



Advocating for Involved
Fatherhood in the UK
(1999-2012)

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Introduction

ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper has been commissioned to tell the story of advocacy for involved fatherhood in the UK by the Fatherhood Institute¹ from 1999 to the present day.

The narrative has been compiled from the perspectives of staff, past and present, plus stakeholders, interviewed or offering comments via an online survey. Contributors include academics, journalists, government officials, trades unionists and practitioners in health, education and family services mainly from the UK (74%) the US (11%) and Australia (8%), with a few from Europe and Asia.

The funder for this paper is the Bernard van Leer Foundation (<http://www.bernardvanleer.org/>) which in 1986 became the first international funding body to identify involved fatherhood as relevant to child wellbeing. BvLF then funded fatherhood projects (including a Communications Officer for Fathers Direct) in both the Global South and the Global North during the 1990s and the early 2000s, including grant-aiding Fathers Direct to convene an International Fatherhood Summit in 2003.

The Fatherhood Institute is not a membership organisation and does not represent fathers. Its mission is for:

‘A society that gives all children a strong and positive relationship with their father and any father-figures; supports both mothers and fathers as earners and carers; and prepares boys and girls for a future shared role in caring for children.’

With its staff of ten (some part-time), backed up by accounting, administrative and IT functions and with trainers and researchers working on contract, FI is a ‘virtual’ organisation with staff working from home and a current annual turnover of around £1,000,000. FI has an international presence via its information-rich website and through sale of publications and delivery of training and consultancy. Its model of ‘father-inclusive’ practice has been influential².

¹ Formerly known as Fathers Direct www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

² See <http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing9.html>; <http://dadsforlife.sg/events-buzz/ensuring-family-friendly-practices-are-even-more-father-inclusive-in-singapore>; http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Research%20Centres/Family%20Action%20Centre/reports/SA_PHS_2Oct2008.pdf

EARLY DAYS

Although our story begins in 1999, this is not to suggest that interest in involved fatherhood began then, as several of our survey respondents were keen to point out. Not only was the wind of change blowing in from Scandinavia with reports of 'parental' leave for *both* parents, but a growing body of academic research³ had begun to report on advantages enjoyed by children with involved fathers. We now know that these include better peer relationships; fewer behaviour problems; lower criminality and substance abuse; higher educational / occupational mobility relative to parents'; greater capacity for empathy; non-traditional attitudes to earning and childcare; more satisfying adult sexual partnerships; and higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction (for reviews see Sarkadi et al, 2008; Flouri, 2005; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

In 1999 in the UK, while the discourse around fathers was primarily negative ('deadbeat' dads) our survey respondents felt that the involved fatherhood agenda was beginning to take shape - from a low base:

'The **public narrative** was about mother-baby-bonding. . . There was no narrative about fathers and babies bonding, so every father who did bond thought he was unique.' *(UK respondent)*

'Fathers were invisible in almost every **policy** document to do with the family and flexible working; in **training** for health professionals; in government announcements; in **advertising** (unless as the absent/dim witted/incapable dad); in the **decor and ambience** of nurseries and childcare centres in ante-natal and maternity facilities . . .' *(UK respondent)*

'(There was) a **dearth of research** that looked at men's and fathers' experiences. Men and fathers were either the un-noted backdrop against which women's experiences were evaluated or, at worst, framed as the opposing force in the battle for women's rights.' *(UK respondent)*

'There was little **engagement with fathers** as they were considered "hard to reach".' *(UK respondent)*

³ e.g. Lamb, M.E. (ed). *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. Wiley (first edition, 1976; fifth edition, 2010)

Strategies and activities

BRANDING

Men? Fathers? Separated fathers?

Should we brand ourselves an organisation concerned with MEN or with FATHERS? 'Men' didn't seem a good idea. Men are not generally perceived as a 'needy' group and deserving of funding support. And the connotations attaching to men were particularly negative at that time.

'In the 1990's the agenda particularly in the health sector and social services was dominated by the domestic violence agenda and . . . this imbued training for . . . professions like midwifery and social services. The campaigners on DV always said that the figures on DV were the tip of the iceberg and this gave the impression of all heterosexual men as potential perpetrators.' (UK respondent)

'Fathers' seemed to have more positive connotations and is relational, with impact on and connection with children part of the package. But even 'father' was (and is) not without difficulties. Assumptions were immediately made that we were an 'angry' separated fathers' group – a misconception possibly compounded by our then-title 'Fathers Direct', with its implication of 'direct action'. So in 2008 we re-branded as the Fatherhood Institute. That has helped, but even now many people assume we primarily represent or support separated dads. This may reflect, in part, the mainstream media's extensive coverage of fathers in the context of separation: conflict, particularly between women and men, is always newsworthy.

The deficit perspective

A key element in our branding has been to adopt strengths-based perspective on fathers. This means that without underestimating risk (see MESSAGING below) we propose that most fathers, like most mothers, have something (and usually a great deal) to offer their children:

'A strengths based perspective has worked - focussing on what dads CAN do and what they offer children.' (Australian respondent)

A strengths-based approach, recognized as good practice in social work, helps counter the 'deficit perspective on fathers'⁴ – widespread negative stereotyping of fathers as fundamentally selfish, insensitive, uncaring, and uninterested in children.

⁴ Hawkins, A.J., & Dollahite, D.C. (1997). Beyond the role-inadequacy perspective of fathering. In A.J. Hawkins & D. Dollahite (Eds) *Generative Fathering: beyond deficit perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

'You just scratch the surface and it's there. You'll be in a meeting and someone will say "men have tunnel vision – they can't think about more than one thing at once." Or one of the mums will come out with "men are like children" or "you have to leave them lists – they can't cope on their own, bless them!" And the men are as bad. They'll say "we can't multitask" or "women are better with babies". And even if they don't say it, you see they are *thinking* it.' (UK respondent)

'I find that many services and workers do have an innate fear about how to engage with fathers and this perhaps is to do with cultural stereotypes about fathers being breadwinners, being not interested in sharing the upbringing of children and perhaps negative stereotypes of men being aggressive or hard to communicate with.' (UK respondent)

Negative stereotyping has been found to be a major reason why child protection teams regularly fail to engage with men, thereby increasing risks to children (Brandon et al, 2009)⁵ as well as engaging in discriminatory practice in employment.

'In one child therapy clinic where I consulted, the Director confessed that she had never had a male psychology intern because she feared child abuse. As a result of our consultation, she did choose one of my best male students - once - but never again.' (US respondent)

The evidence base

The need for a reliable evidence base for our advocacy was and is clear to us.

'In the way we tried to create change we were very focused on evidence. We weren't a grass roots organisation drawing on our or other people's experience very much, except tactically. We were a tiny group of people who were mobilising an intellectual argument.' (Co-founder)

The evidence base had to focus on *fathers' impact on other people*, mainly women and children, rather than on fathers' own needs. .

