WORKING WITH MEN
FATHERS’ DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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The debate on the role of fathers in children's lives has been steadily increasing in past years. Father absence was identified as a major stumbling block to the success of children and families during the 1990s, especially those in poverty. In the US, scholars and authors like David Popenoe and David Blankenhorn put forward arguments that fatherlessness was at the root of social problems, driving policies that were focused on stabilising the nuclear family to make fathers present in their children's lives. The term 'deadbeat dads' emerged to describe under involved and absent fathers regardless of what might have led to this behaviour, serving to vilify imperfect fathers.

In academic literature, a movement emerged toward defining and acting upon the notion of 'responsible fatherhood'. Scholars such as James Levine and William Doherty published work on 'responsible fathering' providing a model not only for studying and understanding how men are involved with their children, but also as a foundation for working with men to become positive influences on the children. Responsible fatherhood is more than just being a breadwinner or good provider, as traditional male role norms might expect. It expands our understanding of fathers as being warm and loving as well as active participants in all aspects of their children's lives. The conceptualisation of responsible fatherhood continues to be influential today, such as in President Obama's Promoting Responsible Fatherhood initiative.

In light of all of this, we need to ask the question: does father involvement matter? The short answer is that when fathers are positively involved, then yes, their involvement can be very beneficial. In synthesising the body of research on the consequences of father involvement, Joseph Pleck and I concluded that when fathers are involved in a positive manner, child outcomes benefit from the domains of physical development to social–emotional functioning to academic achievement. That alone is reason enough to support men becoming effective, competent, and responsible parents.

Actually engaging men in public services to support, enhance, and promote positive involvement with their children is a different story. Getting men, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, to participate in such services is a challenge, fraught with obstacles ranging from external social demands to male socialisation into traditional gender roles. When I began to focus on engaging men in family services in the early 2000s, I constantly encountered service providers struggling to gain any buy-in whatsoever from fathers for their programmes. Some 10 years ago when speaking at the annual 'Zero to Three' conference in Washington DC I faced a packed ballroom with an audience focused on one question: how do I get men to participate? Unfortunately, I continue to hear the same question today.

Some might feel that attempting to engage men in services that promote responsible fathering is an exercise in futility. I would disagree. Working With Men (WWM) have demonstrated that engaging men in fathering programmes is not such an exercise. Evidence from their recently-completed three-year project in Islington, London, helps us to understand both how we can best engage men in fathering programmes and effectively promote their development as parents. Their work represents some of the most thorough and hope-instilling applied research on this subject that I have had the good fortune to review.

The precursor to the Islington project was a joint research study of non-resident and young fathers from disadvantaged backgrounds that sought to determine what these fathers felt constituted collaborative working relationships with mothers, identifying what they felt were barriers to these collaborative working relationships, and what they felt were barriers to their access of support services to help them be involved fathers. This research found that fathers do have a strong desire to engage in parenting and to engage in this parenting via constructive co-parental relationships, but that these positive attitudes did not translate into action. Rather, there were other concerns impeding the translation of attitudes into behaviour: for example, low self-esteem as a parent combined with low confidence in the parental role often led to feelings of inability to participate in relationships with their children and the mothers. When reading this, one is reminded of 'learned helplessness'; it is as if these fathers were caught in a cycle where low self-esteem and negative beliefs about themselves simply created a vicious self-fulfilling prophecy, a Pygmalion in the parental role.

What the researchers uncovered was a process of self-defeating cognitions that disarmed positive attitudes and interrupted the connection to positive action. WWM then created a theory of change and a programme reflective of the above, their findings from their long history of work with disadvantaged fathers, as well as a thorough analytic literature review. I have great pleasure in saying that the studies from, and evaluation of, this programme indicates success!

A wide range of positive outcomes for the men involved have been obtained. Significant increases in confidence among the men in terms of their fathering skills were apparent. Fathers were not seen to have a distinct role from mothers, as cultural expectations often prescribe. Instead, these fathers were able to understand that, above all, they were parents, and that caring for their children is something both mother and father can accomplish. What these men found particularly helpful was that the programme helped them to develop practical skills for being a parent and to understand the emotional aspects of having a child. And, ultimately, the intervention interrupted the self-defeating, self-fulfilling prophecy that impeded acting to be involved fathers.

