The Dads Club is an activity-based parenting support project for single and contact fathers with young children in Edinburgh. It began in 2001 and is run jointly by Gilmerton Child and Family Centre and One Parent Families Scotland.

Gilmerton Child and Family Centre is located in the South East area of Edinburgh. It is purpose built and was opened in 1954. It is part of the City of Edinburgh Councils, Children and Families Department. The Centre is very proud to have a mix of both Male and Female members of staff within it's team who are key workers and role models to the children.

The Dads Club is non-supervised and the dads support worker is on hand to deal with any enquiries or issues some of the dads may have.

It provides the opportunity for the fathers and their children to take part in activities and outings on Saturday mornings.

The fathers and the children pick the activities/outings that take place.

In the past the trips have been to museums, the story telling centre, soft play areas (when it's been raining) and also when the sun shines we try and get out to Country Park, and do outdoor activities. In the past we have had a BBQ out at Dalkeith Country Park, and also an Easter egg rolling session.

We have helped fathers back into education, parenting classes and even volunteering opportunities. During the week we have also seen the fathers take part in healthy cooking classes, photography classes and provided the opportunity for some dads to use leisure centres. This varies as it depends on what the dads needs are.

The fathers are single and contact fathers with young children (under 4 years old) in Edinburgh. Both those who are the main carers of their children and those contact fathers who look after their children for shorter periods of time.

The Dads Club idea stemmed from observations of fathers playing with their young children. The project moved away from the more traditional approach of providing focused parenting support through centre-based group work. Instead, a programme of sports, visits and outdoor activities has been developed, in which fathers and young children can take part together. The parenting support element is provided ‘on the hoof’ by the project worker and other participants as they take part in activities.
The project holds regular outings on Saturday mornings with fathers and children. It also provides advice and support on issues such as legal rights, housing, debt and benefits and the project worker can act as an advocate on fathers’ behalf. Assistance is also provided with accessing education and applying for jobs.

In under a year the project attracted fourteen fathers and thirty children who use the project on a weekly basis for Saturday visits and outdoor activities. Since then, the Dads Club has worked with over 100 families. Other fathers use the drop-in service held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, raising a range of parenting and other issues with staff.

Healthy eating and health project work has also been undertaken, with support from NHS Lothian.

All the fathers have been encouraged to allow their children the time and space to talk, to express their own opinions and for these opinions to be acknowledged. With this in mind, it was decided that it should be the children who decide the venue of the Saturday trips – time, travel and finance permitting. As a result, the children (who some fathers worried were having to take on caring roles for younger siblings) became more expressive, talkative and confident.

There is no shortage of demand for the service, which has been expanded to cover the whole of Edinburgh. Fathers are referred to the group (eg through Social Workers or the courts).

Training material on lone fathers has been developed and used with a range of organisations.

Children’s needs, interests and wishes are central to the project. Children get a lot out of the activities and outings directly (in addition to through improvements in the parenting skills of their dads) and are treated as key decision makers.

Dads can use the service as needed – for help and advocacy or to socialise with other fathers and children. It moves at their own pace and provides both one-to-one and peer support.

Taking a proactive and holistic approach to tackling the pressing multiple difficulties faced by users keeps fathers engaged and allows them space to focus on their children’s needs and best interests.

**User Feedback**

“**Bairns met bairns - They love it - I use the trips as a carrot!**”

“It’s made me realise that I’m doing OK - I respond to praise and encouragement, like everyone does, I suppose”
“It gave me and dads like me the opportunity to do things ourselves and with our kids, the things we couldn’t afford. It’s not all about money, the emotional support was tremendous”

“I cannot thank the Dads Club enough for helping and supporting me and my children in rebuilding our relationship”

Kenny Spence
on behalf of Gilmerton Child and Family Centre
20 February 2014