'We realised we had to argue from other people's perspectives which, looking back, was very clever. So we argued from the mothers' perspective and never from the men's perspective, even in our training: as soon as you argued from men's perspective you had lost them. Our whole thrust was how this 'fatherhood agenda' was good for women and children. And we sincerely believed that, and the evidence is there and that is what made us so

⁵ Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P., Gardener, R., Sidebotham, P., Dodsworth, J., Warren, C., & Black, J. (2009). *Understanding Serious Case Reviews and their impact: a biennial analysis of Serious Case Reviews 2005-07*. Research Report DCSF-RR129. London: DCSF.

effective. Our focus on mothers was, in fact, also a focus on children, because in the public mind mother-and-child are one.' (Co-founder)

TARGETING PROFESSIONALS

Why policy makers and practitioners?

When we were first funded we thought our organisation would serve fathers and mothers as well as professionals. However, we soon realised these were different audiences, that funding was more readily available to address professionals and that these 'intermediaries' are key: unless they communicate positive messages to fathers, men will be systematically 'nudged' away from close involvement with their children.

'(The Fatherhood Institute's) influence has been primarily on politicians and professionals' organisations and advisors/officials rather than with mainstream media/public opinion. This is very valuable though!' (UK respondent)

For practitioners to behave differently, guidance and legislation need to *specify* fathers, and require professionals to develop *strategies* to reach out to them⁶. This then provides a lever for resources to be committed to training, so that managers and front-line workers develop systems, strategies and skills to draw fathers in to services and engage successfully with them. This 'top down' and 'bottom up' pincer-strategy has served everyone well.

'The Fatherhood Institute has influenced policy at a national level which supported those of us at a local level who were championing work with fathers. This meant local staff could link their work to national policy and research which helped raise it on the agenda. They also provided effective training to support staff to improve in this area of work.' (UK respondent)

Father-inclusive practice

Policy makers and practitioners favoured the setting up of separate services for fathers, often via a 'fathers' group' or by employing a single 'fathers' worker' who was supposed to deal with all the fathers' issues. It quickly became clear that this was untenable and unsustainable, and that hiving the fathers off into separate services was a way of avoiding mainstream services having to change.

'Dads' groups have been the main way to engage fathers and this continues engagement (*sic*) to be tokenistic and not systematic or responsive.' (UK respondent)

⁶ When the gender neutral term 'parent' is used it soon becomes synonymous with 'mother' as does 'family' which generally means mother-and-children.

A corollary of the ‘separate services’ approach is the belief that ‘only men can work with fathers’ and that, somehow, magically, any man employed to engage with dads will know exactly what to do. This is plainly false. While we have encouraged the employment of men in the children’s workforce, our focus has been on developing father-inclusive practice across organisations, so that *all* practitioners can and do engage with fathers. Currently this perspective imbues our ‘Dads Included’ hub <http://www.dadsincluded.org/>, its self-assessment framework (the ‘Dad Test’), our Dads Included Toolkit, and the training and consultancy we provide to audit the activities of agencies and help them implement change.

‘The Father-inclusive Toolkit was very innovative and has helped many organisations look at how they engage with fathers and helps them to change practice.’ *(UK respondent)*

Which sectors?

Involved fatherhood is relevant to almost every sector in both adults’ and children’s services, let alone in the wider world. If one is not to be swamped, one must specialise. Our approach has been to focus on policy areas being prioritised by government to which involved fatherhood is plainly relevant. In the first decade of the 21st Century in the UK these were mainly Early Years, Employment and Teenage Pregnancy. We argued successfully for father-inclusive policy in all three, including achieving the requirement to engage with fathers to be inserted in service level agreements in Early Years. More recently Maternity Services are beginning to understand the importance of engaging with fathers, as we have pointed out the impact, positive and negative, that expectant and new fathers have on maternal and infant health.

‘The setting up of the Fatherhood Institute, which was able to focus primarily on the fatherhood agenda, made a big impact. This accelerated change, and maternity, child health and family policies after 2000 were much more explicit about the role, contribution and needs of fathers. I think one might see the 1990s as the decade in which a key agenda was raising awareness about the need to provide woman-centred maternity care and the 2000s as the decade in which a father-focus in the transition to parenthood and early years captured the imagination and became mainstream.’ *(UK respondent)*

‘Messaging’

MEDIA COVERAGE

We have never had sufficient funding to run traditional media campaigns and are not sure that the money needed to fund them would be best spent in this way at the moment. Fatherhood is a newsworthy subject and can generate much media interest. Our approach has been to get our ‘advertising’ for free by developing our

reputation as the first port of call for the media on fatherhood and related issues, as well as generating newsworthy messages of our own (see MESSAGING below). These we sometimes develop on the back of polling or other research (this costs money but can sometimes be sponsored) and employing communications experts (more money needed) to help us get information out.

‘The Fatherhood Institute almost gives permission to men to be active fathers. It is a thinking organisation that says being an involved dad isn’t emasculating.’ *(UK respondent)*

E-newsletters, our website and, for a while, a quarterly magazine, publicised our work to the children’s workforce and government, as did three massive annual fatherhood conferences held in London (2003-2005) which attracted more than 1,000 delegates every time. These events were very effective in putting involved fatherhood on the map in a range of policy areas. And since the conferences drew substantial media coverage, they raised awareness among the wider public, too.

DEVELOPING MESSAGING

While the media can usually set up an ‘oppositional’ debate and sometimes do, in the main voices are not raised in the public arena against the idea of involved fatherhood. Practitioners also tend to express positivity towards the idea but rarely regard it as a priority.

‘The fatherhood agenda is interesting insofar as few people would disagree with the need to involve dads yet a real gap remains between that awareness and actual efforts to maximise the role of dads.’ *(UK respondent)*

To try to embed involving fathers as a priority, we therefore ‘theorised’ our subject intensively over a period of years, and continue to theorise it. From our continually renewed understanding of what we are doing and why we are doing it, arise messages, backed up by evidence, which we consciously adopt and repeat in different ways to different audiences.

‘The Fatherhood Institute has played a key role in . . . pushing forward balanced policy messages. Messages around the need to engage positively with fathers due to the benefits to children and access to paternity/parental leave and family-friendly working have been the most effective and influential with policy makers and a range of stakeholders who are not directly concerned with furthering fathers’ rights.’ *(UK respondent)*

Some of the messages we have advanced, divided up into ‘Message Themes’, are shown in the tables below, together with the narratives and policy areas to which they are relevant, our evidence base for them, and perceived impact on policy in the UK.

Message Theme 1: TIMES ARE CHANGING

‘Fathers have been forced into the home particularly here in the North East, as unemployment has risen and the heavy industries, such as ship building, mining and heavy engineering have vanished. Services have been very slow to recognise this shift in caring and have not, in my view, responded in positive and meaningful ways to include fathers.’ (UK respondent)

1.0 TIMES ARE CHANGING				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND POLICY AREAS	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY
Fathers are more involved at home than ever before; mothers are in paid employment in unprecedented numbers. Services that fail to address fathers-as-carers and working mothers are out-of-step with modern family life	(Child wellbeing) (Gender equity) Health Education Children’s & Family Services	Women Children Men Services	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/uk-lags-behind-in-new-family-fairness-league-table/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/fi-research-summary-fathers-mothers-work-and-family/	This point is now widely accepted and implicit in the growing emphasis on including fathers in policy relating to children and families – e.g. http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/early/a00192398/supporting-families-in-the-foundation-years
Because of this changing family landscape services that fail to engage with fathers deliver an inferior service to families	(Child wellbeing) (Gender equity) Health Education Children’s & Family Services	Women Children Men Services	We make This point throughout our research summaries and practice guides – e.g. http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	This point is now widely accepted and implicit in the growing emphasis on including fathers in policy relating to children and families – e.g. http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_130565 - a new antenatal education strategy that is totally couple-focused