Furthermore, WWM identified the characteristics for public service providers that the men thought helped facilitate their engagement and continuing participation, a rather overlooked area of research. We frequently do not go beyond matching simple background characteristics, such as having a male provider deliver services to men. What WWM found was that there were three key characteristics of the service provider that were essential: being easy to talk to, being honest and genuine, and being supportive. These are not the characteristics I was clinically trained to emphasise and I would accept these important findings with greater confidence than my clinical training as they are not based on assumptions. Rather, WWM did something very important; they followed what I feel is the most important lesson I learned in a seminar on ethnographic research methods: never assume what you can find out.

In conclusion, the Islington Fathers’ Development Project demonstrates to us that fathers want to be involved, have the capacity to be involved, and can develop the confidence to be involved in their children’s lives. It also demonstrates that a negative cycle can be broken and that men can be both positive influences in their children’s lives and equal partners in sharing the work of parenting. At the same time, this research shows us the importance of authentic, genuine and caring attitudes towards disadvantaged fathers, if these fathers are to be effectively engaged in family services. If support is father-friendly, barriers to involved fathering can be overcome. We know all of these things now with much more certainty because of this programme.

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INTRODUCTION

Working With Men (WWM) is a not-for-profit organisation working to ensure that fathers are supported to be actively engaged in the lives of their children. As the definition of family continues to be redefined in the 21st Century, many fathers do not live in the same household as their children; while some are able to continue to engage in collaborative parenting, others too often face significant barriers to co-parenting, compounded by barriers to accessing support even though they may have a strong desire to be involved in their children’s upbringing.

What is required is a paradigm shift in family support services. If we accept that positive father involvement has far-reaching impacts on children’s development and wellbeing, then we must surely agree that supporting fathers into involved fatherhood should be afforded the same necessity and value as the support of motherhood – regardless of the difficult economic climate and inevitable conflicting demands on resources. Yet, only some Local Authorities offer dedicated support for these fathers, while others would argue that their services are offered on a gender-neutral basis. However, as acknowledged by the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Parenting and Social Mobility (2015), the present culture of ostensibly gender-neutral family services has the tendency to inhibit access for fathers.

In the course of our extensive work with fathers from disadvantaged backgrounds and with Local Authorities, we have designed, piloted and evaluated different approaches, interventions and tools to arrive at a profound understanding of the barriers both to co-parenting and to accessing support – and the changes required to overcome these barriers. This paper charts the thinking behind our campaign for better father-inclusive family services to support these fathers, and presents our proposals for changes in policy and practice.

We call for a step change in mainstream family services, underpinned by a national framework for strategic level interventions that compels Local Authorities to (a) build this work into their strategic plans, and (b) commit / safeguard the required funding. Appropriate structural changes should be implemented to ensure that mothers and fathers are proactively engaged with, and supported equally, whether or not the father resides with the family.

A comprehensive training programme will be vital to ensure the successful implementation of the new strategy, with measurable monitored targets of engagement with fathers from organisational level to practitioner-level.
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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Working with Men aims to bring lasting change to the lives of men from disadvantaged backgrounds who are otherwise unable to fulfil their potential to become active and productive members of society.

1.1 A key aspect of our work is with fathers, including separating, separated and young fathers from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds typically in deprived inner-city areas. Informed by research and through our extensive work during the last 25 years or so, we have developed a profound understanding of the internal and external barriers faced by these fathers in building positive and active relationships with their children and their children’s mother, and in accessing support. For support services, too often these fathers are simply viewed as financial providers rather than caregivers.

