

PIP: Parenting Implementation Project

Delivery Resource: Fathers

Guide to developing a father-inclusive workforce

The Fatherhood Institute drafted this report with support from four PIP local authorities (Lincolnshire, Luton, Nottingham and Suffolk). The Report draws on their collective experience along with the Fatherhood Institute's knowledge of a range of approaches to developing staff working with fathers.

These four PIP local authorities focussed specifically on engaging with fathers and supporting father-child relationships. Through this work these LAs identified a need to offer individual agencies practical information and ideas to help them support their own staff to become more father-inclusive.

This document shares learning and offers other LAs solutions which can be implemented to achieve father-inclusive services.

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Guide to developing a father-inclusive workforce

Effectively engaging with fathers and supporting father-child relationships is the business of all children's services – and this depends crucially on the qualities of the staff who provide them. Our understanding of what these services, and the workers who deliver them, need to offer to be genuinely 'father-inclusive' has developed considerably in recent years. However, relevant professional and vocational training, and workforce development strategies, have generally not kept pace with this fast-developing agenda.

Therefore, in discussions involving the four PIP local authorities which have focussing specifically on engaging with fathers and supporting father-child relationships¹, we identified a pressing need to offer individual agencies practical information and ideas to help them support their own staff teams to become more father-inclusive.

The Fatherhood Institute drafted this report with support from the four PIP local authorities. The Report draws on their collective experience along with the expertise of the Fatherhood Institute, which has direct knowledge of a range of specific approaches to developing staff teams to work with fathers. Initially the Fatherhood Institute drafted a position paper and led two workshops with the four authorities, to help develop the key ideas in the Report. Case study material from the four authorities and elsewhere was drawn together following on from these workshops.

Why should Children's Services develop their Staff to be 'father-inclusive'?

Every Parent Matters states that "Father-child relationships – be they positive, negative or lacking – have profound and wide ranging impacts on children that last a lifetime"². Therefore, "Irrespective of the degree of involvement they have in the care of their children, fathers should be offered routinely the support and opportunities they need to play their parental role effectively. More recently, the *Children's Plan* stresses that, since children benefit enormously from having strong relationships with their fathers, there is a "need for public services to engage with both father and mother except where there is a clear risk to the child to do so". Local strategies also need to meet the requirements of the Gender Equality Duty in *The Equality Act* (2006), which puts a new obligation on public bodies to 'promote' gender equality, to ensure that public services effectively meet the needs of both women and men.

Father-inclusive children's services are ones which adopt a strategic and integrated approach to engaging with fathers and supporting their relationships with their children. However, the DCSF Review, *'How fathers can be better recognised and supported through DCSF policy'*, published in November 2008, shows that services rarely adopt this approach, and identified the workforce as an important stumbling block to increasing

1. Lincolnshire, Luton, Nottingham, Suffolk.

2. These impacts are summarised in The costs and benefits of active fatherhood available on www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

engagement with fathers. “Some staff in family services did not view engagement with fathers as a priority and did not think pro-active support was important to engage fathers”.

The 2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy (DCSF 2008) now includes a commitment “to ensure the whole workforce understands the importance of engaging fathers and supporting father-child relationships and is equipped with the skills to do so effectively”. It goes on to say that “The revised Common Core will address this, as a basis for relevant occupational standards and professional qualifications to recognise the need to engage and work with both fathers and mothers”. But this overall requirement has yet to find its way into detailed practical policies.

The importance of leadership

What do you need to do to show effective leadership for your staff around father-inclusiveness?

Strong leadership is vital to ensure staff at all levels of the organisation are committed to supporting father-child relationships. All children’s services should have a robust policy statement about the need to engage effectively with fathers.

The management team needs to feel confident in their knowledge about how and why to support father-child relationships. This should enable managers consistently to reinforce the importance to outcomes for children of supporting father-child relationships, and explain clearly how engaging with fathers is integral to fulfilment of Government policy frameworks (particularly the Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework and the NHS Operating Framework)³.

