

DadsInDistress

2020 Vision Report
Supporting Separated Dads
since Father's Day 1999



Introduction

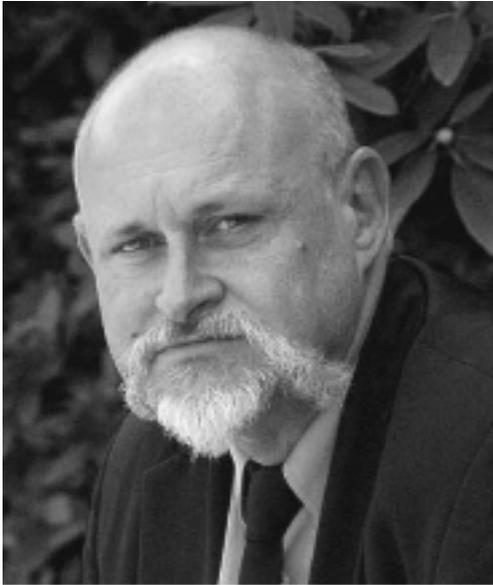
Parents Beyond Breakup is a national suicide prevention charity with a focus on supporting separating families. Whilst we operate front line services focusing separately on the support needs of mums and dads, it is overwhelmingly dads that reach out to us for support via our Dads in Distress service.

Our mission is to keep dads alive and in their kids lives. This Fathers Day, we will celebrate 21 years of supporting Dads in Distress from all over Australia, through our National Helpline, face to face peer support groups and more recently, online support groups.

Significantly, men represent 76% of all deaths by suicide in this country, but poor public and professional awareness has meant that it is also one of the least supported population cohorts.

We think this needs to change.

Our history



On Father's Day 1999, a separated dad from Coffs Harbour doing it tough, sat on a veranda and waited to see if other men would respond to his local newspaper advert.

Other separated dads turned up, drawn together because there was no other support available to them.

These peers went on to form Dads in Distress and later, Mums in Distress and then in 2016, the "parent" suicide prevention charity, Parents Beyond Breakup.

That dad was **Tony Miller** (pictured). In 2010, Tony was awarded an OAM for his work in establishing Australia's only national support for separated dads.

We're still here in 2020, looking after both mums and dads.

As we reflect on our 21 years of experience it is apparent that the challenges back in 1999 are still there and that we're not much further forward as a nation when it comes to meeting the needs of dads who have been separated from their children, usually as a result of relationship breakdown.

We believe that we have a duty of care to the people we support to share the facts and insights, to share our experience, our wisdom and our learnings. We hope that this leads to positive change. Especially in terms of reducing the terrible toll of male suicide in Australia.

Trust: A matter of life and death

As a provider, half the challenge is doing the right thing. The other half being able to reach those that need your help. And yet repeatedly, at our support groups and on our helpline, we hear from dads that they shy away from other services or agencies because they feel they are treated unfairly, blamed for the predicament they find themselves in and that in being 'wrong', they must somehow be improved or changed.

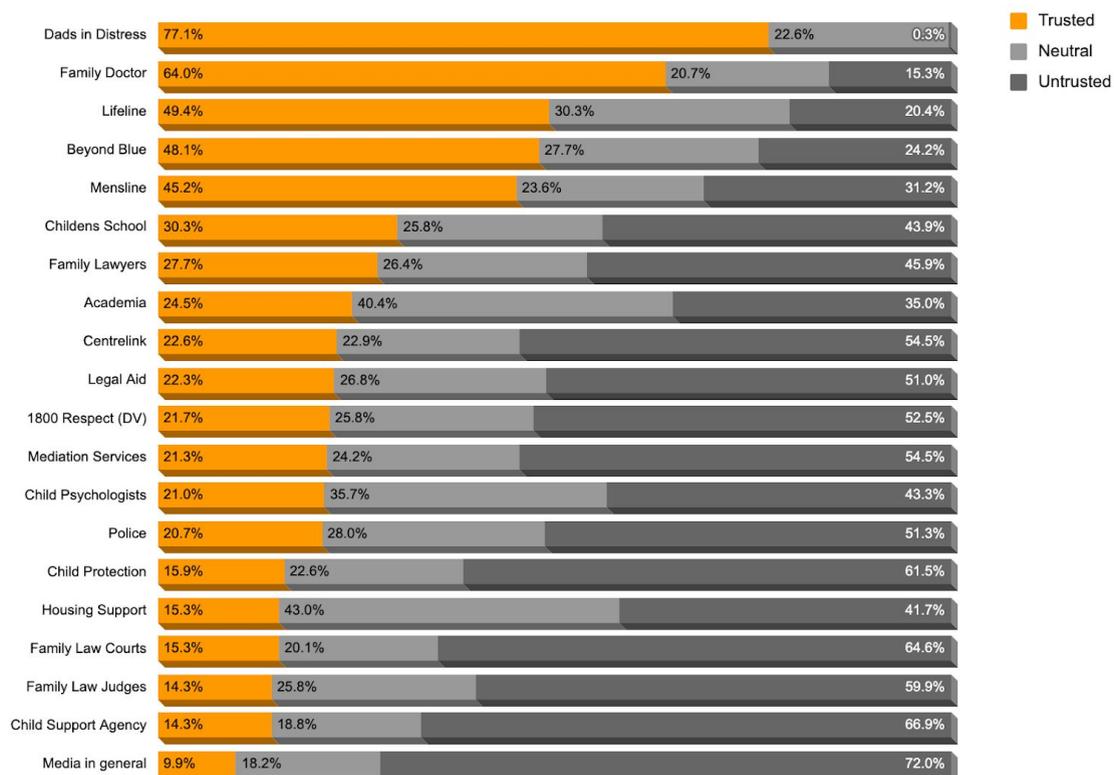
Things are changing, for the better, but the historical perceptions will take a lot of effort and time to change. Until they do, dads are limited in where they can go. We decided to run a survey to determine not only how trusted we were by separated dads - critical to our success - but also how we compared to other typical touch points for dads post family breakdown.