1.2 Currently, support for fathers from mainstream family services varies across the UK, with some Local Authorities and some family services more engaged with fathers than others. In general, family services are ostensibly delivered on a gender-neutral basis which, rather than promoting routine engagement with fathers, has the tendency to lead to unequal levels of access for these fathers. Whilst some Local Authorities offer dedicated fathers’ services, these services are generally sporadic and inevitably sensitive to heavy workloads and budget cuts. Accordingly, fatherhood is typically relegated to add-on services, while motherhood is viewed by mainstream agencies as essential.

1.3 When services fail to engage with fathers, the narrative is usually whether the father chooses to engage or not, and the assumption is often that fathers choose not to engage. In reality, men’s construction of their roles as fathers, and their use or non-use of parenting support services, is a consequence of many factors that not only correspond to the father himself, but also the mother, the parental relationship and wider contextual factors (discussed in Section 2).

1.4 Our work is both evidence-based and practice-led, informed by independent research, our own research studies and outcomes of our projects. Our Fathers’ Development Programme has several key aims:

• to support fathers to be actively involved in all aspects of their children’s lives;
• to influence strategic and systemic change within mainstream family services such that these become father-inclusive whether or not the father resides with the family;
• to engender cross-sector and multi-agency working to ensure a holistic approach to family support.

1.5 Recognising the current economic climate, and the inevitable policy context of limited resources and competing priorities faced by Local Authorities, we are at the forefront of campaigning for a national framework for fathers’ support that would ensure (a) mainstream agencies routinely and actively engage with fathers as well as mothers as the norm in their family services offerings, and (b) Local Authorities offer dedicated father-specific services as dictated by local needs. Best practice for fathers’ support must be what we refer to as ‘beyond Saturday mornings’; in other words, simply facilitating father-child activities once or twice a week at children’s centres is inadequate. Instead, Local Authorities must engage with all aspects of fatherhood at all stages of the child’s life.

1.6 This paper charts the thinking behind our campaign and is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines key findings from independent research and from our joint research study with Dr Victoria Bourne of Royal Holloway, University of London entitled Collaborative parenting: barriers faced by separated fathers. Section 3 discusses the structure of our current Fathers’ Development programme. Section 4 discusses the main outcomes and learning from our recently-completed project in the London Borough of Islington. Section 5 presents the key findings of our longitudinal study conducted during the course of the Islington project. Finally, Section 6 draws together the main findings and proposes recommendations for policy and practice.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

2.1 Independent research

2.1.1 There is a wealth of research on the impact of parent-child relationships on child development and child outcomes. Whilst an exhaustive literature review of this research is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth highlighting the growing body of research that specifically considers the impact of fathers in shaping their children’s development and wellbeing. Fathers have a significant bearing on a child’s development; father-child relationships, whether positive, negative or absent, have wide-ranging effects on children even beyond their childhood years; these effects are particularly enhanced for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.1.2 Research shows strong correlations between father involvement and child development: see Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) for a literature review. More specifically, research suggests that both the quantity and quality of father-child interactions during early childhood years can lead to more positive social developments (Frosch, Cox & Goldman, 2001), fewer behavioural problems (Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi & Taylor, 2003), greater emotional self-regulation (Roggman, Boyce, Cook, Christiansen & Jones, 2004), increased language development (Magill-Evans & Harrison, 2001) and greater cognitive functioning (Gauvain, Fagot, Lee & Kavanagh, 2002) for young children. Conversely, low father contact is correlated with a range of negative outcomes in children (see Flouri, 2005, for a review).

2.1.3 A father’s positive influence extends beyond the early years of childhood. According to Flouri and Buchanan (2004), an involved father is associated with greater academic motivation and an absence of cognitive and behavioural difficulties in adolescence; moreover, early father involvement protects children in separated families against later mental health problems. Accordingly, interventions to improve the nature of father-child relationships can be instrumental in increasing social mobility (Economic and Social Research Council); this conclusion was recently endorsed by the Parliamentary Inquiry into Parenting and Social Mobility (Family and Childcare Trust, 2015).

