

Where's Dad?

Improving the Engagement of Fathers' and Male Carers in Fife

Evaluation Report

June 2016

Improving Fathers' Engagement Partnership



Improving Fathers' Engagement Partnership

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“Fife Council, recognising the crucial part fathers play in the nurture of young children, commends and endorses the importance given by our Early Years staff to working with fathers’, and wholeheartedly welcomes the declaration of 2016 as the ‘Year of the Dad’.”

(Fife Council, 2016)

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“Really heartened to hear about this shift in culture towards a more inclusive approach to parenting and family support. I’m looking forward to keeping dads on our own agenda.”



Introduction

In 2014, practitioners from Fife Health & Social Care Partnership, Fife Council and the Voluntary Sector formed a collaboration known as *Improving Fathers' Engagement Partnership* (IFEP) with a vision to improve practitioner and service engagement with fathers and male carers across Fife. The group explored local and national research and practice, including successes and challenges, and used this knowledge as the foundation for the partnership's overarching outcomes:

- (1) Practitioners across Fife will have improved knowledge, skills and confidence to address cultural and societal beliefs on gender roles and parenting; enabling them to positively engage male parents and carers.
- (2) Ensure sustainable local strategies support and engage male parents and carers across Fife.

The group recognised that in order to meet these outcomes, a successful model would have to consider the following key questions:

- Why do we want to engage dads/male carers?
- How do we engage dads/male carers in a meaningful and purposeful way?
- Do practitioners understand and value the difference in men's parenting behaviour?
- What is Fife's strategy for engaging fathers' and male carers?

This report will provide insight into our learning, progress and achievements to date as well as recommendations to enable continued growth of this initiative.

Rationale

"It is well established that fathers' (whether resident or non-resident, biological or de facto, good or bad) are profoundly important to the development, wellbeing and life chances of their children."

(Children in Scotland, 2010)

Changes in the law in 2003 acknowledged parental responsibility of fathers named on their child's birth certificates, whether or not they are married to the mothers (Fathers Network 2014). Research by Children First (2010) and Growing Up in Scotland (2012) suggests that fathers experience exclusion from, and feel marginalised by services as culturally there is a tendency to view motherhood as more central to women's lives than fatherhood is to men's lives (Dads2b 2011).

The Early Years Framework (2008) advocates that parents are ultimately responsible for parenting with the support of the wider community and agencies. There is specific point made of considering fathers in this model in the context of securing improved outcomes for their children. The National Parenting Strategy for Scotland (2012) similarly recognises that fathers have greater expectations on them from society to play an active role in parenting and family life in general. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is an approach to improve outcomes and support the wellbeing of children and young people that includes supporting parents (The Scottish Government 2012). Whilst this document does not define "parents", it may be suggested that this passively includes fathers.

Dads2b (2011) and Fathers Network Scotland (2014) acknowledge that practitioners play an influential role on whether fathers feel valued and included; recognising that a father's involvement has a significant impact on a child's life experience and developmental milestones.

Changing a Culture

In order to achieve significant changes, every individual, service and partnership involved in supporting children and families must think about what part they play in making Fife a more inclusive place to live, work and parent.

The IFEP set out to initiate a cultural shift in Fife by challenging certain historical and embedded perceptions, attitudes and practices towards parenting. Practitioners, managers and leaders have been encouraged to examine, explore and develop knowledge, skills and tools to adopt a more father aware and father inclusive approach to working with families, children and young people.

Partnership Working

The establishment of IFEP brought together practitioners from across all sectors. Members held different experiences of engaging dads within their practice; with varying levels of success. There was a shared awareness that despite pockets of good practice there was a lack of consistency across Fife and opportunities for improvement. It was acknowledged that despite good intentions, services and organisations often reinforce gender inequalities by gearing communication towards females often with a maternal perspective.

At the onset of the partnership it was recognised that the messages conveyed by readily available literature, publicity and resources; as well as organisational cultures, professional values and attitudes has a direct and indirect impact on our inclusiveness as practitioners and service providers.

A multi-agency approach has been fundamental in bringing conversations and ideas into fruition. All partnership members invested their knowledge, skills, resources and connections, harvesting creativity and synergy.

Within the initial months, the partnership explored research and good practice in relation to father inclusive approaches. Links were forged with Father Network Scotland, who have been a key partner in supporting and enabling our vision to bring about sustainable change.

