EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

FATHERS AND PARENTING

SUBMISSION FROM EDINBURGH LONE FATHERS PROJECT (DADS CLUB)

Founded in 2000, is a partnership between Gilmerton Child and Family Centre and One Parent Families Scotland.

The Scottish Governments National Parenting Strategy is promoting the involvement of fathers and the positive impact they can have on their children’s lives. There is also a desire to promote greater involvement of Fathers in all areas that concern their children’s lives.

If it wasn’t for The Lone Fathers Project, we believe there are fathers who would have given up the hope of ever seeing their children again.

This unique partnership between Gilmerton Child and Family Centre and One Parent Families Scotland, provides support to single fathers with young children and 'contact fathers' who look after their children for short periods of time.

Many of the fathers feel extremely isolated, lacking both friends and or family support. They are unlikely to meet other lone fathers and often feel cut off from friends because of child care issues. By bringing these dads together our project helps them realise they are not alone.

There are many benefits to this type of collaboration, for example the child and family centre works with a number of families where contact and residency is an issue. The support of the fathers worker and the key worker in the centre has helped support the best outcomes for the child.

This local authority/voluntary sector partnership brings together local parenting support, with those with experience of providing assistance on financial, legal and other issues to single parents. Working together, it has been possible to develop a successful formula for involving single fathers and their children.

The project is the longest running project of its kind in Scotland and was originally set up after realising that very few fathers were interested in coming along to more traditional social activities, such as coffee mornings.

Rather than using centre-based group work for support, a programme of sport, visits and outdoor activities are on offer every Saturday, while individual support takes place throughout the week - all activities allow the fathers to spend time with their children and make friends with one another.

Apart from the outings or activities that take place on Saturdays, the project offers the dads chances to take part in activities throughout the week. These usually take place on a Monday or a Tuesday. This can range from meeting up for a chat, catching up with
any problems that may have arisen and also, the chance for peer support amongst the dads.

The guys support each other and once they get to know each other, can build up a friendship where they are more likely to talk about their children and what it's like being a father. It takes time to build relationships."

Fathers show significant gains in self-confidence and self-esteem, due both to the support offered by the project worker and also from other participants. Once the fathers gain confidence in the service they are willing to open up and disclose personal issues and problems. Fathers have also seen improvements in the behaviour of their children as well as their performance at nursery. All the fathers in the group had very similar issues and concerns and from this a collective strength was nurtured and channelled into a positive direction. This allowed the individual fathers to learn through empathy, that the experiences of others were similar to their own and could reflect on this.

Parenting support is available from both the project worker and by the other dads taking part in the project. Having professional support and peer role models is extremely important to the group.

Over the years, we have met many fathers who without the right support, are struggling to overcome what can be overwhelming barriers. Most services are still geared towards women and the bulk of parenting is still done by mums but if we accept that looking after a child is down to both parents we need to provide support for fathers as well.

Men currently studying to be child carers or working in the field are in the minority, and often feel isolated. Some researchers argue that childcare centres should consider the hidden message that all-female childcare centres may send to children.

According to research, the presence of male childcare workers can help to challenge stereotypical views of men and women, encourage staff to change their own gender assumptions, and avoid children developing a skewed picture of the roles of men and women in society.

At pre-school level children begin to explore adult roles; with male care givers in their lives, boys will have positive male role models, and all children will benefit from the different qualities which men can bring to work with children, such as an adventurous approach to outside play and sport activities.

More fathers will get actively involved in childcare and events at local centres when the number of male care workers increases.

Children learn more and do better if they have more than one adult in their life. There is also extensive research to show that if a dad is involved in the early years, he will play a part right through the child's life. Children benefit from positive interactions with their fathers and play is crucial for their development. The positive outcomes are so massive, it is difficult to quantify them.
Dads are quick to praise the project. In one recent case, a father who had been going to court for two years to get access to his child was granted a court order for contact on a Saturday morning with the Dads' Club. The father, who did not wish to be named, said: "The Dads' Club offered the opportunity for me to demonstrate to the courts that not only should I have contact with my children but also that I was more than capable of looking after them. I nearly gave up hope and can't thank the Dads' club enough for helping me rebuild my relationship with my children."

Kenny Spence
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