2.1.4 A father’s relationship with his children’s mother is also important as research shows that the parental relationship is a strong predictor of the father’s involvement in co-parenting. For example, Andrews et al (2010) found that poor parental relationships can be a barrier to involved fatherhood; at a more nuanced level, research on the concept of ‘maternal gatekeeping’ suggests that mothers’ perceptions of fathers as competent caregivers, and the extent to which mothers are supportive or resistant, has the potential to shape or restrict father involvement (McBride et al, 2005). Significantly, fathers’ non-residential status was found to be directly linked to mothers’ gatekeeping behaviour (Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

1 Defined here as a father who reads to his child, takes outings with his child, is interested in his child’s education and generally takes a role equal to mother’s in the child’s upbringing; he need not live with the mother. However, it should be noted that the definition of ‘involved fatherhood’ is likely to vary between studies.

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2.1.5 More recently, a global study on the State of the World's Fathers found that involved fatherhood promotes gender equality both now and in future generations (MenCare, 2015). Based on studies in multiple countries, the report concluded that by sharing caregiving and domestic work, fathers not only support mothers’ participation in paid work, but also influence future generations, contributing to boys’ acceptance of gender equality and girls’ empowerment. Additionally, the report reinforced prior independent findings that involved fatherhood helps children thrive, and makes men happier and healthier.

2.1.6 Yet we know that barriers exist preventing fathers from being actively and positively involved in their children’s lives. Men’s construction of their roles as fathers is inherently complex and is influenced by many factors including the following:

- **father-factors**: role identification; knowledge, skills and commitment to fathering; relationship with own father/mother; physical/mental health; involvement in criminality/drugs/alcohol; mother-factors: mother’s continued employment; expectations of father; attitude towards father; support provided to father;
- couple-factors: commitment to the relationship; cooperation and mutual support; residence/contact arrangements where the couple lives apart;
- child-factors: attitude towards father which is sometimes influenced by the mother; behavioural difficulties;
- broader contextual factors: institutional practices such as service opening hours and working practices; economic factors; race/ethnicity resources and challenges; cultural expectations and social support.

(Doherty et al, 1998; Burgess, 2009)

The hierarchy of influences on fathers’ acceptance of support from services is as yet unknown, but research suggests that family culture, community norms and influences from informal support networks will influence utilisation of services (Summers et al, 2004).

2.1.7 On the other hand, research suggests that fathers who do engage in parenting services are typically those who are already highly involved in their children’s lives (Palm and Fagan, 2008). Failure to engage with and support fathers to overcome barriers to involved fatherhood not only fails men, but compromises the quality of service delivery to mothers and children, at times even putting them at risk (Burgess, 2009). The evidence cited above clearly suggests the need for family support services to adopt a father-inclusive approach whether the father resides with the family or not. A different approach, with gender-differentiated strategies, is needed to instil necessary and lasting change within support services in order to engage with ‘hard to reach’ fathers most in need of support.

2.2 Our joint research study: Collaborative parenting: Barriers faced by separated fathers (2012)

2.2.1 This study, commissioned by The Department for Work and Pensions, was conducted by Shane Ryan of WWU and Dr Victoria Bourne of the Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London. The aim of the study was to identify barriers faced by separated, separating and young fathers, particularly from disadvantaged or excluded socio-economic backgrounds, that prevent these fathers (a) being involved in collaborative parenting and (b) accessing support services. Collaborating parenting is broadly defined as working together with the other parent in the best interest of the child.

2.2.2 It was evident throughout the Study that these fathers had a strong desire to be involved in their children’s upbringing beyond financial provision, ie to provide practical, emotional and educational support. However, some fathers were unable to translate these positive attitudes into behaviours, revealing a cycle of disengagement from fatherhood:

- Low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in their skills as a father leads to a need for support but an inability to find appropriate support – this is because of both a reluctance to seek support and a lack of available services for fathers
- this leads to feelings of frustration and isolation, often believing that their only valued contribution to their child’s / children’s upbringing is financial which in turn leads to conflict with the mother and, typically, reduced contact with the child which has a negative impact on an already fragile self-esteem.

And so the cycle continues, impinging on the father’s ability to effectively engage in positive relationships with both the child and the child’s mother. From the child’s perspective, such disengagement can easily be perceived as rejection, serving to increase the emotional gap between father and child as the child withdraws from the father.