The IFEP have presented to and linked with key strategic groups, such as, Fife Early Years Strategy, Breadth of Parenting, Fife Council Senior Equalities and the Lead Officer Equalities, promoting father inclusion. Within a national context the partnership has provided representation and regular updates to the National Fathers Advisory board with the work being progressed in Fife considered good practice and gaining national recognition.

Workforce Development

The IFEP has taken a holistic approach to increasing equity around father inclusiveness. The partnership works collaboratively across all sectors, communicating with practitioners, leaders and managers to inspire and initiate changes to service development.

A vital part of improving and embedding father inclusive practice across Fife is having a highly competent, confident and motivated workforce able to apply the required knowledge and skills to initiate relevant changes in practice and improve service delivery.

A workshop led by a Specialist Community Public Health Nurse student (a member of the IFEP) was developed to highlight the importance of engaging dads and to encourage practitioners to reflect and consider the impact of their approach, practice and messages on the role of fatherhood.

The content was based on two inputs; one from a section of the well evaluated 'Boys Own': Improving Self Esteem in Boys and Young Men training workshop plus input from Fathers Network Scotland on discriminatory practice in public service imagery.

The workshop was piloted with Health Visitors and had a profound effect and impact on practitioners' understanding and recognition around the need to be more father inclusive in their day to day practice. All participants were able to identify at least one area of their work and/or service that they would change to become more 'father inclusive'.

The IFEP acknowledged that learning, education and development of the Fife workforce is pivotal if organisational and cultural change is to be successful. This led to the development and dissemination of a father inclusive training model across the Fife workforce by building on the core principles of the pilot workshop.

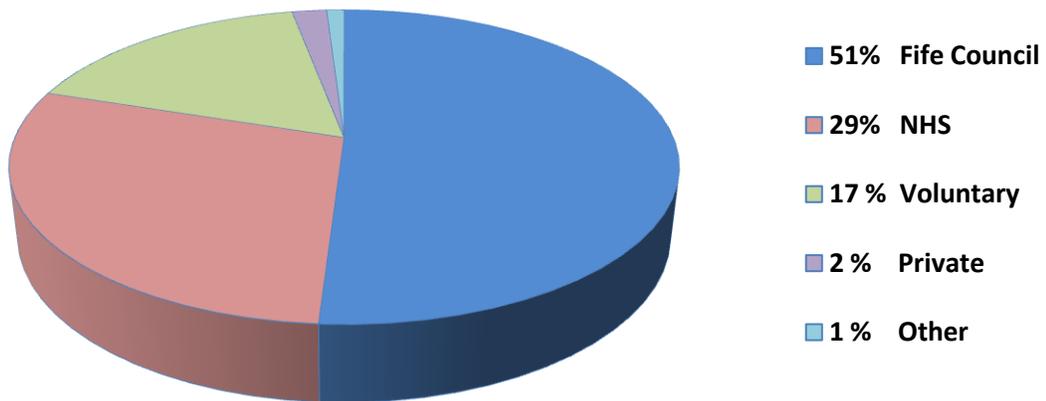
A proposal was submitted to the Early Years Strategy Group, leading to funding to support the development of a father inclusive model for Fife including a comprehensive training workshop, practitioner workbook and marketing materials all branded under the term – 'Where's Dad?'