Message Theme 2: MEN’S CAPACITIES FOR CARING ARE GREAT AND ‘HARDWIRED’

2.0 MEN’S CAPACITIES FOR CARING ARE GREAT AND ‘HARDWIRED’				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND POLICY AREAS	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY
Men are no less ‘innately sensitive to babies than women are	(Gender equality) Maternity Services Early Years Workplace regulation (parental leave)	Women Children Men	We have not created a specific research summary containing this evidence, but include it in press releases and most of our publications for professionals and fathers – e.g. http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/the-fi-guide-for-new-dads/	We cannot be sure this message has been ‘heard’ by policy makers as it is not repeated in policy documents. However, we think it is having an impact.
Expectant and new fathers experience hormonal changes which encourage nurturing and bonding	(Gender equality) Health Early Years Employment	Men Women Children	This is new evidence which we are beginning to include in presentations and will be including in publications	We are not yet aware of this argument impacting on policy
Parenting skills are learned: men can learn them as well as women	(Gender equality) Maternity Services Early Years Workplace regulation (parental leave)	Women Children Men	We have not created a specific research summary containing this evidence, but include it in press releases and most of our publications for professionals and fathers – e.g. http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/the-fi-guide-for-new-dads/	We cannot be sure this message has been ‘heard’ by policy makers as it is not repeated in policy documents. However, we think it is having an impact.
Infants and children benefit from developing secure attachments with more than one caregiver.	(Child wellbeing) (Gender Equity) Children’s and Family Services Maternity Services Childcare	Children Mothers Fathers	We refer to supporting research in a number of our research summaries but have not as yet prepared a full research summary on this important point	We have only recently been making this point so we do not think it is yet having an impact.

Message Theme 3: FATHERS HAVE SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

'Messages that emphasise the benefits for children of involved fatherhood have been of most benefit (rather than those emphasising benefits for mums or dads).' *(Australian respondent)*

'Research that evidences the difference that involved fathers have on outcomes for children has been highly influential as this has tapped into the outcomes focus that has been growing over the last 7 or 8 years.' *(UK respondent)*

3.0 FATHERS HAVE SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND POLICY AREAS	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY
Father-child relationships - be they positive, negative or lacking – have profound and wide-ranging impact on children that lasts a lifetime	(Child wellbeing) Health Education Children's and Family Services Social care	Children	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/	Fathers' impact, often described in exactly these words, is repeated in a number of policy documents
Policies and services which fail to acknowledge fathers' impact and exclude, overlook or fail to reach out to fathers, undermine children's development and wellbeing	Child wellbeing) Health Education Children's and Family Services Social care	Children Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/	We have not seen this argument specifically repeated in policy documents but we believe it is informing the growing number which address father-inclusion specifically
Disadvantaged children gain even more from a	(Child wellbeing) (Inequalities)	Children	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fathers-direct-contributes-to-birth-registration-debate/	Early years policy since 2006 has been quite strongly informed by this thinking

strong father-child relationship than better-resource children; and suffer more when this is lacking	Birth registration Early Years Children's & Family Services Social care		http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-young-fathers/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/ Legislation for mandatory joint birth registration was passed in the UK in 2010 but has not yet been enacted
A positive and substantial father-child relationship can 'buffer' children from the negative effects of socio economic and other disadvantage	(Child wellbeing) (Inequalities) Health Education Children's and Family services Social Care	Children Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-disabled-children/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-young-fathers/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/
High levels of father involvement in childhood correlate with higher educational attainment and social mobility	(Child wellbeing) (Inequalities) Education Employment	Children Society (educated, competitive, workforce)	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-their-childrens-education/	This point has been explicitly addressed in a number of policy documents http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/
Fathers' involvement in their children's schools, education and learning correlates with greater educational success	(Child wellbeing) Education Boys' achievement	Children Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-their-childrens-education/	No measurable impact yet (we are looking for inspection frameworks that measure schools' engagement with fathers and mothers not just 'parents').
Low paternal interest in his child's education is linked to low achievement by the	(Child wellbeing) (Inequalities) Education	Children Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-their-childrens-education/	No measurable impact yet (we are looking for inspection frameworks that measure schools' engagement with

child				fathers and mothers not just 'parents').
High levels of father involvement in childhood correlate with lower criminality, anti-social behaviour and substance misuse in adolescence	(Child wellbeing) Criminal justice Health	Children Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-anti-social-behaviour-and-fatherhood/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/ http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2011-1250/DEP2011-1250.pdf

Message Theme 4: FATHERS’ INFLUENCES CAN BE NEGATIVE AND THESE MUST BE CHALLENGED

Some advocates for involved fatherhood focus exclusively on the positive aspects of involved fatherhood. We think it is important to highlight fathers’ negative influences, too, as these provide important reasons for engaging with them. This is not the same as adopting a generally negative approach to men or fathers – i.e. the deficit perspective.

4.0 FATHERS’ INFLUENCES CAN BE NEGATIVE AND THESE MUST BE CHALLENGED				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND POLICY AREAS	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY
Children die and are abused because family and children’s services fail to engage with the men in their lives	(Child wellbeing) Children’s and Family Services	Children	We have only recently started to make this point	We have received funding to work with child protection/safeguarding services
Fathers who use violence are likely to continue this behaviour with existing	(Child wellbeing) Children’s and Family Services	Children Mothers Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/	https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/00305-2010DOM-EN.pdf

and future families unless their behaviour is challenged and changed				https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-final-report-a-child-centred-system
The behaviour of many fathers who behave negatively or abusively can be successfully challenged and changed	(Child wellbeing) Children’s and Family Services Separated Families Domestic Violence	Children Mothers Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/	https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/00305-2010DOM-EN.pdf https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-final-report-a-child-centred-system
Active fatherhood can bring about positive changes in behaviour in men, including among socially excluded and very young men	(Child wellbeing) (Inequalities)	Men Children Women	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-young-fathers/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/	https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/D-CSF-00673-2009

Message Theme 5: NON-RESIDENT FATHERS’ ENGAGEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN IS IMPORTANT

Prime Minister David Cameron (e.g. after the riots in June 2011) took ‘absent’ fathers to task, and it is common to hear ‘deadbeat’ dads blamed for young people’s negative behaviours. Our approach to low- or no-engagement by non-resident fathers is child-focused and positive.