The results surprised even us.

We asked over 300 separated dads the following question and listing 20 different entities that they might go to for help or support after separating:

'As a separating father, I trust [named institution] to treat me fairly and no less favourably than it would any other person.'

Respondents could select yes (i.e. trusted), no (ie. untrusted) or neutral.



Results - institutions ranked by positive trust rating (%favourable) on perception of receiving fair treatment as a separated father.

Note: Slightly less than half of respondents (47.1%) were at some point a client of Dads in Distress. 52.9% of respondents have never used our service. Feedback from both sets of dads were consistent.

These findings resonate strongly with research by The Black Dog Institute conducted in partnership with BeyondBlue and Movember¹:

“Men were also asked to rate the importance of a number of factors that may be helpful for interrupting a suicide attempt. Almost 90% of men said that support from someone they really trust and respect was important. The kind of support was also important, with men saying they did not want to be told that everything will be okay – rather, they wanted someone to listen with an open mind, and to know that the person can hear the truth without judging them. Around three quarters of men said it was important to hear that others are going through a similar situation and that it is normal to struggle sometimes.”

These research findings are confirmed in our recent survey on the matter of what it is that our dads most liked about our support (page 8).

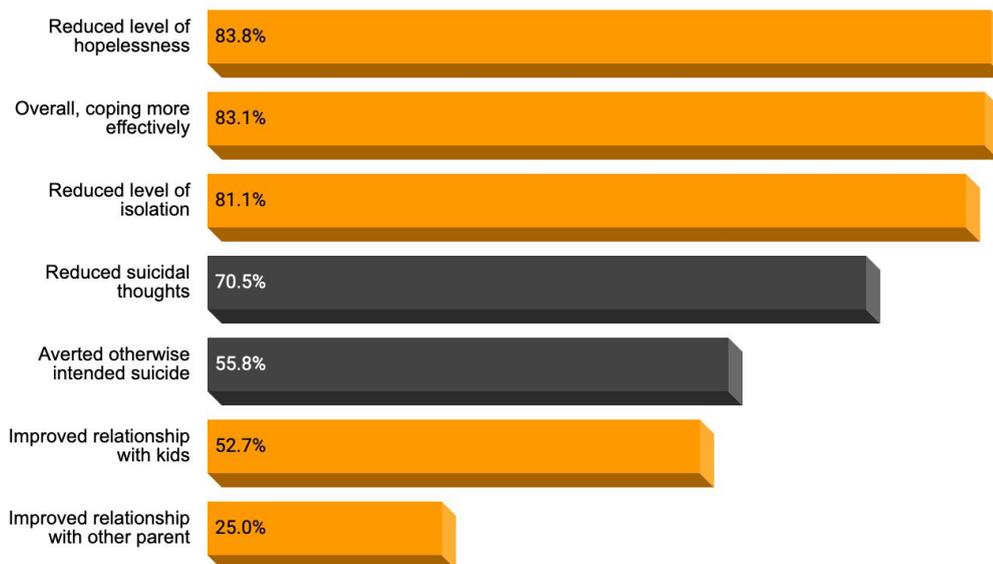
¹ <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/mens-health-report-170315-final.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

Our performance

We know separated dads have low levels of trust in official support agencies. Because of this, support is commonly accessed anonymously. Consequently, the number of interactions for a given dad might be one or twenty, with access through different channels making this impossible to track. However, an examination of the overall number of interactions in a given year against a known average of 10 interactions where identity is shared, allows us to estimate with a good degree of confidence that we support between 1,000 and 1,500 dads per annum.

The support provided to those 1,000-1,500 dads ranges from quick informational one off exchanges through to long term ongoing peer based situational management. For the most part, it's a form of support that's close to the 'person centered therapeutic approach' based on the work of psychologist Carl Rogers.

What impact do we have on these 1000-1,500 dads each year? We ran a survey asking dads who've used our support what changes they experienced. The results shown below are percentage favourable responses. Note in particular the two grey bars relating specifically to suicide reduction.



