

# CITY LIFE

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## Program looks at what's best for dads

by **VIKKI HOPES**  
Abbotsford News

When Kelly Tinsley's wife, Jasmine, suggested he attend an Abbotsford prenatal nutrition program with her, he was a tad hesitant.

He didn't think he'd be comfortable getting together with a bunch of people he'd never met before.

It turned out to be one of the best things he's ever done.

Not only did Kelly go to that first meeting, but he continued to regularly attend the Best for Babies program until his youngest son was six months old – the maximum length of time that anyone can participate.

He now attends other programs that work in partnership with Best for Babies.

Kelly is among a segment of the population that was once virtually ignored when it came to pregnancy and the post-natal period.

Dads used to be relegated to a backseat role when it came to support services, but Abbotsford became a leader in this area starting about four years ago, said Susan Larocque, Best for Babies co-ordinator.

At that time, Abbotsford Community Services' New Beginnings program hired two father support workers – Bob Kay and Jeff McLean.

Meanwhile, Best for Babies – also a program of Abbotsford Community Services – had spent several years focusing on pregnant moms and their babies up to six months old. The moms were invited to attend drop-in programs, where they received information and support, including nutritional advice.

Dads were always welcome, but attendance was low from that side.

When Kay and McLean came on the scene, their support extended to Best for Babies. They began attending the two weekly drop-ins – Kay on Wednesdays and McLean on Thursdays – and more fathers began to join the sessions.

It was their presence that made it comfortable for dads like Kelly to join the program and seek support and advice.

Larocque said this has been an important addition to Best for Babies. Men often have issues related to pregnancy and parenting that they are not comfortable discussing with their partners.

Having other men to connect with can pay dividends, she said.

"We felt if dads were supported, they were able to be better fathers and support their partners and help them unite as a family."

Larocque said Best for Babies now averages six fathers per drop-in, and 25 different dads have been seen since April 1.

Many of them are new fathers but some have more than one child.

Keith Kayser has fallen into both groups during his time with the program. He and his wife, Charlotte, have two boys – ages five months and two years – and got involved with Best for Babies when Charlotte was halfway



JOHN MORROW / The Abbotsford News

**Kelly Tinsley plays with his son Kenneth, one year old, in the Old Courthouse Building, where the Best for Babies program operates.**

through her first pregnancy.

She was not from Abbotsford and, without connections to family and friends, she was feeling isolated.

"It was a way for her to meet other moms and get connected to the community," Keith said.

He got involved as a means of education. "I wanted to learn how to be a good father," he said.

The couple stayed with the program until their firstborn was six months old, but Keith continued to attend other dads' programs run by Kay and McLean such as Saturday morning drop-ins during the school year and Tuesday evening barbecues during the summer.

They went back to Best for Babies when Charlotte became pregnant with their

second child.

Keith said he has benefited greatly from the involvement.

"I've learned a lot of different methods in raising kids and handling different situations that arise," he said.

Kelly also has two sons – a one-year-old and an almost five-year-old – but didn't get involved in Best for Babies until his wife's second pregnancy. At the time, the couple were the first among their group of friends to have children.

"I've gotten a lot of parenting knowledge from it and a lot of support," Kelly said.

He, too, has since stayed involved in the other dads' programs. He has a piece of advice for fathers who might be reluctant to drop by: "They can come once and give it a try."

The Best for Babies drop-in program meets Wednesdays and Thursdays from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. The location is in Abbotsford Community Services' Old Courthouse Building on Laurel Street. The drop-in includes a meal and either a guest speaker or an activity.

Larocque commended the partnerships that Best for Babies has in Abbotsford. Support has come from various sources. Recent donations include six infant car-seats from Prospera Insurance Agency (West Oaks branch) and funds from Sunlife Financial (Fraser Valley branch) and Success by 6.

For more information on Best for Babies, call 604-859-7681 (local 288). For more information on other programs for dads, call 604-850-7303 (local 3404) or visit [www.abbydads.ca](http://www.abbydads.ca).

## Shane desperate to escape grandfather's blood

Alf Weaver raises his shovel and takes a vicious swing at the offender:

The shaggy sheep dog yelps and scurries across the narrow country road, dragging its left hind leg.

Alf's 15-year-old grandson, Shane, runs across the field toward him.

"What was that for?"

"Stupid mutt was digging up my watermelon vines."

"That's no reason to beat him! Digging's what dogs do, Grandpa."

"Not in my garden, they don't. No critter's gonna wreck my stuff and walk away healthy!"