5.0 NON-RESIDENT FATHERS’ ENGAGEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN IS IMPORTANT				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY

	POLICY AREAS			
There is a strong correlation between children seeing little or nothing of their fathers and childhood depression	(Child wellbeing) Birth registration Prisons Youth Offending Separated Families	Children	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fi-research-summary-separated-families/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/birth-registration-and-parental-responsibility-a-discussion-paper/	No measurable impact on policy yet
Young adults from separated families who do not see their fathers suffer substantial anger, grief and self-doubt	(Child wellbeing) Birth registration Prisons Youth Offending Separated Families	Children	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fi-research-summary-separated-families/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/birth-registration-and-parental-responsibility-a-discussion-paper/	No measurable impact on policy yet
When fathers pay child support (especially willingly) the benefits to children are greater than if the same amount of money received from another source (e.g. state benefits, grandparents)	(Child wellbeing) (Child poverty) Child Maintenance Separated Families	Children Mothers Fathers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/	No measurable impact on policy yet
Only a small percentage of non-resident fathers are too vulnerable or damaged to provide no positive support to their children	(Child wellbeing) Separated Families	Children Mothers Fathers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/	No measurable impact on policy yet

Message Theme 6: ENGAGING WITH FATHERS SUPPORTS MOTHERS

‘The Fatherhood Institute/Fathers Direct played a key role in making the agenda more positive and less “anti-mother”.’ (UK respondent)

6.0 ENGAGING WITH FATHERS SUPPORTS MOTHERS				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND POLICY AREAS	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY
Services which make mothers solely responsible for children's welfare let fathers off the hook and unfairly burden mothers	(Child Poverty) (Gender Equality) Family and Children's Services Separated Families	Mothers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/	https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/00305-2010DOM-EN.pdf
Mothers who feel supported by their babies' fathers adjust better to motherhood and parent more positively	Maternity Services Teenage Pregnancy Health Children's and Family Services Separated Families	Mothers Children Fathers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fatherhood-institute-main-research-summary-the-costs-and-benefits-of-active-fatherhood/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-young-fathers/	http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2011-1250/DEP2011-1250.pdf http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_130565
Delivering a parenting intervention to both parents is significantly more effective than delivering it to just one	Health Education Children's and Family Services Separated Families	Mothers Children Fathers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2011-1250/DEP2011-1250.pdf

Message Theme 7: FATHERS HAVE SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH

7.0 FATHERS HAVE SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY

	brackets) AND POLICY AREAS			
Almost all parents are in a close relationship at the time of the birth	(Family Stability) Maternity Services	Children Mothers Fathers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/maternal-and-infant-health-in-the-perinatal-period-the-fathers-role/	http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_130565 - a radical new antenatal education strategy that is totally couple-focused
When fathers are prepared well for the birth, mothers' birth experiences are better	(Maternal wellbeing) Maternity Services	Mothers Fathers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-attending-births/	http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_130565 - a national couple-focused antenatal framework
The biggest influence on the mother's smoking is the father's smoking	Maternity Services Health	Mothers Infants	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-smoking/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/child-health-promotion-programme-update-june-2008-a-model-of-father-inclusive-policy
A positive couple relationship protects women against developing postnatal depression; and strong partner-support assists recovery.	(Maternal wellbeing) (Child wellbeing) Maternity Services Health	Mothers Infants	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-postnatal-depression/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/child-health-promotion-programme-update-june-2008-a-model-of-father-inclusive-policy
Breastfeeding rates are higher when fathers are directly addressed on the benefits and mechanics of breastfeeding	(Child wellbeing) Maternity Services Health	Mothers Infants	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-breastfeeding/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/child-health-promotion-programme-update-june-2008-a-model-of-father-inclusive-policy

Message Theme 8: HIGH FATHER INVOLVEMENT HELPS FAMILY STABILITY.

Clearly, it is not possible to work effectively with couples unless fathers are included. Effective co-parenting, too, requires couples to cooperate, negotiate disagreements and handle conflict in productive ways. Another way of advocating for involved fatherhood is therefore to advocate for attention to be paid to couple-relationships. It is important, however, that this does not degenerate into the ‘marriage’ debate. We talk about this below in MESSAGES TO AVOID.

8.0 HIGH FATHER INVOLVEMENT HELPS FAMILY STABILITY				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND POLICY AREAS	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY
Where fathers are more involved in children’s care, both parents are more satisfied and the couple relationship is more stable	(Child wellbeing) (Family Stability) (Child Poverty) Health Education Separated Families	Children Mothers Fathers Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fi-briefingsupporting-families-and-relationships-through-parental-leave	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces
When fathers take paternity leave they become more involved in care-giving, a pattern which tends to endure.	(Child wellbeing) (Family Stability) Employment	Children Mothers Fathers Society	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fi-briefingsupporting-families-and-relationships-through-parental-leave	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces

Message Theme 9: HIGH FATHER INVOLVEMENT IS ESSENTIAL FOR EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

'I don't know how much the Fatherhood Institute can be given credit, but I am amazed that the discourse has moved on to the point of the May 2011 *Modern Workplaces* consultation document from the Coalition Government aspiring to facilitate the sharing of parental responsibilities of mothers and fathers who are living together.' (UK respondent)

'The research evidence shows that shared parenting is good for children and parents. Both parents can have careers and be good mums and dads.' (UK respondent)

9.0 HIGH FATHER INVOLVEMENT IS ESSENTIAL FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND POLICY AREAS	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY
High involvement by fathers in the daily care of children is essential if women are to compete equally with men in the wider world	(Gender Equality) Employment	Women	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/uk-lags-behind-in-new-family-fairness-league-table/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/fi-research-summary-fathers-mothers-work-and-family/	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces
When policy or practice presume mothers are the only significant carers women are forced into this role and are disadvantaged in the paid workforce	(Gender Equality) Employment	Women	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fi-briefing-on-paternity-maternity-and-parental-leave/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/flexibility-is-key-our-evidence-to-the-government%E2%80%99s-parental-leave-consultation/	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces
Parenting leave policies that promote uptake by fathers are central to women's equality and to	(Gender Equality) Employment	Women	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/uk-lags-behind-in-new-family-fairness-league-table/	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces

reducing the gender pay gap				
Fathers' uptake of paternity/parental leave enables mothers to return to work earlier. This benefits employers.	Employment	The Economy The Business Community	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/why-new-paternity-leave-rules-are-good-for-uk-business-a-fatherhood-institute-summary/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fi-briefing-on-paternity-maternity-and-parental-leave/	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces
Fathers and children miss out when fathers work long hours	(Child wellbeing) (Gender Equity) (Parenting leave) Business, Industry & Skills	Children Fathers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/fi-research-summary-fathers-mothers-work-and-family/ http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2010/fi-briefing-on-paternity-maternity-and-parental-leave/	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/modern-workplaces

Message Theme 10: MAINSTREAMING WORK WITH FATHERS ('FATHER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE') IS THE WAY FORWARD

