Provision of Services and Support Groups

In North Ayrshire there is an on-going focus of increasing engagement and involvement of fathers in Early Education, school education and parenting support. Below is a flavour of some of the particular opportunities for fathers at the early stages.

A number of Early Education centres run football sessions for fathers. One Early Years Centre started running a six week football group. This group has continued to meet for the past year and a half. A staff member with responsibility for the group has commented on health benefits for the men. This includes a reduction in the sense of isolation, weight loss and increased fitness levels. The group has been a social support for the fathers. Training is held on a weekly basis, alongside a team meeting. In addition, the group has now signed up for and are playing in the local Power league. This group of fathers have attended training provided by SFA on Early Touches and are delivering this within the Centre and are keen to become further involved in activities. Future training with SFA is planned for August. Seventeen fathers attend this group.

Other opportunities include supporting and enabling fathers to attend forest school and involvement in a range of groups including gardening and cookery.

A Mellow mums group has been set up. An offer has been made to fathers to provide them with an insight into the programme. As a result four sessions are planned in March to allow fathers to participate in three taster sessions provided by Mellow along with a practical session for fathers.

Three fathers have attended Parent Early Education in Partnership (PEEP) sessions with their young children.

Barnardos within North Ayrshire are offering a Mellow Dads & Mellow Toddlers group in partnership with Mellow Parenting starting at end of March 2014. They hope to have between six and eight dads in attendance.

Societal Attitudes

Early gender socialisation often contributes to stereotypes about appropriate activities for female and male carers in a parenting role. Men may not find it as easy to participate in groups that are centred on chatting and socialising and face barriers to inclusion if they are the only male in the group.
This can make it harder for men to access parent groups in the community as they are often targeted at female care givers with the language used reflecting this eg Mother and Toddlers. In order to help change the attitudes of the predominantly female staff working in Early Years Establishments, staff have participated in awareness raising training for working with fathers.

Men often talk about perceptions of them out in the community if for example they are taking their children swimming and using changing rooms with a female child.

Over a period of years one father has participated in almost every activity and support group the early years and primary school have to offer. When asked why he thought that he was the only father who attended any parent groups he said that, most dads work and can't get to the school during the day. However, the main barrier or challenge for fathers who don't work and could be available is the predominantly female environment. He had spoken to other fathers who refused to get involved with "all those women" because they found the environment intimidating.

North Ayrshire Council
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