Including Fathers From the Very Beginning

Services to Fathers are an equality issue primarily around gender equality.

A trustee of Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) attended a ‘Dads To Be’ course run by maternity services in West Lothian in 2005. As a consequence he bathes his three boys, a role he has undertaken from day one of being a new father.

In 2011 FNS worked in partnership with Children in Scotland, NHS Lothian and the NCT to produce a ‘Dads To Be’ resource for professionals providing antenatal education and support to fathers – see: http://fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk/archive/Dads2b.pdf

As far as we’re aware, West Lothian is still the only area in Scotland to run an antenatal course specifically for dads.

It is our hope and desire that every dad in Scotland has the opportunity to attend a ‘Dads To Be’ type antenatal course and be prepared and encouraged in having a meaningful role from the very beginning of their child’s life.

What Fathers Want

Nearly 70% of fathers want to be more involved in their child’s education and even higher proportions of non-resident parents (81%).

In a recent study 60% of parents said fathers should spend more time with their children. (Equality and Human Rights Commission)

Employment is still a barrier to dads’ involvement. Despite flexible working being good for dads it is still not fully utilised by men in the UK. In a UK Working Mums survey of 2000 mums in 2012 it was found that four per cent of fathers worked part time and 16% had some other kind of flexible working arrangement.

Creating a father friendly working culture in Scotland will allow fathers to negotiate shared parenting of their children more easily, providing a more rounded experience for Scotland’s children in the future.

There needs to be recognition that family break-up costs all in the family and in society and heightens the risk of poverty and of families falling below the poverty line.

This links the need for support for families before break up and support for families after and can be a key component in tackling inequality, particularly at the economic level.

Services’ Neglect of Fathers

In spite of recent research developments and insights regarding the need for services to support fathers, services remain very fragmented and projects that do
exist are often left to their own devices and self-funded despite their services being relied upon by the statutory services. Research has discovered that: 'Father inclusive practice was not seen to be routine or mainstream in family services (Page et al 2008). For instance, of a sample of 382 Scottish services for parents, only three services were adapted to suit the needs of fathers (Hutton et al. 2007).

There is also a demonstrable lack of uptake by fathers of generic ‘parents’ groups and services. Specific groups of fathers such as young fathers may experience an intensified sense of exclusion and thus remain on the fringes of service provision, particularly at a time and age when they are most in need. Different equality communities of single dads will have multiple disadvantage both culturally and their ability to access support and services.

**Encouraging and supporting fathers to play an active role in their child’s upbringing is key if we are to improve the health, wellbeing and life chances of Scotland’s children and young people.**


**The Changing Role of Fathers**

There has been a marked increase in the role fathers play in childcare and domestic life and also a major shift in the manner in which fatherhood is viewed. A more active role is evident throughout childhood as well as a shift away from the more traditional (perhaps stereotypical) married breadwinner and disciplinarian. (O'Brien, 2005; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003; Sullivan and Dex 2009).

The role of father or father-figure is complex. Those in the role can be single or married; externally employed or a stay at home father; gay or straight; an adoptive or step-parent; and crucially, can be a more than capable caregiver to children as they face the various challenges that come with growing up.

The inclusion of a significant emphasis on fathers and fathering in the Scottish Government’s National Parenting Strategy (2012) is the most recent example of official attention. Fathers’ right to be named on their child’s birth certificate has been extended through legislation (in 2003) and the father role recognised by the extension of parental leave.

**Why Dad Matters?**

Research findings indicate that fathers’ involvement with their children links to higher educational achievement and occupational mobility irrespective of the child’s gender (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004; Flouri, 2005; Sarkadi et al 2008; Flouri and Buchanan, 2002).

Low fatherly involvement also indicates detrimental outcomes in these areas. Positive outcomes are also demonstrated in relation to fathers’ involvement and children’s behaviour including lower levels of police involvement at a later stage (Hango, 2007; Blanden, 2006) Fathers’ interest has also been shown to have a positive influence on mental health (Flouri, 2005).

The benefits of involved fathering, no matter the family makeup, extend beyond those that accrue for the child. Mothers and fathers themselves have been found to
gain when fathers are included. Failure to involve fathers impacts on mothers by placing an unfair burden on them in relation to the disciplinary role and, in cases of suspected neglect or abuse, an unfair burden of investigation and responsibility (Gillies, 2004).

Studies involving young fathers point to the negative effect ignoring them has on children’s well-being as a lack of perceived support among expectant teenage mothers correlated with high scores on a Child Abuse Potential Inventory (Zelenko et al, 2001; Kalil et al, 2005).