10.0 MAINSTREAMING WORK WITH FATHERS ('FATHER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE') IS THE WAY FORWARD				
MESSAGE	RELEVANT NARRATIVES (in brackets) AND POLICY AREAS	PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES	EVIDENCE BASE COMPILED BY THE FATHERHOOD INSTITUTE	IMPACT ON UK POLICY
Including fathers saves services money	(Cost savings)	Services The Economy	We are always looking for examples– e.g. preparing fathers well for the birth reduces early hospital admissions	Royal College of Midwives guidance on including fathers published November 2011 (endorsed and contributed to by FI)
Fathers will take part in	(Child wellbeing)	Mothers	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/201

services when the whole team, rather than just a 'father's worker' is committed to their inclusion	Health Education Children's and Family Services	Fathers Children Services	page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	3/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/
Fathers will take part in services if their contact details are collected with mothers' at the outset and they are then regularly contacted and invited in	(Child wellbeing) Health Education Children's and Family Services	Mothers Fathers Children Services	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/
Fathers will take part in services if the <i>benefits to their children</i> of their participation are clearly stated and reinforced	(Child wellbeing) Health Education Children's and Family Services	Mothers Fathers Children Services	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/
Most fathers will not attend fathers' groups. This does not mean they are unwilling to be engaged with.	(Child wellbeing) Health, Education Children's and Family Services	Mothers Fathers Children Services	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/
Fathers 'hear' the term 'parent' as 'mother'. They need to see the words father/dad/granddad etc. to feel invited in	(Child wellbeing) Health, Education Children's and Family Services	Mothers Fathers Children Services	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/
Male workers can be a 'plus' but female workers can work very effectively with men	(Child wellbeing) Health, Education Children's and Family Services	Mothers Fathers Children Services	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/
Standard 'parenting' interventions must be revised if they are to be as	(Child wellbeing) Health, Education Children's and	Mothers Fathers Children	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/products-page/resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works/	http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/policy-legislative-frameworks-requiring-engagement-with-fathers/

effective with fathers as mothers	Family Services	Services		
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MESSAGES TO BE CAREFUL WITH

Fathers are excluded

While of course we make this point frequently, we are careful never to let it slide into claiming that 'fathers/men are victims' (including of domestic violence) or that practice should be changed in order to be 'fair to dads'. 'Fathers-as-victims' and 'being fair to dads' put fathers, not children, at the centre and implies that men need more resources, when it is clear that overall, men are still the ones with power.

Fathers matter because they are different from mothers

While it can be useful to point to complementary parenting styles where these exist, this argument tends to reinforce old stereotypes. Within-sex differences are substantial, between-sex differences tend to be small overall, and 'traditional' masculine interests or behaviour do not make fathers better parents. Emphasising gender differences quickly becomes 'fathers need separate services' and 'fathers aren't as good at nurturing as mothers'.

MESSAGES TO BE AVOIDED

Fathers' rights

The 'rights' argument has been effective when structurally disadvantaged groups with limited access to power and resources (women, black Americans) have fought for recognition and parity. But while men dominate public life and the lions' share of resources, demands for fathers' or men's rights, like claims of victimhood, will not be persuasive – even when the men seeking recognition and parity are, in fact, individually or collectively (as in young, poor, fathers) disadvantaged.

'Most messaging that has been effective focuses on fathers but not from a "fathers' rights" perspective, rather an inclusive perspective.' *(UK respondent)*

Some separated fathers' groups have tried to turn the fathers' rights argument round and talk about 'children's rights' but the discourse of competing rights is so complex that we feel this line of argument should normally be left well alone.

Fathers are essential

Arguing that fathers or involved fatherhood are 'essential' to child wellbeing; or that children can only be successfully raised in two-parent heterosexual unions cannot succeed. Such arguments are clearly fallacious, as a glance towards President Obama testifies (raised by a single mother and with his other positive influence being, it would seem, his grandmother). There are also many children being raised in non-heterosexual families, with different numbers and combinations of mothers and

fathers in their lives. FI argues that fathers are not essential *any more than mothers are* and that children can be successfully raised in just about any family form.

However, we also point out that this does not render fathers unimportant, any more than a father successfully raising a child alone renders the mother, or mothers in general, unimportant. Each father or loved father-figure matters to his child because of their individual and personal relationship – which is irreplaceable. Such a relationship exists even when the father and child have never met because the relationship invariably exists powerfully in fantasy.

The married father is the best father

To claim that married fathers matter more than other fathers or that children of married couples do better because their parents have tied the knot, is another fallacious argument. The reason children of married parents tend to do better is because people who marry tend to be older, better educated, better resourced and more purposeful in establishing their partnerships. However, this does not mean that stable, happy parental relationships should not be valued. The argument we advance about involved fatherhood contributing to couple-relationship stability and satisfaction is well received and does not set up opposition between lone mothers and family traditionalists. We also constantly emphasise the impact of the quality of the parents' relationship on their children, whether or not the parents live together.

Fathers as 'role models'

Being a 'role model' implies distance, not intimacy⁷. This undermines messaging about the value of involved fathering and implies that a father is easily replaceable. We have seen this operating in youth services where, when a boy living in a lone-mother household is perceived to be troublesome, professionals look quickly for male mentor or 'role model' without first making any attempt to identify, contact or work with the boy's own father.

Rejecting the argument that a father's value to his child is as a 'role model' does not imply rejecting the notion that a father can be a good 'role model' for his child in respect of *something specific* – honesty, kindness, creativity, endurance, commitment to his community and so on. That is valid – and the same applies to mothers who can also function as role models in respect of *something specific*, such as high educational achievement. Involved fathers can also function as 'role models' for other fathers in, for instance, communities where involved fatherhood is rare.

⁷ Think how absurd it would sound to say that a mother matters to her child because she is a role model!

Supporters and Detractors

ORGANISATIONS

United Kingdom

In the UK, the government has supported involved fatherhood since 1999, first via funding from the Home Office (which covers internal security – policing, prisons and so on) and more recently from the Department for Education via funding streams established to promote positive parenting⁸.

‘We were lucky in being able to go with the steady rise up the agenda of parenting: we didn’t mobilise an argument relating to men or boys or even fathers. We mobilised an argument related to parenting and children.’ (*Co-founder*)

Non-government supporters of involved fatherhood include advocates for equal opportunities (for women) and family-friendly working, as well as small organisations operating in sectors including early years, family literacy, community services, parenting support, care-leavers, prisons, services for couples and for separated families, teenage pregnancy, men-into-childcare advocacy and many others. Localism rules. In national programmes, some sites support involved fatherhood well. Others do not. And where support has been strong it can disappear, sometimes without a trace, as can organisations which have supported it.

‘We have little pockets of good work but they are from being universally embedded at a local level. Practice has come and gone without being embedded or being seen as core practice.’ (*UK respondent*)

The Fatherhood Institute

The UK organisation most frequently referred to by our survey respondents as supporting involved fatherhood was, unsurprisingly (since we initiated the survey!) the Fatherhood Institute (Fathers Direct), with individual staff members also mentioned as having particular impact⁹ and partnerships with the organisation valued:

⁸ In Australia, funding for fathers’, men’s and boys’ work has been through a separate funding stream (the ‘Men and Family Relationships’ funding stream), which may have contributed to a particular emphasis in that country on separate work for men and fathers.

⁹ Particularly Adrienne Burgess, for her co-authorship of *Men and their Children*, her authorship of what many consider to be a very important book, *Fatherhood Reclaimed: the making of the modern father* and her research summaries on the Institute’s website

'Fathers Direct was an excellent partner in some of the work I did within Young Voice on fathers in the prison system. We found them thoughtful and respected.' *(UK respondent)*

But even we were surprised by the extent to which our work was considered important. Eighty-two per cent of survey respondents said our influence had been substantial, with 94% saying we had helped them advocate for involved fatherhood, 81% for gender equity and 77% for child wellbeing. Forty-one percent said we had also brought about changes in their personal lives.