Where's Dad? Training Workshop

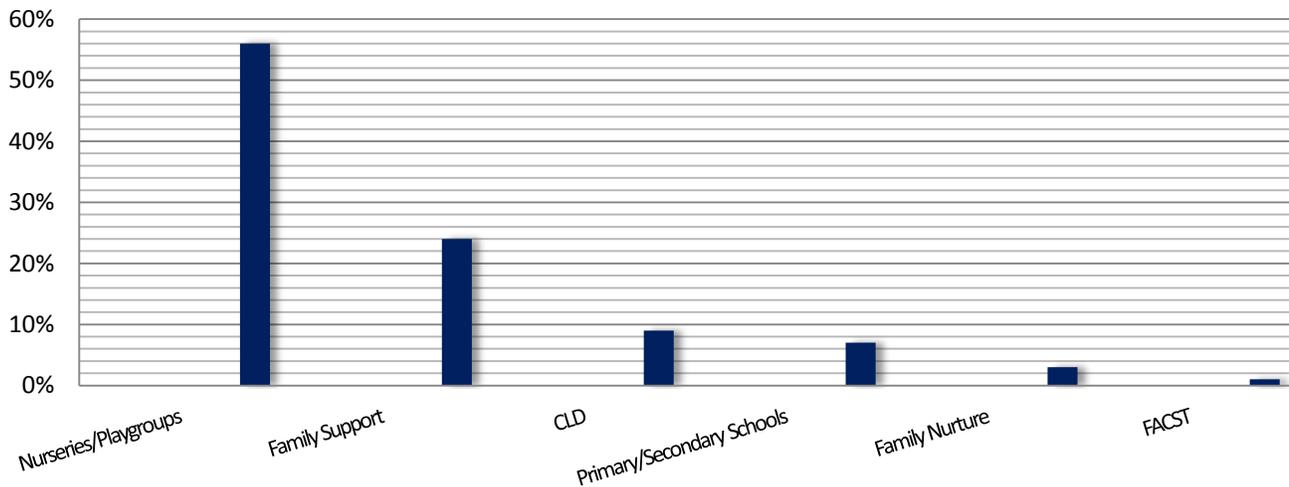
The 'Where's Dad?' workshop provides the opportunity for participants to reflect on their practice and to adopt a more father inclusive approach.

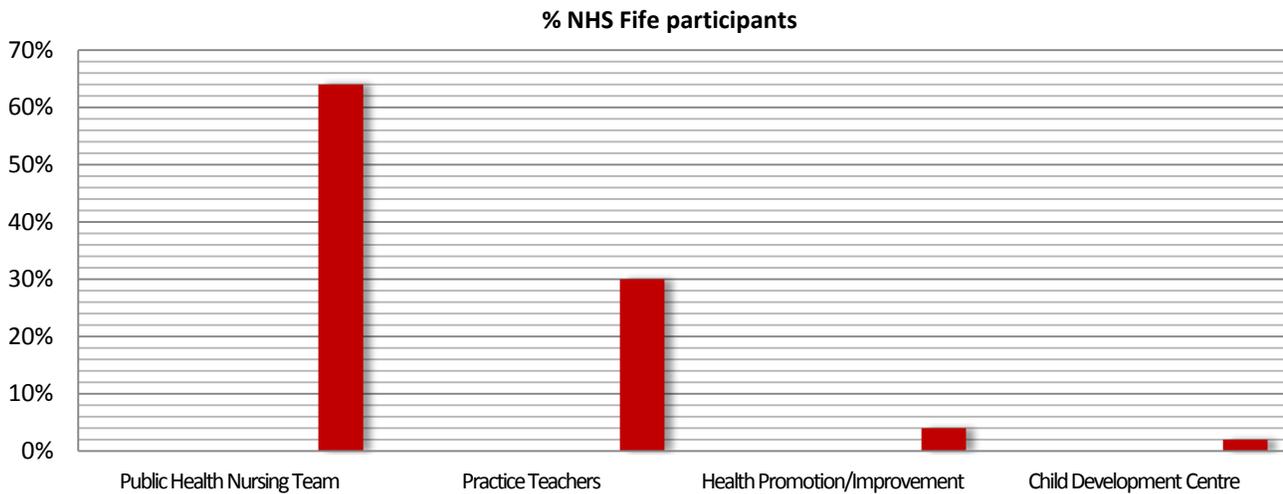
Members of the IFEP delivered workshops across Fife through the Health Improvement Training Programme 2015/16 and Multi-Agency Training Calendar 2015/16. There were also a number of requests for in house training across all sectors. To date 184 participants have attended the training. The profile of participants is as follows:

% of participants from each sector (n=184)



% Fife Council participants





Participants were asked if they felt the course had achieved its objectives with 64% responding ‘fully’, 35% to a ‘large extent’ with 1% to a ‘limited extent’. When asked to rate the workshop in terms of their job, 51% felt it was ‘extremely valuable’, 42% indicating ‘very valuable’ and 7% ‘valuable’.

Practitioners were also asked to indicate what they had gained from the workshop - ‘improved knowledge’ was cited as the highest with 87% of participants, 84% ‘new ideas’, 58% ‘new contacts/networking’, 44% ‘improved confidence’ and 37% ‘improved skills’.

When asked to identify an area of practice they will change as a result of the workshop, 100% of participants were able to take away at least one thing they could change to improve/support father inclusive practice.