2.2.3 Barriers to collaborative parenting and to accessing support were found to be both internal and psychological (for example, low confidence or lack of self-efficacy) and external (for example, unemployment, homelessness or lack of father-specific support). Fathers caught in this cycle of disengagement are less likely to access mainstream family services (around pregnancy, childbirth and parenting) which are typically seen as targeting the mother, supporting the needs of the mother or seeking to strengthen the mother-child relationship. Where support is available for fathers, it may not be visible enough to overcome these emotional barriers and the fear of judgement or stigmatisation. Moreover, younger fathers and fathers from some black and minority ethnic communities are least likely to access these services.

2.2.4 The study identified a need to improve existing mainstream family services, to ensure services are (a) actively father-inclusive and (b) address all aspects of the role of the father, beyond financial support, at all stages of the child’s development. Additionally, more men should be included in the delivery of these services to counter what was seen as an overtly female-oriented culture, the dominance of women in both workforce and service users, and the perception that mainstream support caters primarily for the needs of mothers.

2.2.5 More broadly, the study identified a need to:

- target the right groups at the right time: in other words, targeting young fathers and separated fathers before the birth of the child or as soon as possible after birth;
- improve existing services around pregnancy, childbirth and parenting to actively identify and engage with all fathers whether living with the family or not; mainstream services should not focus solely on fathers’ financial contributions, but ensure a broader awareness of fathers’ issues and fathers’ contributions;
- ensure that fathers accessing support, attending parenting classes, etc, is viewed as the norm;
- develop new or extend existing father-specific services delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations; this is intended to be in addition to, not instead of, mainstream services, as some fathers expressed a preference to use such services over ‘official’ services ;
- finally, there was a call for more targeted outreach for fathers and for mediation services.

2.2.6 These conclusions and recommendations are discussed further in Appendix A.
3.1 Informed by research evidence as outlined above and outcomes of our work since 1988, our Fathers’ Development Programme is underpinned by three fundamental premises:

- the importance of both father–child relationships and father–mother relationships on a child’s development;
- the recognition that significant internal and external barriers exist preventing separated and young fathers, particularly those from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds, from establishing and maintaining positive relationships with their children; and
- the recognition that mainstream family services often fail to engage with fathers most in need of support.

3.2 So, working to provide better outcomes for children, their parents and consequently society as a whole, our programme is designed to:

- remove barriers that currently inhibit fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives;
- build fathers’ confidence to better able to support the child and the child’s mother;
- ensure that expectant fathers (especially those under the age of 25) are equipped with the information and practical skills required to father their baby; and
- promote children’s development by bringing lasting change to father–child relationships.

3.2 Our Expectant Fathers Programme (EFP) is situated within this work, and is the longest-running fully-evaluated programme for new fathers and fathers-to-be in the UK. This programme focuses on the health needs of babies, mothers and fathers. Evidence suggests that fathers expecting their first child are more likely to seek advice; moreover, the more fathers engage with their child when very young, the more likely their relationship with their child will be sustained in the long-term, even through separation or divorce, so producing positive outcomes for their children (Lewis and Warin, 2001).

3.3 To achieve our objectives, we have developed a multi-strand approach, working not only with fathers directly, but also with Local Authorities and mainstream agencies. We believe that the extensive benefits – social, economic, environmental – of supporting otherwise disengaged fathers into involved fatherhood is too significant for this work to be delivered at a ‘micro’ level by civil society organisations such as ours, or relegated to ‘add-on’ services provided sporadically or inconsistently by mainstream agencies. Consequently, our programme is also designed to:

(a) raise awareness within public services of the crucial role of fathers in children’s development and children’s life chances; whether living with the child or not, fathers should be seen as carers rather than simply financially responsible for their children; and
(b) influence changes in practitioners’ mindset and working practices to engender sustained delivery of father-inclusive family services that routinely and actively engage with fathers, whether separated from the mother or not.