Your agency should also consider appointing a ‘fatherhood champion’ to drive forward this agenda – with the full support of senior management.

Developing Leadership

Children North-East worked with Sunderland Children’s Services Senior Management team to develop a whole organisation approach to workforce development to support engaging fathers in services and service delivery. This included the development of strategy, policies and practitioner guides, and delivery of training programmes e.g. women working with fathers and men; recruiting men into services.

The Fatherhood Institute have delivered strategic roundtables for senior managers across the country, focussing on how to identify local needs of fathers and male carers, and how to develop systematic approaches to meeting those needs. The Institute has also recently delivered practical presentations in all nine Government regions to the Children’s Centre Leadership Network, to give Children’s Centre managers the knowledge and skills they need to support the development of father-inclusive services.

3. These broad messages link directly to some of the Public Service Agreements and National Indicators – the key drivers for policy makers and practitioners at local level – e.g. raising the educational achievement of all children and young people (PSA10); narrowing the gap in educational achievement between children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers (PSA 11); and improving the health and well-being of children and young people (PSA12). Relevant National indicators include the prevalence of breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks from birth (NI 53); and obesity among primary school age children in reception year (NI 55).

Staff recruitment

How do you recruit workers who can support father-child relationships?

All staff in children's services have an important role in supporting father-child relationships. So it is vital that, when they are recruiting new staff, these agencies can identify which applicants are going to have the potential to work effectively with fathers. This means they should think about what knowledge, skills and behaviour their workers need to engage effectively with dads, and design their recruitment processes accordingly:

- Recruit all male and female staff on this basis – including reception staff, volunteers etc.
- Review all person specifications and job adverts to ensure they reflect adequately the qualities required (see below).
- When general 'family worker' posts are advertised, working with fathers should be identified as a requirement.
- In all job descriptions and advertisements, the word 'parents' should be replaced with 'mothers and fathers' wherever possible.
- Interviews should include at least one question that specifically addresses the applicant's attitudes, knowledge and skills relevant to engaging with fathers.
- It is helpful to have both male and female service users on your interview panel.

Recruiting Ethnic Minority Men as Teaching Assistants, Nottingham

The Creating the Learning Links project (funded by New Deal For Communities) used positive action to target and train local men from the African Caribbean and Asian communities as teaching assistants to act as positive role models, increase levels of achievement, raise confidence in parents and children, and address staff under-representation. It was hoped that the presence of staff from similar backgrounds, able to relate to pupils' home circumstances and act as positive

role models, would have a significant impact on pupils' performance and parental involvement.

The project used positive action (including a poster campaign with a picture of an African-Caribbean man and child) to attract black men to work in schools. They support retention by providing additional appropriate support to trainees, working in partnership with PATRA (Positive Action Training Agency) and Brother II Brother – a black men's group which aims to counteract negative stereotypes of black men and supports young black men. Adverts stated that "Many of the young people in these schools have few role models from their own communities to support their development and educational needs.....We particularly welcome applications from African Caribbean and Asian Communities, especially African Caribbean Men." Trainees on the NVQ Level 3 Teaching Assistant course met regularly for joint support and additional training around successful strategies for working with children in a classroom setting; and all trainees were paired with mentors.

The project resulted in 25 men from minority ethnic communities becoming teaching assistants, with some then going on to train as teachers. Long term project evaluation (including SATS and classroom based assessments, and qualitative data from parent/teacher/pupil feedback) showed a substantial impact on pupil achievement and confidence, and on parental satisfaction and confidence.

Core responsibilities and competencies

What responsibilities do staff in children's services have to support father-child relationships?

There should be an emphasis from senior management down on the importance of supporting father-child relationships in all the agency's work: men are important to children and all services should be relevant to fathers and recognise their position – e.g. providing breastfeeding leaflets specially designed for dads.

Engaging with fathers and supporting father-child relationships:

- can help staff meet Every Child Matters objectives
- can help agencies meet their responsibilities under the Equality Act.