"You just did it because you're mean! I'm telling the neighbours what you did."

"If they ask, I'll tell them the mutt got hit by a truck. And you'll tell them the same

thing."

"I'm not going to lie for you, Grandpa. I'm going to tell them the truth."

"You'll tell them what I tell you to tell them, or you'll be out on your ear, young man. Respect your elders."

Shane and his mother live with his grandfather because they have no other place to go. Shane's mother has emotional problems and spends most of her time watching soaps in her bedroom.

Alf Weaver is a stocky, bald, angry man with watery grey-blue eyes. He constantly criticizes everyone in the house for being untidy. He calls Shane a sneaky little thief, and he belittles his daughter-in-law for being fat.

Shane turns and runs into the woods on the other side



**ALLEN UNRAU**  
Young and Old Alike



of the creek.

"Run away, you little coward! You're a worthless piece of trash, just like your father! You'll never be any better than him."

Shane pushes his face against the rough bark of a cedar tree and screams:

"Why do I have to have that man's blood in me? Why can't the doctor drain it all out and pour in new blood? Why can't I have a good family?"

That evening, when Shane finally returns home, his grandfather is in the kitchen. He looks up from the massive plate of spaghetti and meatballs he's shovelling into his mouth and growls, "I've already been to the neighbours, so don't bother yapping to them about the dog."

Shane stands squarely in the doorway.

"I may have some of your blood running through me, but I'm never going to be like you. I'm not going to be mean or tell lies or hurt people. After what you did today, I've decided that we aren't going

to live here anymore. Mom and I are leaving."

Alf smirks.

"Where you goin'? Neither of you gotta dime."

"I called that women's shelter we went to when we had the trouble with Dad. They said we can stay there for at least a few days. After that, I don't know. But anything's better than here. I may have your name, but I'm not the same inside."

Somewhere in his walk in the woods, Shane seems to have crossed the invisible line from boyhood to manhood.

His grandfather's eyes darken.

"I told the neighbours what happened to their dog," he says and pauses. "They said they could understand why you chased it out of our gar-

den and said it wasn't your fault it got winged by the truck. Stupid dog's worthless anyhow. Drags everybody's garbage around."

Shane's face hardens. "On my way back to the house, I filled in the hole by the watermelons."

He drops something on the table.

"This was lying at the bottom."

It's a tarnished gold pocket watch with the initials A.W. engraved on the back.

"That 'stupid' dog's digging found the watch you blamed me for taking. Looks like you dropped something, Grandpa."

*Allen Unrau's columns are fictional stories about real-life issues. Comments? [allenunrau@yourlifeweekly.com](mailto:allenunrau@yourlifeweekly.com)*



### Learn to compost

Abbotsford Mission Recycling holds several free one-hour sessions for adults who would like to learn how to start and maintain a home composting system.

Classes take place in the Fraser Valley Regional District's compost demonstration garden at the Abbotsford Mission Recycling Depot, 33670 Valley Rd.

They are held Thursday, July 18; Friday, July 19; and Saturday, July 20. The sessions run three times a day – 9 a.m., 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Register by calling 604-850-3551 (local 3).

### For mood disorders

The Mood Disorders Association support group in Abbotsford meets Thursday, July 19 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The group gets together at Abbotsford Community Services (2420 Montrose Ave.) and is open to those who have mood disorders such as depression, manic depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Friends and family are also invited.

Call Christine at 604-854-9404 for more details.

### Art time at library

MSA Centennial Library (33660 South Fraser Way) invites kids ages seven and up to come to the library to create art with paper, scissors, paint and glue, and a story or two.

This program takes place Wednesday, July 18 from 10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. Call 604-853-1753 to register.

### Get on board

An afternoon of board games for kids ages nine and up takes place Thursday, July 18 at Clearbrook Library (32320 George Ferguson Way).

The program is hosted by the Friends of the Abbotsford Libraries and runs from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Refreshments are included. Registration is not required.

### Caregivers meet

The Alzheimer Support Group for caregivers meets Tuesday, July 17 at Garden Park Tower (2825 Clearbrook Rd.).

The meeting runs from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, call 604-859-3889 and leave a message.

### Support for cancer

The Abbotsford Breast Cancer Support Group meets Thursday, July 19.

The meeting runs from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. For more information, including location, call 604-852-1112 or 604-852-1410.

### For celiac disease

The Abbotsford Celiac Support Group meets every Tuesday at 10 a.m.

The group meets at Clayburn Gourmet Gallery (#320 3033 Immel St.).