'Fathers Direct (now the Fatherhood Institute) raised the agenda on a national scale and improved practice through workforce development and evidence based practice guidance.' *(UK respondent)*

'I know that having a national organisation that promoted father involvement 'behind' me helped me in my work, so that I was not the only one ploughing the furrow. The organisation I work for is now committed to an agenda that it had not even thought about less than 10 years ago.' *(UK respondent)*

'I don't know about specific policy changes but in terms of gathering evidence that dads are worth focussing on AND inspiring and highlighting interventions with fathers that make a difference the Fatherhood Institute is invaluable - and if it didn't exist, you'd want to invent it'. *(UK respondent)*

Internationally

Survey respondents from abroad identified organisations in their home countries which support, or have supported involved fatherhood. These included the Ford Foundation, NPCL and the NFI in the US, the Family Action Centre in Australia, Instituto Papai and Promundo in Brazil and Singapore's Ministry for Community, Youth and Sports. At the same time, most of these respondents also pointed to the Fatherhood Institute's impact in their country:

'Best policy development internationally and a great website.'

'The Fatherhood Institute is in my view a world-leader in fatherhood work. It is balanced, sensible, practical and creative. While the US has fathering groups, they seem more ideological and agenda-driven.'

Asked about international organisations as supporters, one survey respondent pointed to the UN Commission on the Status of Women¹⁰ and the Council of the

¹⁰ *Conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality (extract)*

Forty-eighth session, 1-12 March 2004: The Commission urges UN agencies, Governments, the private sector, NGOs, and other stakeholders, to:

- 'Promote understanding of the importance of fathers, mothers, legal guardians and other caregivers, to the well being of children and the promotion of gender equality and of the need

European Union¹¹ as having been explicit about the importance of engaging with men's caring capabilities, although they did not point to specific actions emerging from these policy intentions. Another stakeholder mentioned the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child¹²; and others referred to the European Union as 'driving things along'. Two mentioned UNICEF 'when Patrice Engle was there', making the point that support for involved fathering as a means of improving the lives of women and children, which had been Engle's perspective in the 1990s, has since disappeared from the organisation's narratives.

INDIVIDUALS

Overwhelmingly, our survey respondents pointed not so much to organisations as to individuals as supporters of involved fatherhood.

'Much of the early work on the fatherhood agenda was led by individual managers or departments rather than a joined up approach.' (*UK respondent*)

'Working in the health sector with hospitals, policy people and community health in getting services started on including fathers I kept meeting quiet, behind-the-scenes workers (often women) who kept raising the need for fathers over and over.' (*UK respondent*)

One respondent reflected on the fact that this *ad hoc* individualised support is the norm when change is in its early stages:

'Always these ideas have been around for some time before any big breakthrough occurs. There need to be lots of individual and institutional advocates for change, or supporters ('early adopters'), for the breakthrough to occur.' (*UK respondent*)

Public figures

to develop policies, programmes and school curricula that encourage and maximize their positive involvement in achieving gender equality'

- 'Create and improve training and education programmes to enhance awareness and knowledge among men and women on their roles as parents, legal guardians and caregivers and the importance of sharing family responsibilities, and include fathers as well as mothers in programmes that teach infant child care development...'

¹¹ *Conclusions on men and gender equality (extract) 30 November and 1 December 2006*: The Council of the European Union: 'encourages the development, from early childcare and education, of pedagogic practices aimed at eliminating gender stereotypes, also paying attention to educational methods and tools that improve the capacity and potential of boys and men to care for themselves and others'.

¹² e.g. Article 7 of the UNCRC grants the child the right to, as far as possible, know and be cared for by both parents; Articles 5, 18(1) and 14(2) address the positive role of parents, parental responsibilities and the child's evolving capacities; Articles 18(2) and (3) cover the right to family support and to maintain regular contact with both parents when separated from them.

Individual supporters named by our respondents included celebrities: David Beckham ('a good father as well as good at his job'); Jamie Oliver, very visibly a family man and campaigning for good food for children; Sir Bob Geldof who followed up on a short spell of campaigning for separated fathers to counter stereotypes, after his ex-wife's death, by adopting her child by the man for whom she had left him. Several respondents pointed to the impact on the British people of the young families of the three most recent British Prime Ministers moving into Downing Street to live above their fathers' offices.

Academics

The largest category of individual supporters mentioned by our respondents was academics¹³. Psychologist Professor Michael Lamb, formerly of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in the US, now at Cambridge University in the UK, put fatherhood research on the map beginning in the mid 1970s and was also for a while a Trustee of the Fatherhood Institute. Other psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, evolutionary psychologists and even geographers have contributed, providing insights with which we have been able to evidence our messages. Contributions from academics in practice-oriented disciplines, including family law, psychiatry, health, social work and parenting have also been significant. Their funders' support was also recognised as significant.

'Our research in association with Oxford University in 1999 showed the importance of father involvement, and government was very interested . . . (Their funding) via the Home Office Family Support Grant and later the Strengthening Families grant allowed us to do far more work - with prisoners and their families - and also explore children's experience when parents part.'
(UK respondent)

That said, our respondents kept pointing out that much of the fatherhood research is small scale and 'ghettoised' away from the mainstream, even in 'men's studies' where a separate journal for work on fathers (*Fathering*) has been instituted. What exercised them most, however, was the father-blindness of research in any number of disciplines:

'Social work research often talks about "parents" when in fact mothers were the respondents.' (UK respondent)

'Research around fathers' engagement in family literacy is extremely limited. On carrying out a review of research I found that most of the work refers to parents but in fact studies only mothers' behaviour.' (UK respondent)

'Researchers investigating parents' experiences of being with their sick child spoke to mothers only yet talked in their findings about "parents" experiences.' (UK respondent)

¹³ We cannot name them all here - most are cited in the research summaries on our website.

‘Fathers were excluded, and still are from the research literature on child development, attachment and parenting (almost all mothers) . . . It is still common that in research models and approaches to research fathers are not included.’ (US respondent)

Our respondents pointed out that when research renders fathers invisible, training and policy render them invisible, too:

‘Social work training literature marginalises or demonises men by depicting them in case examples and scenarios as obstacles or violent – or simply omitting them.’ (UK respondent)

‘The front cover of recent national child protection guidelines in Scotland has an image of a woman with two children. That’s it.’ (UK respondent)

However, some felt matters were improving:

‘From an academic viewpoint, it is noteworthy that material on fathers seems more common and easier to locate, equally, academic journals appear to be willing to carry greater father-specific material.’ (UK respondent)

Feminists

Many of the other individuals perceived by our survey respondents as promoting involved fatherhood are feminists: Australian-born Lynne Segal and US based Louise Silverstein writing lucidly and positively about involved fatherhood from a feminist perspective; Patricia Hewitt, later a UK government minister, who together with Anna Coote (who had co-authored the first *Guide to Women’s Rights*) commissioned the aforementioned, groundbreaking, *Men and their Children: proposals for public policy* in 1996..

