

CASE STUDY 1 | Nationwide | Social care

Social workers learn to work with fathers

Project cuts the risk to children in families where there are safeguarding concerns by raising social workers' engagement with fathers

PROJECT
Engaging Fathers in Child Protection

PURPOSE
To reduce risk to children in families where there are safeguarding concerns by increasing social workers' engagement with fathers and father figures

FUNDING
Training fees for local authorities range from about £1,500 for a one-day workshop to £19,000 for an intervention programme spanning several months

BACKGROUND
One of the key failings often emphasised in serious case reviews is the absence of engagement with fathers and father figures in the child protection process. "There's a wealth of evidence, stretching back over decades, of a failure to engage with fathers," says Mark Osborn, safeguarding project manager for the Fatherhood Institute. "These fathers and father figures were either a risk that was not properly assessed, or they were a potential positive resource that was not utilised."

From 2011 to 2013, the Fatherhood Institute worked to tackle this issue through a Department for Education-funded project with six local authorities, in partnership with the Family Rights Group. In February 2013, the organisation developed this work further with a two-year grant from the European Union's Daphne funding stream, enabling it to trial a training programme with two Welsh authorities.

ACTION
The programme starts with a roundtable session to introduce it to key staff across the authority's child protection services, followed by an audit of policies and



Courses for social workers aim to boost their understanding of the positive impact fathers can have on children's development

procedures to assess how father-inclusive they are. Twenty randomly-selected case files are then looked at in detail to assess how effectively fathers have been included and supported in the child protection process, from children's initial referral onwards.

Social care managers and practitioners are trained to audit these case files alongside the trainers to help them see more clearly where and how

opportunities have been missed. According to Osborn, this gives them a better understanding of the need for change and a sense of ownership.

The findings feed into a report that is presented to the roundtable attendees, with recommendations on how they can improve their involvement of fathers. The local authority then compiles an action plan. "This is not about the failure of individual practitioners or about

individuals not doing their job well," stresses Osborn. "We have to look at it from a whole-system point of view."

The next step is a two-day training course for social workers and managers, aiming to boost their understanding of the positive impact that fathers can have on children's development, alongside the risks of not engaging them.

It also helps participants tackle challenges in engaging fathers, such as difficulties in tracking them down, fathers' reluctance to engage and the anxieties they can feel about liaising with men labelled as aggressive.

The training is followed by "action learning sets", which involve social workers applying what they have learned to their everyday practice and reflecting with colleagues on how to overcome particular difficulties. Half-day workshops on engaging fathers are also provided for multi-agency staff.

OUTCOME
Analysis of 21 case files by the Fatherhood Institute before and after the intervention in Conwy showed a significant increase in the authority's involvement of fathers in the child protection process.

Before the intervention, in June 2013, only 47 per cent of fathers were involved in core assessments, compared to 82 per cent in July last year, four months after the intervention ended. Initial case conferences included a recorded discussion of the father's level of risk in 61 per cent of cases before the intervention, compared to 84 per cent afterwards. His strengths were discussed at these conferences in 44 per cent of cases before the intervention, which increased to 89 per cent thereafter.

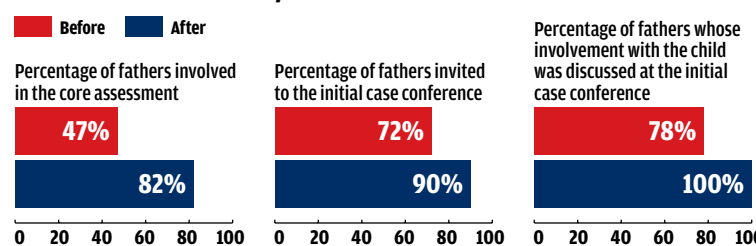
Review case conferences included a recorded discussion about the father's level of risk in 55 per cent of cases before the intervention, compared to 95 per cent afterwards. His strengths were discussed in 50 per cent of cases before the intervention, compared to 89 per cent after.

Social workers in both pilot authorities reported improvements in their practice, including their ability to motivate fathers to change problematic behaviour, engage abusive men in discussion about their behaviour and assess fathers' positive qualities. Both authorities reported some children had not been taken into care and been placed with their fathers instead, as a result of their new approach.

If you think your project is worthy of inclusion, email supporting data to derren.hayes@markallengroup.com

FATHERS MORE INVOLVED IN CASES

Analysis of two sets of randomly selected case files produced by social workers at Conwy Council before and after the intervention



Source: Fatherhood Institute



Participants said the project increased their self-confidence, and improved their leadership and communication skills

CASE STUDY 2 | London | Youth work

Football helps net special bond

PROJECT
London Football Journeys

PURPOSE
To bring together young Londoners from different parts of the city and develop them as community leaders

FUNDING
About £500 a head for 135 young people a year. Funding includes a two-year £114,000 grant from the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities programme plus contributions from Tudor Trust, John Lyon's Charity, Sport Relief, Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund and Hilden Charitable Fund

BACKGROUND
Social entrepreneur Alex Baine's involvement in a football project for marginalised young people in Mumbai in 2009 inspired him to take what he had learned back to his native London. "I wanted to start a project using football to celebrate the diversity of London with its different backgrounds, religions and opportunities," he says. He consulted youth groups on the negative perceptions young Londoners often had of other parts of the city.

ACTION
London Football Journeys involves linking up a youth group in one part of London with another in a different area. The first project started in February 2012 and involved 11- to 14-year-olds from Fitzrovia Youth in Action in Camden and Paiwand Afghan Association in Harrow.

Each group of 15 young people makes a film about their area and community, which is shown to the other group. Participants then embark on home and away "football journeys", playing together in their respective areas, facilitated by professional football clubs including Millwall and Queens Park Rangers. Baine says this involves taking the young people "out of their comfort zone" by putting them into mixed teams. After the match, the young people share food and visit the local area. Participants are invited to put themselves forward as "ambassadors" to help deliver future activities.

Since 2012, 13 groups of young people have been involved. Schools were introduced to the project last year, when pupils

from Ark Elvin Academy in Brent and St Thomas the Apostle College in Southwark paired up for football exchanges in Peckham and Wembley. The project will be working with six schools and three youth centres each year for the next two years.

OUTCOME
Between February and October last year, 87 11- to 15-year-olds took part in the scheme, with 24 gaining a qualification in Community Development and Leadership through the Open College Network.

Feedback found 78 per cent of participants said it made them more confident about meeting others from different communities and 72 per cent said they felt more confident travelling to other areas of London.

Two-thirds said the project had increased their self-confidence, 79 per cent said it had improved their leadership skills and 88 per cent reported improved communication skills. More than three quarters said they wanted to plan and deliver more football exchanges.