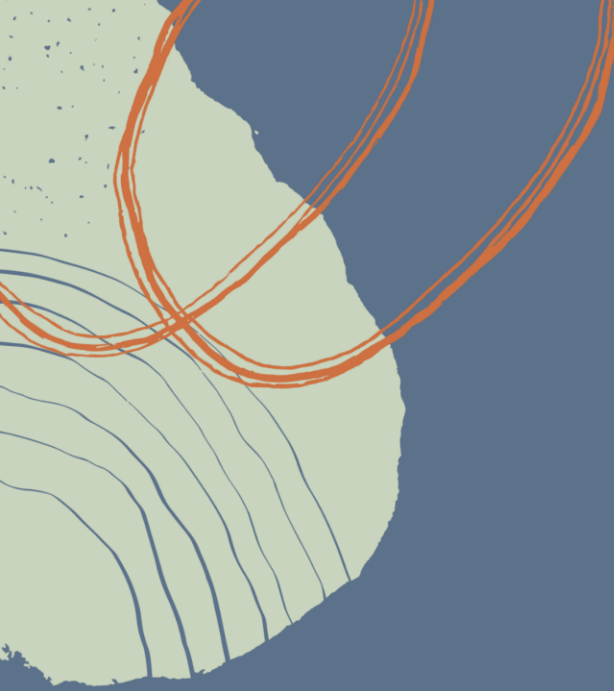
When you leave here today, what's one thing you can do in your work/community to create a ripple effect for young fathers of the future?

"He [mentor] was very supportive. He'd always check-in on me, almost every day for that while, because I told him my son was just taken like I don't know how to cope with it... I'd try to distance myself but obviously, [Mentor], he always knows how to get me talking (laughs)... I'm glad that he did. Uh, that I'm very thankful for."



Questions?





www.bravefoundation.org.au

Oliver@bravefoundation.org.au

Clarissa@bravefoundation.org.au