All staff should receive clear guidance about their specific role in supporting father-child relationships. This should include engaging proactively and systematically with fathers in the families individual workers are working with. Agency systems, forms, and letters should be designed with this in mind. Staff need to be able confidently to explain to dads what services your agency is offering them; tell them why they are important to their children and how services can help; and find out about their experiences and needs.

Involving fathers in Primary Birth Visit, Lincolnshire

To test the impact of taking a father-inclusive approach, two health visitors in Grantham conducted a comparative study in which one continued to use the standard letter about the primary birth visit, while the other used a new father-inclusive version (below). With the standard letter 3 out of 15 Dads attended, while with the father-inclusive letter 11/16 dads attended.

The health visitor has reported how useful she found it to be able to talk to dads about their role and responsibilities, and encourage them to attend the first development check. They were able to get a much clearer picture of family dynamics, and if necessary set up early support and intervention.

The original decision to use 'parent' (not mother and father) reflected concerns that single parents would feel stigmatised. This doesn't seem to be the case: single parents who attended were quite happy to explain why a Dad was not present.

Dear new Mum & Dad,

Congratulations on the safe arrival of your baby.

As your Health Visitor, I will take over your care from your midwife. I would like to arrange an appointment to see you both at your home to review baby's progress and explain my role.

In order to have an appointment that is convenient for you both, could I ask you to contact me on the above telephone number to arrange a time/date before your baby reaches two weeks of age.

*I look forward to hearing from you soon.
Best wishes,
Health Visitor*

Supporting father-child relationships also means that workers need to keep dads in mind in all their work with mums. Workers need to be able to inform mothers about the important roles dads play in children's lives. They should be able to work with any concerns mums have about greater involvement by their child's father, and support mums to encourage the father to play a full and responsible role in the child's life.

Do staff need different skills, knowledge and approaches to work with fathers compared to mothers?

Core Competencies: Dad's Worker at Sure Start Ferryhill

Both staff and fathers/male carers felt that this female Fathers Worker's enthusiasm and commitment had been vital in engaging men locally:

"Persuading people – she's never heard the word no."

"She doesn't let go – she'll follow up and follow up and follow up ..."

"She tries her hardest to organise actually as many activities as she can."

She is also able to relate well to men:

"She just joins in – she's like one of the lads – she supports you and she even joins in – you know you could get other people and you could be uncomfortable type – whereas [the Fathers Worker] just goes along with it."

The importance of humour in all male groups was emphasised by a number of fathers and male carers:

"Men mickey-take all the time – specially when you get a group of men together – you've got to have banter – if you haven't got banter you haven't got a group."

"It must be hard for her being female and you what all the dads are like sometimes we give her a hard time – I think we sometimes go too far with her winding her up and that – but it's all fun like."

"She gives as good as she gets."

The worker herself also talked about the importance of adopting a more direct manner when working with men.

One father commented on this:

"If she's got something to say – she'll say it – she won't say – no I won't say that."

The worker's ability to be supportive and non-judgemental was commented on:

"She'll actually sit and listen and be very supportive. You can go to her and she won't judge you."

Finally, the use of an individualised approach was valued:

"She doesn't treat you like a number – she treats you like an individual person."

(Durham University Centre for Applied Social Research, July 2005).

The key qualities required by generic frontline staff to engage effectively with fathers are not radically different from those needed to work with mothers. But there are some specific qualities that are very important:

- understanding how important fathers are to children and mothers;
- understanding their role includes supporting father-child relationships;
- being experienced, comfortable and confident about engaging with dads/men – and able to communicate this;
- being committed and dedicated to supporting father-child relationships; and
- being aware of the specific experiences and challenges fathers tend to face, e.g. fathers tend to:
 - see mothers as the 'expert';
 - spend less time with their children and may feel less 'close' to them in some cases;
 - have less information about children and child development;
 - are more socially isolated as parents;