3.4 More specifically, our approach to this work includes:

- developing and assessing alternative methodologies to identify, engage and work with fathers, including outreach strategies and information dissemination beyond traditional methods and resources to engage with ‘hard to reach’ fathers. This can include:
  - supporting a range of dedicated father–specific services that provide both support to fathers and a platform for fathers to engage in joint activities with their children;
  - addressing single-agency and multi-agency forums to raise awareness of these issues and challenge assumptions;
  - providing advice and training to practitioners to develop their work with fathers; and
  - sharing best practice for cross-sector and cross-agency working with fathers within mainstream services.

3.5 Our research study outlined in 2.2 above identified a need to address both external and internal barriers that perpetuates the cycle of disengagement from active fatherhood. Internal barriers cannot be fully addressed until the external barriers to accessing support services are removed, so that fathers are reassured by the inclusive methods of services and are encouraged to seek support from professionals who are aware of them. Although services may ostensibly be offered on a gender-neutral basis, how these are perceived by men is a key factor in whether men seek support or not. As the study revealed, services are often seen as overly female in both service delivery and service use, catering primarily to the needs of mothers; where services are welcoming of men, this is often not known until men have the confidence to take active steps to find out.

3.6 In essence, our Fathers’ Development Programme serves to support fathers directly as well as working to overcome the difficulties of including otherwise disengaged fathers in mainstream services. The value is clear: by experimenting with different methodological approaches and acting on resulting evidence, we aim to develop an inclusive and sustainable change management process for complex adaptive organisations that achieves practical systemic change to frontline services, embedding processes that give rise to positive and lasting outcomes. The programme essentially aims to challenge assumptions and change behaviours by fathers, by practitioners and by agencies.

3.7 The remainder of this paper discusses key outcomes and learning from our recently-completed Fathers’ Development Project in Islington, London, and presents policy recommendations.

**ISLINGTON FATHERS’ DEVELOPMENT PROJECT:**

**QUALITATIVE EVALUATION (JUNE 2014)**

4.1 An independent qualitative evaluation of our three-year Islington project was undertaken in June 2014, by means of statistical and anecdotal evidence from interviews with, and surveys completed by, fathers, project partners and other strategic stakeholders. The evaluation reviewed project activities (4.2 below); analysed outcomes in relation to children, their fathers and external agencies (4.3 below); and assessed WWM’s approach and methodology in delivering this work (4.4 below). By way of background, Islington is a typical inner-city borough that is depicted by areas of high affluence immediately adjacent to areas of high socio-economic deprivation, and an ethnically diverse population. The deprived areas generally correspond to neighbourhoods of social housing estates, with many families on low incomes or facing poor prospects of becoming economically independent.
4.2 Project activities were categorised within the following areas of focus:

(a) engaging fathers and identifying needs (4.2.1 below);
(b) providing dedicated father-specific services (4.2.2 below) and
(c) championing the importance of fatherhood within mainstream services (4.2.3 below).

4.2.1 Engaging fathers and identifying needs

The project was seen to be generally successful in identifying and engaging with typically ‘hard to reach’ fathers though differing means, including outreach, cross-sector networking with mainstream agencies, and supporting Sure Start children’s centres to promote fathers’ groups and father–child activities. Partnerships with civil society organisations such as Chance UK4 were also instrumental in engaging with fathers.

“A lot of support is for single mothers and some single fathers felt excluded and [felt] that there were no services available to them. This project proved different.”

Engaging with young fathers, however, was challenging and required specific provision; in our experience, young fathers are less likely to engage with mainstream services for fear of being judged. This leads to capacity issues.

“Lots of dads have spoken very positively about the relationship they had with the worker and how they have been supported into work, college or had support around their relationships and the role of becoming a young father. As a service we have found the additional input with our families invaluable and this has enabled us to provide a more father focused service, with a ‘real’ resource for our young fathers outside of the [Family Nurse Practitioner] programme.”

“What have been the successes? 1:1 work with some of our more challenging cases.”