“When making contact with families, ensure to ask if both parents will be present and when on visits ask and engage with fathers”.

“Have father friendly posters displayed in the area and literature available”.

The Fife father inclusive model has had a positive impact with many further developments arising as a result. Health Visiting students and Practice Teachers from Queen Margaret University have taken part in the ‘Where’s Dad?’ training with discussions taking place about embedding this within the curriculum. In addition to these training sessions, 290 Nursing students from Dundee University have attended a lecture and tutorials around father inclusive practice.

Conversations have been initiated with Fife Maternity Services surrounding all midwifery and paediatric staff accessing a ‘Where’s Dad?’ workshop. In addition, Community Learning and Development would like to embed the training within their programmes in relation to the teenage/underage pregnancy agenda. With Angus also noting an interest to replicate the work developed in Fife.

The IFEP evaluated current and potential future developments to identify areas of strength in terms of the workforce as well as areas where further work needs to be completed. As a result, a long term outcome identified to support father inclusive practice across Fife was a Training for Trainers programme to increase sustainability and build capacity.

Train the Trainers (T4T) Programme

The ‘Where’s Dad?’ T4T program is designed to increase the skill set of participants from theory and understanding to delivery of a father inclusive workshop. It covers many aspects such as content building, how to facilitate sensitive information, feedback analysis and performance evaluation.

A total of 9 participants (7 based in Fife, 1 from Angus and 1 from Fathers Network Scotland) attended the T4T course delivered by members of the IFEP and supported by NHS Fife Health Promotion Service training team.

A four page training booklet was developed to align with the ‘Where’s Dad?’ workshop. The training booklet was a step by step guide to delivering the workshop as well as aims and objectives around each section. All participants indicated that the course had achieved its objectives.

“Really enjoyed the day, built on knowledge through talking through experiences with other professionals and grew my confidence in being able to deliver effectively”.

“Really enjoyed the course – very valuable to my practice and aim to deliver ASAP”.

Increasing the number of trainers enables continual growth, effectiveness and success of ‘Where’s Dad?’ and builds on the creative work and vision of the IFEP to increase father inclusive practice across Fife.

Practitioners should now be better equipped to engage and involve fathers more, and collectively these small changes may contribute to the longer term transformational change, or cultural shift, in how we engage, represent and discuss parenting with all parents/carers.

Seminar - Strategic Influence

The IFEP held a ‘Where’s Dad?’ seminar on Thursday 3rd December 2015, targeted at strategic leaders in Fife. The aim of the seminar was threefold:

1. To raise awareness of the *IFEP*, and the work progressed in Fife.
2. To promote the ‘*Year of the Dad*’ and encourage collaboration to plan and build on from this national campaign locally.
3. To initiate conversations around ‘father proofing’ policy and practice in Fife.

To provide an overview of research regarding the importance of fathers’ as well as local and national context, the seminar included a number of speakers to set the scene:

- Lynn Gillies, Early Years Change Officer, Fife Council
- Dr Gary Clapton, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh
- Chris Mieзитis, Improving Fathers Engagement Partnership
- Douglas Guest, Fathers Network Scotland

Fifty one practitioners attended, 37% identifying themselves as a strategic lead during the application process. On registration participants were assigned a table with the aim of gaining a broad range of perspectives through multiagency representation.

Table Discussions

Following the speakers, participants were invited to engage in facilitated round table discussions. Each table had a facilitator with guidance to initiate discussions around four topic areas:

1. Reflections on presentations
2. Cultural Change
3. Workforce Development
4. Year of the Dad

The remainder of the chapter is a summary of the main themes that emerged from the table discussions. Participants' words, phrases and direct quotations are presented.

Key Themes

Research

The majority of participants reflected on the research presented by Dr Gary Clapton. Participants acknowledged the evidence surrounding the involvement of fathers and better social, educational and emotional outcomes for children, for example:

- *“improved cognitive functioning in kids with dad’s being present”*
- *“children’s lives are improved when dads are involved”*
- *“the massive effect on a child’s development and attainment”*
- *“two or three important statistics helps make an impact, gives a sense of urgency”*
- *“research shows dads’ involvement has positive outcomes. I question whether negative involvement would have positive outcomes”*
- *“evidence regarding dad’s input in early months reflects on a child’s life.”*

Practice

Participants were able to consider individual and organisations' attitudes and practices, with one participant stating that this was a “tipping point of change in professional attitude to fatherhood”. In addition, participants shared their perspectives on areas that could be improved, for example:

- *“the importance of having dad around really made me think how to use this in my own role”*

- *“realisation that we as health professionals do not include dads as much as we could”*
- *“do we do enough?”*
- *“include fathers in visits i.e. home visits from Health Visitor after birth.”*

Imagery

Many practitioners fed back that imagery or ‘lack of positive male images’ had resonated with them, for example:

- *“interesting how until it’s pointed out we don’t notice how many leaflets etc don’t have dads on it”*
- *“images of family = mother and child”*
- *“the way the media adverts portray families was eye opening. Something I may have taken for granted.”*

Organisational Change

Participants acknowledged the need for effort at an organisation level to bring about positive change towards father inclusion, for example:

- *“the need to change the structural barriers is essential e.g. pay, flexible working”*
- *“recognition of flexible working for parents not just mums or dads”*
- *“guidance and checklists to support services ‘top tips’ to make more ‘dad’ inclusive.”*

Barriers

Exploration of ‘Cultural Change’ in regards to father inclusion and exclusion generated discussion on a broad range of topics, including barriers that hinder father inclusion, such as *“dads work away... off shore”* and *“patterns of work 9-5”* and the realisation that *“huge cultural shifts are needed”* and *“change takes time”*.

Values, Attitudes & Social Norms

Conversations explored how as individuals we contribute to cultural patterns. Emerging themes to improve professional practice as well as trying to influence young people’s values, attitudes and societal norms.

Language

As language is a key aspect of our everyday lives, participants shared the importance of our language in being able to communicate effectively. Language is fundamental in how we engage, interact and work alongside service users and people within our communities *“Language is important – dads, families, biological, step dad, carer and so on”*.

Language was considered very influential in improving father inclusive practice and held the potential of being extremely powerful or powerless depending on its use.

- *“inclusive language”*
- *“acknowledging and speaking directly to dads”*
- *“use of language – small things = big impacts”*
- *“language is powerful”*
- *“parent and toddler’ opposed to ‘mum and toddler’ groups.”*

There was acknowledgement that there has been a shift in language, with couples using language such as *“we’re pregnant”*.

Language was discussed not only as an individual responsibility but in terms of the messages that services and organisations convey about ‘parenting’ and ‘family’ and where responsibilities and accountability lie. A number of comments and service improvements were shared, for example:

- *“ensure services are equally available to dads”*
- *“creativity when promoting services”*
- *“making services more accessible in terms of times, venues.”*

Early Intervention

Another emerging theme in terms of practice was an emphasis on early intervention and the opportunity to influence attitudes and values of the next generation. The importance of work around self worth and self efficacy of young people was considered fundamental in achieving change.

- *“more gender awareness raising within schools, youth work and other groups”*
- *“teenage transitions - an opportunity?”*
- *“early teens - attitudes to conception and commitment”*

- *“early intervention to self worth, self esteem before people become dads”*
- *“engaging dads early is vital.”*

Workforce Development

A commonality between all groups was the importance of training in bringing about systematic change:

- *“training is provided and evaluated”*
- *“father-proof all available training”*
- *“awareness raising – change the mindset”*
- *“we need to share the research findings but think about what changes we need to make in practice”*
- *“continued investment into asset based coproduction training.”*

Documentation

Participants highlighted gaps in the routine information we collect about fathers. The importance of this information and how we might minimise missed opportunities were at the forefront of discussions:

- *“change recording methods (gravitate towards mum)”*
- *“data: how do we know if we are working with fathers and grandparents?”*
- *“gender (role) recording when working with families (who is there/not there).”*

Person-centred Approach

Groups advocated a person-centred approach, demonstrating an appreciation of the complexities that may impact on one’s perception of inclusion and/or willingness to engage with services. A focus on individuals’ ‘self worth’ was put forward as fundamental to father-proofing practice:

- *“early Intervention: self worth, self esteem. Before people become dads”*
- *“person-centred approach to working with people Dads (mums) are people first / parents second”*
- *“be person centred, men tailored approach”*
- *“look at all the people around the child offering gifts and qualities not just mum and dad.”*

Improvements

Conversations moved towards practitioners identifying areas for improvement and sharing their perspectives on how we can improve father inclusion in Fife:

- *“look at book purchases and stock. Books that deliver parental role of males”*
- *“workforce development around work with fathers in prison – parenting groups / bonding sessions etc”*
- *“use team meetings to revisit, change and discuss, keep the momentum going”*
- *“give dads opportunity to be peer mentors”*
- *“Where’s Dad?’ Champions.”*

Power of Conversation

It was highlighted that the ‘Where’s Dad?’ seminar had been a positive catalyst for initiating conversations and the importance of this dialogue:

- *“keep doing what you’re doing. Spread the word”*
- *“these conversations continue”*
- *“it is really positive that Fife has displayed an open approach and we are making progress identified.”*

National Campaign

A number of participants highlighted that the ‘Year of the Dad’ would provide an opportunity to raise the profile of dads and male carers and promote key messages within their organisations as well as local communities. Social media and local networks were highlighted as key tools in achieving this, for example:

- *“can we use this (‘Year of the Dad’)? Absolutely!”*
- *“highlight the ‘Year of the Dad’ to families. The website as a resource to inform and encourage the impact fathers have on their children”*
- *“social media using hashtags #Year of the Dad”*
- *“publicise to other agencies – use to embed in practice”*
- *“posters across Fife”*
- *“promote to workplaces/ get workplaces involved!”*

Strategic Influence

Participants highlighted the need to “*make strategic what has been bottom up*” sharing strategic thinking on how Fife can improve father inclusion through the following approaches:

- “*workforce development*”
- “*development of family friendly policies etc*”
- “*charter status or similar. Organisations achieving status. What do ‘father friendly organisations look like?’*”

Viewpoints

As is inevitable with explorative conversations often more questions emerge than answers:

- “*events – should these be targeted? Dads/families – who does this actually attract/put off?*”
- “*why do fathers not take responsibility? What makes them feel so disempowered?*”
- “*can we sustain what we start? Do we make it mainstream on principle then fund it?*”

Alongside discussions participants did voice personal opinions and statements:

- “*is it fair/right that one parent can exclude another?*”
- “*focus on dads as people not only as dad*”
- “*‘Where’s Dad?’ Initial reaction was absent dads rather than present!*”

Challenges

Partnership working was fundamental in achieving the successes and legacy of the IFEP, both in terms of membership but also the wider collaboration with local and national partnerships, services and practitioners. Although the benefits of collaboration far outweigh the challenges, it is still important to recognise that partners and practitioners can often have conflicting agendas, priorities, and approaches.

As this work was practitioner led and was no 'one' person's specific role or remit, this often meant that practitioners were progressing this work alongside their other work commitments which influenced the time and capacity they were able to dedicate. The IFEP recognised that, to continue and further progress the partnerships' developments, we would have to increase capacity and set up sustainable models hence our commitment to setting up a pool of trainers.

One of the key challenges faced was “*why the focus on dads?*” and whether this was justified. Despite the fact that the IFEP felt strongly that the ‘Where’s Dad?’ agenda was about equality and inclusion for fathers, mothers and children, the partnership often had to contend with both male dominated and feminist political agendas and the strong personal viewpoints that go alongside both. As a partnership we asserted that this work is about supporting the broader themes of equality and inclusion, not about opposing agendas.

A challenge was to overcome initial assumptions around father engagement. A minority of practitioners expressed that they felt that they were already father inclusive; however their perceptions changed significantly following training with feedback indicating that despite being father inclusive, practitioners could still identify areas where they could improve.

“Sadly I realise we as health professionals don’t exclude fathers but we don’t exactly include them either.”

Conclusion

There is growing interest in fatherhood and this is evident within the national policy agenda. There is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate the contribution made by fathers to their children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development (FIRA, 2007) and a plethora of evidence that demonstrates that positive involvement of fathers is of benefit to children, women and fathers themselves (Clapton, 2014).

The father inclusion agenda has at times been confused with the question of including and representing minority groups, for example, LGBT parents, in our collective picture of family and parenting. The family structure has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, however most families (around seven out of ten) still consist of children living with both biological parents (DWP, 2013). Fathers as a collective are not a minority group but may as individual's fall within any minority group.

Cultural stereotypes are powerful. Public policy, media messages and subliminal messages often portray a 'deficit model of fathering' and contribute to gender inequalities surrounding parental responsibility, mainly with mothers seen as the key caregivers. Mainstream family services have traditionally targeted and been used by mothers. In order to meaningfully engage fathers there will have to be a shift in approach to overcome major social obstacles, beliefs about mothers and fathers and powerful gender stereotypes. There is more to be learned about supporting active fatherhood and minimising barriers to inclusion (JRF, 2000).