Decreased involvement of young fathers is significantly associated with young mothers’ increased parenting stress. Non-resident fathers have an important role to play as the quality of time rather than the amount of time is shown to be significant (Asmussen and Weizel, 2010).

In public expenditure terms, the high cost of residential and other forms of childcare is likely to be substantially reduced with a greater systematic involvement of fathers and paternal relatives in care proceedings (Bellany, 2009). More involved fatherhood also contributes to men’s self-improvement in relation to turning men away from crime and self-harm and preventing recidivism among prisoners.

Vulnerable children seem to be in the greatest need of ongoing positive relationships with their biological fathers or father figure. They tend to do worse when father-child relationships are poor or non-existent compared to those who are supported by their fathers (Dunn et al, 2004).

**From father-proving to father-proofing**

The value of positively involved fathering is incontestable and proven (Burgess, 2008). Involved fathers ensure that children, women and families as a whole benefit. A consensus is emerging that we now need to move from having to prove the value of fathers’ involvement to designing services that include rather than exclude them, thus the use of the term ‘father proofing’.

A key determinant of whether services are doing the best they can to involve fathers obviously includes encouraging positive attitudes among staff (men and women) and the dedication of father-friendly provision.

However, the importance of image projected by services should not be underestimated. Image, first impression, ‘feel’ of a place, waiting room or reception area, all these things give off messages which can say that this service is really just for women and mothers. Such messages can be conveyed in policy, publicity, training materials and just the ‘look’ of services.

Father-proofing is not only about the importance of depicting men as involved or capable of being involved in the lives of their children and families, it is also a tool for drawing men into the services we offer in family welfare, child care and public health. And it is also as much about ceasing to depict women as sole carers with the sole responsibility for the health, welfare and safety of children and families.

As indicated at the beginning, father-proofing on its own will have limited effect if it is not part of a strategy to change cultures, attitudes and practices about children, families and mothers and fathers.
Paternity leave usage could increase support to mothers and hence families.

Supporting fathers through a major transition point in life has better outcomes for families, mothers and their children. Keeping families together should be a priority and better-supported fathers throughout the process at pre and antenatal stages as well as through paternity leave can only enhance their involvement at the key transition points.

The economist Ankita Patnaik shows impact of Quebec in 2006 increasing the financial benefits for paid leave and offering five weeks that could be taken only by fathers. “That’s what really made a difference. Now dads might feel bad for not taking leave—you lose this time with parents.” Since then, the percentage of Quebecois fathers taking paternity leave has skyrocketed, from about 10 percent in 2001 to more than 80 percent in 2010.

In Quebec, women whose husbands were eligible for the new leave were more likely to return to their original employers and were more likely to work full-time, resulting in their spending “considerably” more hours on paid work. (When women work full-time, it alters the home division of labour more than when they work part-time.) And as women were spending more time working for pay, men were spending less: the Quebec paternity-leave policy resulted in a small but long-term decrease in fathers’ time at work.

The policy has achieved many of the hoped-for long-term outcomes, chief among them is more fluidity in who does what around the house. Previous studies found that fathers who take paternity leave are more likely, a year or so down the road, to change diapers, bathe their children, read them bedtime stories, and get up at night to tend to them. Patnaik’s study confirmed this; looking at time-use diaries, she found that men who were eligible for the new leave—whether or not they took it—ended up spending more time later on routine chores like shopping and cooking.

At present in Scotland it is not known how fathers are supported at work, how paternity leave is being utilized and therefore how future changes in legislation will affect employers or families. As the review Fathers at Work by Burnett et al (2012) from Lancaster University concludes: “Fathers perceive that, while family-friendly policies might in theory be available to ‘parents’ these are in practice targeted at working mothers.”

Fathers Network Scotland - building a father friendly world.

Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) is a Scottish Charity. Until April 2013 we were a wholly voluntary organisation. We were instrumental in setting up the Fathers Roundtable for the Scottish Government to input into the National Parenting Strategy. This was published in October 2012 and contained a number of promises on fathers.

Our mission is to create a safe and compassionate Scotland where all children, their families and communities are enriched and strengthened through the full and welcome involvement of their fathers.

We do this by supporting organisations to positively engage, support, and empower men to become the best fathers they can be.
In April, SG awarded FNS two years funding as a strategic partner to support FNS to deliver on these priorities.

We have published a number of reports and briefing papers on the engagement of fathers in child and family services and our main product is spearheaded by our work on ‘father-proofing’. Our publication, Where’s Dad is available on the Fathers Network Scotland Website through the following link http://www.fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk/archive/WheresDad.pdf

We have also included a link to the Dad Matters publication by FNS that highlights the issues around father inclusive services. http://www.fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk/archive/DadMatters.pdf

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