- are more wary of showing vulnerability or uncertainty;
- are less aware of and engaged with services – and assume they are for women;
- feel uncomfortable being “the only bloke at the toddler group”;
- assume they will be judged inadequate/risky parents.
- be able to address fatherhood issues comfortably with female service users, to encourage them to support fathers and see the value of men using the service alongside themselves;
- accepting and valuing that fathers will not necessarily behave just like the mothers who use your services – they may be more competitive, more comfortable with activities (sports DIY etc) – but not expecting dads to conform to an outdated stereotype of how men should behave;
- listen carefully to informal conversations, to identify fathers’ needs, and meet them or refer on;
- feel confident and comfortable at challenging any negative behaviour by men;
- work in a way that does not make fathers defensive – not patronising;
- be very flexible in approach – e.g. deliver services outside normal working hours;
- be comfortable with multi-agency approach, which brings a wide range of experience and expertise;
- be willing to accept a lack of planning and routine when working with fathers (and mothers); and
- think in terms of helping dads to support themselves – e.g. through peer support groups – but at the same time continuing to offer your professional expertise, information and practical help.

Setting up a Dads Peer Support Group: DADS Autism Group, Luton

This is a three-hour evening Peer Support Group facilitated quarterly by the manager of the Social Communication Difficulties Team, held at a local primary school with a reputation for being very father-inclusive. Typically 6-8 fathers of children and young people on the autistic spectrum (not age specific) support each other through the difficult challenges of parenting. The group also informs fathers about resources, about positive ways of supporting and managing the needs of their child, with tips and information from research. They can also now access a distance learning course (commissioned by Luton Borough Council) about ways to engage with and support their children.

Specialist Fatherhood Champions can be useful to drive this agenda forward and maybe offer specific services for fathers. But they should receive full support from management and colleagues, who should not assume that having a specialist worker means they themselves do not have to engage with dads. Fatherhood Champions should:

- discourage dads from remaining within men-only activity/group; and
- encourage them to use other services and move on into training, work (including in childcare) and developing parenting skills.

Induction, retention of staff, CPD and in-service support

How do we train and support all staff to support father-child relationships?

The main thing to recognise is that, since very few professional qualifications or foundation courses in education, health and social care offer any training on working with fathers, this is likely to be a significant issue for most of your staff. But there are many specific steps an agency can take to equip and support their staff to deliver genuinely effective father-inclusive services:

- Routinely assess and develop all staff's and volunteers' abilities to support father-child relationships.
- Induction programmes for all staff should address their role, knowledge, skills and attitudes concerning supporting father-child relationships.
- Identify examples of existing good practice with fathers and disseminate to the workforce.
- Listen to staff perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of working with fathers – using team meetings, team days and structured interviews (see box below).
- Dads' worker accompanies outreach staff in home visiting, to 'model' positive engagement with fathers.
- Dads' worker attend women's services (or those mainly used by women) to answer questions/allay fears about enhancing male-involvement.
- Workers other than the dads' worker should attend the dads' groups, and generic workers should proactively engage with and support specialist fathers' workers.
- Wider partners – e.g. health visitors – included in training.
- Staff 'audit' of male involvement.
- Personal reflection required by staff (one-on-one as necessary, with appropriate support provided) to explore own attitudes to engaging with dads.
- Support for dads' workers from outside consultants and local peer networks (protective against isolation and burn-out).

Luton: Fathers' Work – Interview Questions

1. What attracted you to the idea of working with fathers?
2. (Males only) What barriers, if any, did you face in applying for a post working with fathers? How do you think these barriers could be addressed?
3. What challenges do you face in engaging fathers? How do you think these could be tackled?
4. In what ways do you believe that gender makes a difference in father work roles?
5. What services are you currently providing for fathers?
6. What were the reasons for setting up these services?
7. What has been successful in encouraging fathers to attend your services?
8. What positive outcomes have been achieved by your services?
9. What future development are you considering?
10. Can you identify how the model of your service/s could be used in different areas/settings?
11. What would you like to be considered in the future Luton Father's Strategy?

Supervision and staff assessment

How should supervision and assessment address father-inclusiveness?