‘I think recognising that there is no contradiction between men having power and oppressing women, and opening up the 'female domain' to men, has been key to moving the agenda forward.’ (UK respondent)

With the arrival of another eminent feminist (Dame) Julie Mellor as Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1999, that organisation began to broaden its focus to include involved fatherhood:

‘The Equal Opportunities Commission (and Margaret O'Brien in her work for them) produced interesting work on the relationality between the social positions of men and women, with more emphasis on both fathers and mothers gaining from a more equal division of labour rather than a more territorial approach that I discerned in previous decades.’ (UK Respondent)

The EOC published significant research reports on public services’ engagement with fathers and on issues relating to women’s and men’s employment: paternity leave,

dads and their babies, fathers and the modern family, and others. Mellor brought the premier feminist organisation, the Fawcett Society together with the EOC and the Fatherhood Institute for a series of high profile seminars. And then, with the support of Patricia Hewitt who was by then a government minister, Mellor brought Fatherhood Institute CEO Duncan Fisher¹⁴ into the EOC as an Equal Opportunities Commissioner. Subsequently Mellor was, for a while, Chair of Trustees at the Fatherhood Institute.

In taking these steps, Mellor positioned involved fatherhood at the heart of the equal opportunities narrative and the feminist agenda in the UK. There is now not a senior spokesperson on equality for women in this country who would speak out against the notion of applying resources and attention to the issue of involved fatherhood as an ‘enabler’ of women’s greater participation in public life and escape from financial disadvantage. Other female Ministers who would self-define as feminists, including Beverley Hughes, one-time Minister for Children, subsequently took a further step, by linking gender equality and involved fatherhood with child wellbeing.

Another kind of feminism . . .

However, not all those who would self-define as feminist are comfortable with the Institute’s strengths-based approach to promoting involved fatherhood. While feminists from the 1970s had been calling for men’s greater participation in housework-and-childcare, they had presented men as ‘the problem’: unlike women, they needed to change; and, unlike women, they were universally powerful and therefore responsible when change did not happen. This perspective is still clear in some of our survey responses:

‘Men as a group have some capacity to make collective choices about gender arrangements, and in recent history in most parts of the world their choices have mostly been to perpetuate gender inequality . . . I know that maternity services are mainly focussed on the women and don't provide much of a place for the individual men, but since that is a response to broader arrangements that men have more power to change than women do, I find it hard to conceptualize men as being 'excluded or ignored'. In fact I find it quite worrying that it should be conceptualized that way. (Australian respondent)

The Fatherhood Institute has not focused on men as ‘the problem’ – and nor have feminists such as Mellor, Hewitt, Coote, Segal or Silverstein. Their starting point is the political, social, economic and cultural narratives that keep men, no less than women, ‘in their place’ – that place being, in the case of men, *outside* the nursery.

‘We didn’t start with that agenda or trying to change men – we just wanted to raise as an issue the fact that policy and practice weren’t addressing men.

¹⁴ Fisher was subsequently be awarded an OBE for his work on fatherhood,

We didn't have all the answers but we said "we cannot think you (service providers) are doing a good job if you are only talking to women so stop thinking it's OK to only talk to women".' (*Co-founder*)

From the 1980s the 'men are powerful and have to change' narrative which had driven second-wave feminism took a darker turn as leading feminists adopted rape, domestic violence and, later, the vulnerability of lone mothers as key issues. In all these narratives, which have often been interlinked, fathers appear as dispensable at best and dangerous at worst; and engagement with them is dis-incentivised.

'For the harassed professional, say dealing with a pregnant teenager in a fragile relationship with her partner it was easier not to deal with the father, to discourage his involvement thereby (in the view of the midwife or social worker) reducing the mother's potential exposure to violence.' (*UK respondent*)

The developing polarisation between the 'fathers'' and 'women's' agendas was regretted by many of our survey respondents, with blame laid at the fathers' doors, too.

'The fathers' rights programs (in the US) have damaged real progress because they believe that fathers, and men in general, are victims of rabid feminists. All of this offends feminists who had the potential to support more involved fathering.' (*US respondent*)

In the early 2000s, the narrative of the dispensable/dangerous man/father was at its height in maternity care in the UK. There it has subsided somewhat but is currently to the fore in debates on family policy post-separation.

Some academics and lobbyists including trades unions representatives and some organisations in Britain concerned with 'women's issues' seem, when the chips are down, to be opposed to any policy or legislation which seeks to open the doors of the nursery to admit men. While their rhetoric is supportive, their actions are not. Every issue (Joint Birth Registration, replacing 'maternity' leave with 'parental leave' so that fathers as well as mothers can take it, or encouraging shared parenting after separation) is countered with the claim (though not evidence) that introducing it will put 'vulnerable women' at risk.

Pro-feminist males

The new Men Care programme, developed out of the pro-feminist Men Engage/White Ribbon campaigns, is creating resources to promote positive images of men as carers, mainly as fathers. Linking the pro-feminist agenda and the involved fatherhood agenda may prove challenging. Like traditional feminists, pro-feminist males, who have often operated within 'Men's Studies' or 'Gender Studies' or 'Queer Studies', subscribe to the idea of men being powerful and problematic

and, unlike women, needing to change. Involved fatherhood has not traditionally been part of their narrative.

‘They talked about violence, having to be strong and powerful and not show vulnerability, hierarchy, heterosexuality and defining yourself as ‘not female’ but they said nothing about the ways in which all that affected the understanding of men as parents. One or two talked about fatherhood but there was rarely any celebration in the narrative and they seemed to be looking over their shoulders at the feminist agenda.’ (UK respondent)

In the UK the broadly pro-feminist Coalition of Men and Boys (COMAB) produced a report *Man Made: Men, masculinities and equality in public policy* (2010) which did have a chapter on fatherhood. Nevertheless, negativity in tone was clear, and elicited an exasperated reaction from one of our survey respondents:

‘Initiatives like the Coalition for Men and Boys props up this thinking in some ways - focusing on men "and the problems they cause" - honestly folks, can you image the women's movement talking about "women and the problems THEY cause" !!!!!!’ (UK respondent)

If you believe men need to change, then of course your first ‘port of call’ will be to try to change them – generally through criticism and blame or, adopting a more positive and often condescending tone, by assuring them that fatherhood is the most important job in the world or that:

‘(Involved fatherhood is) an [expansion of the meaning of masculinity, a source of pleasure, connection, growth and creativity.](#)’ (Australian respondent)

But whether you wave a stick or offer a carrot, your mission to *get men to behave better* will mean that your focus will be on changing something which is ‘bad’ (likely to set up resistance). In our view it is more productive to emphasize the benefits of new ways of doing things, and acknowledge that *everyone* needs to behave differently if men are to play a greater role in caring for children.

‘Left’ and ‘Right’

Right wing governments often speak quite easily about fathers, including separated fathers, partly because they have not traditionally been concerned about women’s autonomy. However, their way of valuing fathers has, traditionally, been to see them as breadwinners and family ‘leaders’ – the very roles that have contributed to fathers’ low involvement with their children and in the domestic realm.