However, one-to-one support is highly resource-intensive and some respondents expressed concern at the sustainability of this approach beyond the duration of the project.

4.2.2 Providing dedicated father-specific services

Time was spent supporting father–specific services at many of Islington’s 16 Sure Start children’s centres with generally good results. At the Margaret McMillan Children’s Centre, the project engaged with over 40 fathers and trained over 20 staff; at other children’s centres, the project assisted in establishing and promoting Fathers’ Forums or Fathers’ Groups and father–child activities, with good attendance at some centres, but low attendance at others. Facilitating father–child activities enabled staff to engage with the fathers themselves, as well as providing a platform for fathers to be actively involved with their children.

“There should be more services like that and they should be advertised. There are not many lone parents who are fathers and it is difficult to find support.”

Our Expectant Fathers Programme (EFP) was well received: 26 courses were run at children’s centres and at two local hospitals, with 195 fathers attending. Participants’ feedback were very positive with 98% scoring the course 7 or above out of 10, and two-thirds scoring the course 9 or 10. A further two EFP ‘pilot’ courses were run at Pentonville Prison as a result of outreach work with the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT). These courses allowed absent fathers to demonstrate their desire to continue to be involved in their child’s upbringing. Following the success of these ‘pilots’, PACT undertook to explore funding for future courses.

The project was less successful at attracting younger fathers to the EFP, with a course aimed specifically at young fathers cancelled due to non-attendance, despite 14 fathers having signed up to attend.

One-to-one support was received by 68 fathers with priority for this resource given to younger and lone fathers; this proved invaluable to both fathers and mainstream services.

“... Last night I observed a ‘Caring Dads’ course where two or three of the five men have babies – a very important group. They are starting to talk about their children’s needs and putting these first.”

“Children have been delighted that their Dads have made an effort to, in some cases, take time off work and spend special time at school. Several children have grown in confidence talking and engaging more after one of the Dads’ groups.”

4.2.3 Championing the importance of fatherhood within mainstream services

WWM’s standing in relation to fathers’ work led to an invitation for us to participate in a strategic Local Authority initiative in the form of the Fathers Implementation Strategy Group; this group was tasked with formulating and monitoring a strategy for the development of fathers’ services within the Borough. WWM were seen as an instrumental resource within this group and highly effective in supporting this change agenda.

A wide range of activities were undertaken to raise awareness and promote the importance of fatherhood, including:

• presenting to over 100 practitioners at a multi-disciplinary ‘early years’ conference;

“This was an excellent contribution to the conference and reached a broad audience of health, education, adult learning, and social care professionals. Thank you.”

• presenting to PV1 Forum, Chance UK and social care outreach teams;

4.3 Outcomes for children, fathers and agencies

4.3.1 Outcomes for children

82% of respondents thought that the project had contributed to the ultimate goal of better outcomes for children – to ‘some’ or ‘a large’ extent.

“... What have been the successes? 1:1 work with some of our more challenging cases.”

New resources were developed in partnership with mainstream agencies, and there was agreement that these have been useful in both increasing engagement with fathers and putting the issue of support for fathers on agencies’ agenda. These included:

• a ‘Dads Matter’ leaflet for children’s centres, GP practices, youth hubs and clubs, and community centres, with some 8,200 leaflets distributed; feedback was excellent and the project received ‘self-referrals’ from fathers who had picked up the leaflet;

• Home Learning Kits, developed in partnership with early years practitioners and funded by Children’s Services, with over 400 kits distributed to staff and fathers;

• a range of visual media specifically for children’s centres.

For fathers with a history of domestic violence

For Professional/Independent

Intervention and Specialist Outreach teams;
Not surprisingly, engagement with fathers benefited both father and child as the following demonstrates:

“I got into contact with [the worker] about my housing problem – I first met him at a Fathers’ Group. I am a single dad and have joint custody of my daughter (now 8) but live in a one bedroom flat. I’ve been on trips arranged by [the worker] and my daughter has had a good time. It’s great to get out – the last trip we went on it was raining but we had a great day – we would have probably stayed in and watched telly otherwise. I didn’t know there were things like that for dads.”