This is powerful data considering that feelings of hopelessness and isolation can be key drivers of suicidal behaviour. **Significantly, 70.5% of respondents reported “reduced suicidal thoughts” as a result of our support.**

How do our dads feel about us?

Our survey asked our dads to rate us on how likely they are to recommend us to other dads and how we rate against other support available to them. This is what they told us.

Ratings are %favourable.



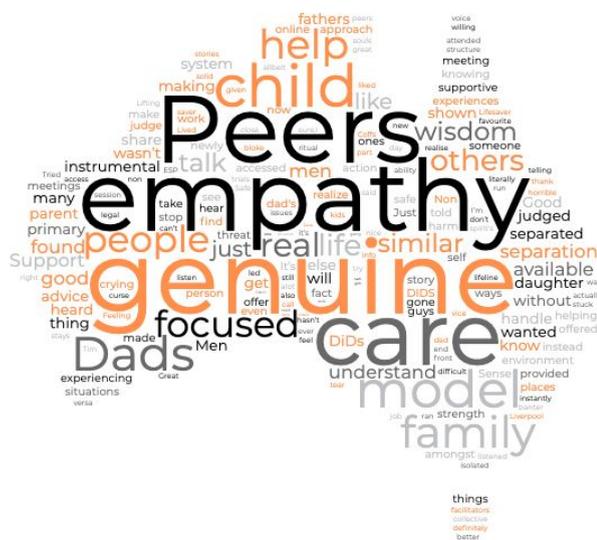
Whilst there's always room to improve, we're proud of this feedback and highly focussed on delivering the highest quality support to our dads.

We also asked our dads to say a few words about what they most liked about our services, and what how they most wanted us to improve. The results are outlined in the next section.

“DiDs got me, understood me and what I was going through, because they were Dads, who'd walked it themselves, and survived.”

“Very welcoming, whatever background or circumstances, no judgement, good banter (uplifting) and to be amongst other Dads going through similar experiences.”

What do our dads like?



In our 2020 dad Survey, we asked users of DiDs what they most liked about us. These are their responses.

The word cloud to the left shows the most common words amongst all comments, and the list below outlines a list of common themes that emerged from a thematic analysis of all comments.

In their own words:

"I wasn't judged. I was given proper care and I was listened to as a victim of domestic violence."

"Very real feedback. It was good to chat and discuss the issues in a male oriented manner."

"No one that hasn't experienced the horror will ever understand what men like me have gone through."

"The respect and privacy of what is said in the meeting stays in the meeting unless someone's life is in danger."

"It gave me support and a lifeline that I don't actually have. It made me realise that I'm not alone. I could also contribute and help other Dads. Saved my life."

"The wisdom in how to handle the situation I found myself in was instrumental in making sure I got to parent our daughter."

"Feeling instantly welcomed and safe to share my feelings and story."

"Very welcoming, whatever background or circumstances, no judgement, good banter (uplifting) and to be amongst other Dads going through similar experiences."

"DiDs is real, not scripted"

"DiDs got me, understood me and what I was going through, because they were Dads, who'd walked it themselves, and survived."

Common themes:

- Empathy / Being heard
- Life saving - mine / others
- Peers not experts / Dads together
- Safe / Confidential
- Honesty / Feedback
- Shared Wisdom / Insights
- Real / Genuine / Respectful
- Welcoming / Acceptance
- Get help / Give help
- Mateship / Family / Connection
- Positivity / Uplifting
- Unconditional / No requirements

What do our dads not like?



In their own words:

"I love everything about it. Need face to face in WA though - Covid-19 to blame not DIDs."

"Needed face to face meetings (thanks COVID!)"

"Just the distance to travel to [group location], but it's absolutely worth it."

"Govt says it wants to reduce suicide but it ignores programs that actually work."

"I know the call centre is run by volunteers. but it would be great for it to be 24hrs"

"It's not promoted enough."

"The reality of the Family Law system. You can see it weigh heavily on everyone who attends. It's like a support group for post-war Veterans."

"Noone to talk to in the evening outside of the online groups. Those are my low points."

"Hard to find. You should be advertised everywhere. Yes, more advertising."

"Should be groups near more people."

"Honestly, personally I'm disgusted I gotta answer the answering machine at 2am. This MUST become a 24-7 operating system service for FATHERS SAKES 🙏"

Common themes:

- Nothing / stay as you are!
- Distance to nearest in-person group
- Groups run too short / too long
- Need 24hr telephone helpline
- Negative / disruptive attendees
- Local group closed (COVID or other)
- Lack of activism / legal support²
- Not advertised as much as big charities

² Dads in Distress is a suicide prevention support service

How can we reduce male suicide?

1. We strongly support Suicide Prevention Australia and the Australian Men's Health Forum in calling on Government to develop a National Male Suicide Prevention Strategy.
2. We would like to see targeted funding specifically for supporting dads going through relationship breakdown.
3. The inclusion of lived experience voices of dads in both research and policy development.

Contact

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