This is a crucial way of communicating to staff that this is a core part of their role, and will help to ensure that managers support them effectively:

- The issue of engaging with dads should be raised routinely in supervision – with clear 'prompt' questions: 'how are you including fathers?' 'how's it going working with fathers?'

- Specific outcomes should be attached to activities to enable the impact of this work to be monitored and evaluated.

Gender composition of staff teams in Children's Services

Men make up about 17% of the social care workforce (rising to 35% at senior management levels)⁴, and less than 2% of the workforce in early years settings⁵. These figures are in spite of a number of initiatives to increase the percentage of men in the early years workforce over the last decade. This dramatically gendered pattern of employment reflects a range of factors. In early years settings, these include cultural norms, low pay, part-time work, low status, poor conditions and (until recently) low qualification levels.

These factors will not change overnight – and are to some extent outside the control of individual local agencies. However, there is much that a local agency can do to recruit more male workers.

But first, we need to reflect on why that is important.

Does a worker's gender make any difference to their role and effectiveness on children's services?

Workers engaging with men do not generally have to be male. Most dads themselves say that skills and attitude are far more important than workers' gender – and some may even prefer a female worker. The best arrangement is generally to have both male and female workers available – to give the dads some choice, as well as modelling male/female co-operation. Female staff should be strongly encouraged to engage with fathers and male carers – and they should see it as part of their role to strengthen men's visibility and role in service settings and delivery.

Female Worker with Pakistani Dads Club

Geraldine Waugh, Parenting Project Worker at Bradford YMCA, worked successfully with Asian dads in schools and community settings. To reach the Asian dads, she worked closely with a community leader, asking if he knew suitable dads. He did. The men were mainly from one area in Pakistan, about the same age and worked together. It was a great way to start – and Geraldine started small: just an hour's workshop and an activity, something they 'wouldn't normally feel comfortable with': bowling, swimming, taking their kids to the cinema.

And then Geraldine asked 'what else would you like included in the workshops . . .?' She supported local dads to act as facilitators for the initiative, and gradually the fathers took ownership, with the facilitators becoming the 'invited guests'. There followed four pilot sessions, which developed into a full eight week 'Dads and Lads' course (although adapted to 'Dads and Kids' as girls were involved). Eight courses, reaching more than 100 fathers, have now been held. One father has trained as a 'Dads and Lads' facilitator; others deliver some workshop elements.

Geraldine's approach worked very well. She does, however, acknowledge that *"I don't necessarily dress as a woman – I notice that I'll wear trackie bottoms and a T shirt"*.

BUT the gender of workers can make a difference to the effectiveness of work with men in certain circumstances:

- Some dads feel more comfortable asking men, rather than women, for advice, e.g. male workers are preferred by some younger dads.
- Role model for dads/children.

4. www.skillsforcare.org.uk

5. Nicolson et al (2008) *Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2007*.

- Some men can 'add an extra dimension' physical play, competitiveness, etc.
- Male workers are more suitable when working with fathers in certain communities and settings, e.g. a mosque environment.

Female Dad's Worker at Sure Start Ferryhill

Some fathers believed that there might be additional difficulties for a female worker to begin with, difficulties which the current worker has overcome:

"I think because the worker is a female and she's working with the dads – it's twice as hard – cos she's having to do twice as much work to get past the prejudice of the male – but the way she does it is excellent"

Some fathers felt that the gender of the worker did not matter so long as they were able to do a good job:

"She has the job well sorted – it doesn't bother me that there is a female worker."

One male carer thought that there might be advantages in having a female worker:

"I think it's good that we have a female rather than a male because I think if it was a male we wouldn't be as open as what we are."

However, there are important issues for female workers in working almost exclusively with men. It is important at all times to maintain a professional but supportive approach. The Fathers Worker commented that amongst all of the humour and banter, the men "know where the line is and don't come over it".

