I separated from my wife in November 2012. I have access to my kids every Monday & Wednesday after work for approx. 2 hours and every 2nd weekend the kids stay with me from Friday after School until Sunday evening.

Some of the difficulties I faced when spending time with my kids was being able to afford things to do with the kids especially on cold and winter nights. One day I was walking home with the kids from the park and I bumped into 2 girls who were handing out fliers for the local Family Centre.

I spoke to the kids and asked if they would like to go there as it was on a Monday when I had access to them. We all agreed to go and it has been fantastic with the family group providing different activities for us all to do together from craftwork to cooking and even Zumba fitness.

Whilst at the family club the girls there recommended I contact the Us Together Dad’s group as they explained to me that it would give me and the kids opportunities to do stuff together that normally I wouldn’t be able to do with them due to costs etc.. You see, what people don’t realise is when fathers get separated we have to pay maintenance as well as paying full rent and Council tax, Fuels costs etc for our own house (as we have moved out the marital home) and whilst I do not grudge paying maintenance for my kids as it is my duty as well as mums to pay for their welfare it does though not leave a lot of money to be able to do activities with the kids when I have my access time.

I have to say the family club and fathers group have been a godsend for me and the kids. We go to football, Ice hockey and soft play areas together and have lots of fun together. Especially in the winter months when it is too dark and cold to take the kids to park etc. I know that these types of things are government funded and I really hope that the government continues to fund these organisations.

As far as society acceptance of separated fathers go I feel that we are treated as inferior to the mum. For example I contacted my kids school requesting that all information be sent to me that mum receives i.e. attendance records, upcoming school events etc and from one of the schools I was asked to provide stamps and envelopes as the school claimed the extra costs incurred in sending out 2 letters ate into their budget! I quickly responded by pointing out I didn’t have a lot of money but they could easily email me any information as these days everything was typed up on computers before printing off and sending out. You see although in some cases Mums will inform separated Dads of events etc for kids, not all of them do!! And it depends on how the relationship between mum and separated Dad is at that point in time whether information is passed on. Dads have a right to know everything about their kids and schools should only need proof that the Dad has parental responsibility and any dialogue between Dad and the school should be kept between them. There was one instance when I called School to ask for appointment to discuss my son
who was at nursery and the school didn’t reply until they had spoken to Mum to make sure it was ok! It shouldn’t matter what mum says as long as Dad has parental responsibility!

I’d also like to add that I really feel strongly that the fact that Dad pays maintenance to his kids should be taken into account for housing benefit and council tax benefit. After all I pay maintenance but also have to pay for my kids when I have them stay over. I also have to pay full rent on a 2 bedroom house so that I can have my kids stay over. Extra heating costs etc as well when kids stay over.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and please continue to fund these groups that help out separated dads like myself.

6 February 2014