‘Campaigns for paternity leave were ridiculed by some Tories in power at the time.’ (UK respondent)

The 'Left' traditionally tolerates a wider and softer definition of the 'good father' but because of its concern to foster women's autonomy against power-wielding males has, at times, found it difficult to talk positively about involved fatherhood:

'I recall how people (*on the Left*) either just weren't interested or were incapable of allowing someone to talk positively about men/fathers without instantly assuming they were being negative about women/mothers. I was particularly shocked at how resistant left-leaning, pro-feminist organisations were to the fatherhood agenda and in particular the Equal Opportunities Commission¹⁵. Being a pro-feminist 'Lefty' myself I expect nothing less than unimaginative and old fashioned views from the Right but I was truly shocked at how anti-male and anti-father the Left was.' (*UK respondent*)

Ultimately, the 'Left' under the last (Labour) government in the UK broke the mould. Ministers, men as well as women, spoke positively about supporting both involved fatherhood and couple relationships. Nor is the current Liberal/Conservative Coalition behaving true to traditional form: it has come out strongly in favour of 'non-traditional' gender roles for fathers by committing to supporting 'shared parenting from the earliest stages of pregnancy'. What's happening? Policy, it seems to us, is beginning to catch up with the realities of people's lives: women's lives and women's roles have changed massively; men's can no longer stay the same.

Where to now?

A TIPPING POINT?

Most of our respondents did not believe a tipping point has been reached. They told us that 'if you take your foot off the pedal for a minute, it slips back'. A common theme was 'we still have a long way to go'.

'There has been significant policy shift by central Govt but they are struggling to translate policy to practice.' (*UK respondent*)

Quite subtle barriers were identified . . .

'Bringing in both parents often leads to conflict which these professionals are not trained to deal with.' (*UK respondent*)

. . . and the extent of the changes needed was fully grasped:

'I feel when interviewing potential staff who work within the early years sector, they should have specific questions asked regarding the role fathers can and do play in the lives of their children.' (*UK respondent*)

¹⁵ Before Dame Julie Mellor became the Chair

‘The parental leave system is still "Edwardian".’ *(UK respondent)*

Media portrayal of involved fatherhood was seen as ‘stuck in the dark ages’ . . .

‘I can't see much evidence that there has been a shift in media portrayal.’ *(UK respondent)*

. . . and the global financial crisis regarded as a threat:

‘This will only get worse due to the savage cuts to services that have been there to support them.’ *(UK respondent)*

‘Everything is now going backwards as skilled father-work practitioners . . . are losing their jobs and services disappear.’ *(UK respondent)*

A ROSIER VIEW

But with all that there was a clear sense that things have moved on in important respects:

‘Generally there is recognition from public and workers that family services (including education and health) need to be men/father friendly. This is different from 10 years ago.’ *(UK respondent)*

‘There is also now a legal requirement, as part of the Gender Equality Duty (2007) for public sector organisations to prevent gender discrimination against men and fathers in service provision.’ *(UK respondent)*

Three respondents used the term ‘tipping point’.

‘There was a tipping point probably 2001-2002 (in the US) when national foundations recognized fatherhood organizations; and individual advocates began working on strategies for getting targeted financial and policy support for responsible fatherhood efforts.’ *(US respondent)¹⁶*

‘There was a definite tipping point around 2007/8 (in the UK). Instead of being invited to speak about WHY including fathers was important, I found myself being invited to speak about HOW this was best achieved.’ *(UK respondent)*

‘I suddenly realised that when the term ‘new father’ was being used in the press, it no longer meant ‘a father who plays an unusually big part in caring

¹⁶ The date was challenged by one of our Advisory Group, also from the US, who saw the ‘golden age’ as the late 90s (‘perhaps 1996-2000’), observing that funding diminished after the stock market crash in 2001

for his baby or children'. It was being used, exclusively, to mean 'a man who has just become a father'. I did a quick Google news search to find out if my impression was accurate, and it was. To me that is highly significant because a highly involved father is now just seen as a father. Is this a tipping point?' *(Co-founder)*

REAL LIFE

A number of stakeholders expressed the view that 'real life' is driving involved fatherhood and the tide is unstoppable.

'The drivers behind the fatherhood agenda have always been financial. As more and more families need two salaries to make ends meet, so the dynamics of family life are changing in order to reflect this fact.' *(US respondent)*

'Technological advances have helped enormously enabling some parents to work from home and work flexibly.' *(Australian respondent)*

'The notion of men as the main breadwinners and women as homemakers and the ones who raise the children is becoming more and more outdated.' *(UK respondent)*

'There has been a change in women's expectations of fathers. Women have higher expectations of father involvement and men want to be more involved.' *(UK respondent)*

'The real change is when people see it in their own family or neighbourhood.' *(Australian respondent)*

FUTURE STRATEGIES

Many survey respondents called on us to continue doing what we are already doing, not to let up – and to re-visit areas where we had not been successful:

'You might consider going back to the issue of Joint Birth Registration.'

'Keep up lobbying government using good evidence.'

'Keep it strengths-based and child-focused.'

'Continue to work closely with women and family groups and running collective campaigns.'

Many of their recommendations related to practice in health, education and family services, with suggestions for better-evidencing of interventions¹⁷ high on many people's agendas;

'In this very competitive climate for funding, projects must be supported with recording outcomes for fathers/families/children.' *(UK respondent)*

'Evidence based practice is the only way we can continue to carry on with fathers work. Too many projects fall by the wayside because they are unable to evidence the work that they carry out.'

There were calls for research in a range of areas, and for targeted interventions . . .

'Our understanding about what progresses intervention with fathers who have been and are violent towards their partners and/or children remains somewhat weak. Engaging with 'angry' men (as distinct from involving, seemingly, reluctant men) remains an important area for social work practice development.'

. . . as well as suggestions for embedding practice:

'The key strategy must be informing and supporting very senior managers to recognise and act upon the significant number of policies now in place. We need to make more use of the Equality Act and put forward a test case that shows the marked lack of gender differentiated working in our major services.'

Some stakeholders wanted us to move into broader areas – interestingly, all ones we have been, and are, still struggling to address:

'The media . . . so that successful women are not portrayed as cold and uninvolved mothers and involved fathers are not portrayed as weak and unsuccessful in their career.'

'Employers - we need to give employers evidence that involved fathers are more productive at work (less family breakdown etc?). Some cost benefit research around this would be useful.'

It was also suggested that we move beyond England's borders, improving 'UK coverage' and 'helping internationally'.

Another key area emphasised by our survey respondents was communicating with 'ordinary families'. It was suggested that we focus on speaking directly to fathers,

¹⁷ FI is currently undertaking a major international review, funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, of parenting programmes in relation to involved fatherhood

mothers and grandparents ('attitudes of grandmothers and grandfathers may be forces for perpetuating tradition, so the message needs to reach them').

'The next stage should be to broaden out your reach from research, advocacy and training etc. to become known by the population, talking directly to families out there.'

'Include the 'voice' of fathers, mothers and children.'

'Fathers themselves, who are transformed, becoming leaders and advocates in a very public way -- carrying the message with support and guidance from professionals will be powerful.'

We have devoted considerable resources over the past five years, experimenting with different methods of speaking to families about fatherhood and trying to mobilise fathers. We know what doesn't work and are groping towards new strategies. But that is the subject of another paper . . .

Conclusion

The last twelve years have been extraordinary. We have often been frustrated but like some of the stakeholders who so generously shared their views with us, we remain convinced that the changes we are working towards must and will come. We have learned not to expect change to come quickly and, because of that, are often surprised at how quickly changes come.

We have a sense that we are running with the tide and that we are, to mix a metaphor, somehow on the side of the angels. Involved fatherhood matters profoundly to, and for, us all: men, women, children, the 'good' society. There is far to go but that's to be expected. For we are engaged in something massive: a social, economic, political and cultural shift that is without borders.