Through a multi-agency approach, the IFEP set out to understand why despite good intentions, we sometimes fail to actively engage fathers. With insight, our aspiration was to innovate and influence policy makers, service providers and frontline staff to improve fathers' inclusion in Fife. The IFEP intention was not necessarily to instigate an increase in the provision of father exclusive services in Fife but for policy makers, service providers and frontline staff to reflect and exert individual responsibility, influence and changes to adopt a more inclusive approach with all parents and carers.

Through collaborative working, sustainable models have been initiated to support father inclusion and push the door open for the wider questions around diversity and equality and how all families and parents are represented and engaged by services. In addition, wider practice developments have progressed contributing to a lasting legacy.

Legacy

Since the conception of IFEP the following legacy has been achieved:

- ❖ Effective multiagency collaboration to initiate change.
- ❖ A strong knowledge base through research, scoping and consultation to contribute to the 'Where's Dad?' agenda in Fife.
- ❖ The first local authority in Scotland to unanimously endorse and officially recognise 'Year of the Dad'.
- ❖ Raised the profile of dads and males carers in Fife.
- ❖ Initiated discussions at a strategic and 'grass roots' level on how families and parents/carers are represented and engaged by services.
- ❖ Developed and created a workshop to lead cultural change.
- ❖ Designed and produced a workbook to complement the 'Where's Dad?' workshop.
- ❖ Over 500 staff have completed the 'Where's Dad?' workshop/tutorial to date.
- ❖ Developed and delivered a 'Where's Dad?' Train the Trainers course and resources.
- ❖ Established a pool of 13 trainers and in turn increased capacity to sustain the continued delivery of the 'Where's Dad?' workshop across Fife.
- ❖ 'Where's Dad?' embedded in the annual Health Improvement Training Programme, Health Promotion Service, Fife Health & Social Care Partnership.
- ❖ A process to support opportunities for bespoke training for organisations, services and staff teams on request.
- ❖ Fathers Network Scotland are implementing the 'Where's Dad?' workbook nationally.
- ❖ Communication resources (banners, posters) are stored in NHS Fife Health Promotion Information Resource Centre and are accessible to practitioners across Fife.

- ❖ Queen Margaret University and Dundee University are currently looking at how they can embed father inclusive practice within their curriculum for Specialist Community Public Health Nurses and other Nursing qualifications.
- ❖ Midwifery and Paediatric Service Leads have recognised the value of the ‘Where’s Dad?’ approach and have initiated discussions on rolling the workshop out for all midwifery and paediatric (over 300) staff.
- ❖ Father inclusive work progressed in Fife, in particular our workforce development model, complementary resources and multiagency approach has been recognised as good practice, gaining national acclaim.

Recommendations

The IFEP offers the following recommendations for consideration:

- ❖ Establish accountability for continued growth of father inclusion in Fife.
- ❖ Embed specific outcomes related to father inclusion within strategic and local action plans, with ‘fathers’ engagement’ also being a standing agenda item on key partnership groups.
- ❖ Strategic support and capacity management considerations to enable certified staff to continue to deliver the ‘Where’s Dad?’ workshop and continue the IFEP collaboration.
- ❖ Support opportunities to roll out ‘Where’s Dad?’ training nationally.
- ❖ Ensure the NHS Fife Health Promotion Service training team continues to support and enable the pool of ‘Where’s Dad?’ trainers to deliver and evaluate the workshop.
- ❖ Continue to raise awareness of father involvement literature and the importance of fathers in securing children’s health, happiness and success.
- ❖ In line with national recommendations support further exploration of what policy makers and services providers can do to support parenting.
- ❖ Carry out further scoping of what data we routinely collect on fathers, and where possible improve processes and collection of key information.

- ❖ Support a road show across Fife raising awareness of fatherhood and 'Year of the Dad'.
- ❖ Publish an academic article to share good practice and demonstrate the work that has been achieved in Fife.
- ❖ Maximise social media and local networks as key tools in achieving father inclusion across Fife.
- ❖ Explore the potential of developing an e-learning tool aimed at the wider workforce to improve knowledge, skills, confidence to adopt a more father aware and father inclusive approach to working with families, children and young people.



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