(Durham University Centre for Applied Social Research, July 2005)

Male and Female Family Workers Supporting Minority Ethnic Dads, Luton

Over the last 8 years, Luton has employed Family Workers – initially in selected primary schools and by 2008 in all children's centres and primary schools – to offer early intervention and community engagement. These workers are broadly representative of Luton's dynamic, diverse multi-ethnic population, which has greatly helped in forming constructive relationships with local families and encouraging their engagement in both universal and targeted services. There are many examples of engagement with fathers by female Family Workers – e.g. a Saturday Drop In for fathers at a school and out of school hours events for fathers in other settings – but the vast majority of engagement has been with mothers. Over a similar period, On Track and Children's Fund projects have developed positive links with local voluntary and community sector groups, some of which are engaging well with fathers.

To increase engagement with Pakistani Kashmiri and Bangladeshi (and to a lesser extent other minority ethnic) fathers, Extended Services, Family Support in Schools, Headteachers, Family Workers and local voluntary and community organisations have set up a new network linked to four local schools which have a male Family Worker (men now make up over 10% of Family Workers). By pooling resources and know-how, the network has developed father-focussed activities in schools and neighbouring community settings – including residential events, and a minimum of two additional social, educational, sporting and recreational activities per month, e.g.:

- **Trips for fathers to enjoy with their children** – e.g. Indoor Playground, Whipsnade Zoo.
- **Fathers' Residential** – Outdoor activities, team building, focus group session.
- **Cricket Team** – enter a local tournament in the summer.
- **Parenting Workshops** – How to engage in your child's education.

Thus, to offer a truly father-inclusive service, it is important to actively seek to recruit a substantial proportion of male staff – and to support them in their role. There are many practical steps an individual agency can take – or promote others to take – to attract more male workers:

- Influence future attitudes of boys to fatherhood and working with children.
- Improve status, pay, prospects.
- Enhance pathways to work in the sector, through school careers services, Connexions, Job Centre Plus, LSC, work experience (e.g. a scheme to target men called Cool 2 Care), case studies, role models, endorsements from service users.
- Advertise in publications etc men read, recruit where they already work (e.g. youthwork), use photos of men, explicitly state you want to recruit more men.
- If there is a contact person for more information, try to offer a male contact, or both a male and female contact.
- Good practice is always to have a panel that is gender balanced and includes a male representative on all panels.
- Think about the location and atmosphere for the interviews. Is this a male friendly setting? Are there posters and pictures of fathers and men working with children; not just mothers and female workers?
- Make a clear statement about the CRB checking process, including that if people have other convictions from the past these must be declared but will not automatically result in candidates being excluded as consideration will be given to the nature of the offence, how long ago it was committed and the person's subsequent record. Men are statistically more likely to have convictions during their youth and may exclude themselves despite having become responsible citizens and fathers.
- 'Snowball effect' – when some male workers have been recruited, that attracts others.
- When men are appointed into posts in predominantly female environments consider

whether there is additional support that could make the appointment more likely to succeed: induction that addresses isolation and the concerns of men, buddying arrangements, men's peer support groups etc. Also ensure that female staff are encouraged to welcome male colleagues, and to reflect on the issues their presence and role might raise for them.

- Develop robust systems concerning child safety from abuse, and for addressing accusations of abuse.
- Support male volunteers and service users into positions of responsibility.

Positive Action Scheme to recruit male workers, Buckinghamshire

The recent report by Gill Haynes, *'Including Fathers In Policy And Practice – Developing A Workforce Strategy'* (FPI 2009) notes that "There is a lot of good practice guidance available to support local authorities to increase their recruitment pool [of men]; and there are many examples of innovative schemes, many of them based on the range of proactive, practical recommendations from the Equal Opportunities Commission to help national and local government widen the recruitment base to include men, people with disabilities, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and older workers". (See EOC (2005) *Response to DfES consultation on the Children's Workforce Strategy*)

She adds: *"In Buckinghamshire, for example, the council has worked with Aylesbury College to develop a positive action scheme supported by Men in Childcare to recruit to a men-only Level 2 childcare programme. It has been so successful that a second programme has just been tendered, and children's centres and other settings are volunteering placements for the students."*