4.3.2 Outcomes for fathers

Two-thirds of respondents stated that they believed fathers had received – to ‘some’ or ‘a large’ extent – good quality services that met their needs, with all but one of the rest responding ‘don’t know’.

 “[The worker] gave advice and guidance to a member of our team who was starting up a male carers group … this was very valuable and, at the time, helped us to fully engage fathers through a consultation process.”

Almost two-thirds of respondents felt that fathers receiving services now have improved parenting skills, confidence or wellbeing – to ‘some’ or ‘a large’ extent; the remainder responded ‘don’t know’.

 “Dads feel valued and empowered to support their children’s development.”

“Several Dads have reported back that coming to the Dads’ group has given them confidence and improved the bond with their child. Some of the Dads said that they had taken on some of the ideas for extending language such as offering choices. They also said that they have spent more time playing and doing some of the activities with the children.”

“The young fathers I spoke to described finding the support they received … from [the worker] extremely helpful, especially in terms of confidence as a parent and feeling more able to cope, therefore promoting their emotional wellbeing.”

“… the project has been able to engage fathers that other professionals had difficulty [engaging] with, which has undoubtedly benefitted many of these families.”

There is evidence from interviews with fathers that the following outcomes have been achieved, particularly through one-to-one support:

- a return to college or work;
- gaining access to services such as advice on child maintenance;
- improved relationships with children and children’s wellbeing.

More specifically, 16 fathers monitored during 2013 displayed the following positive outcomes:

- improved paternal confidence;
- increase in positive contact with child/children and positive relationship with child/children’s mother;
- improved self-confidence and motivation;
- improved use of time and ability to prioritise;
- an improved ability to manage conflict;
- an improved sense of personal achievement; and
- a better appreciation of life.

4.3.3 Outcomes for agencies

Responding stakeholders generally believed that the project contributed to better awareness of the importance of working with fathers.

“I found the section on ‘over-coming barriers with fathers’ useful as a frontline worker.”

“The trainers were good at challenging some of our professional and personal views of fathers.”

“I would recommend the training to my colleagues”

Family Intervention and Specialist Outreach Teams

“I will appreciate fathers in the setting more as I understand how much it has taken for them to be there and I will welcome them”

“The project has changed attitudes. We have learnt that dads are worthwhile engaging and that it’s the hardest work we do.”

“Children’s Social Care have historically marginalised fathers particularly when they are difficult to engage and the project has raised awareness of the need to work with men and the ways that this can be successful given the right approach.”

However, the need for additional training was acknowledged:

“Training with health visitors and midwives would be really good. Referrals from Health come with just the mum’s name.”

Asked if there had been any changes in working practices in relation to fathers as a result of the project, two-thirds of respondents felt that there had – to ‘some’ or ‘a large’ extent – and approximately a quarter responded ‘don’t know’.

There was evidence of changes at a strategic level: incorporating fathers’ work into strategic plans and fathers’ engagement targets in ‘early years’ strategies. Several respondents spoke of increased engagement with fathers at children’s centres and implementing improvements to record-keeping. Working with Family Nurse Practitioners has also been productive, leading to an increased focus on fathers and referrals to other agencies for support.

“We were able to change the mind-set within ‘early years’ which is very maternally focused. There are 32 children’s centres and all 16 local authority run now have a children’s strategy and are more mindful of work with fathers.”

However, the issue of sustainability was once again voiced:

“I worry about once [the worker] is not there – we need to look at how we work to improve in the longer term.”

“I’m not sure if we can sustain it. It’s good to work with another agency from outside and with a male worker. Work with under 5s will always be female dominated and we can become insular and inward looking.”

In terms of whether more fathers had accessed mainstream services, the results of the survey were less affirmative: 40% of respondents felt there had been an increase in fathers accessing mainstream services as a result of the project – to ‘some’ or ‘a large’ extent – with the majority stating that they did not know.

4.4 WWM’s approach and methodology

“The link with ‘Working with Men’ has effectively increased the participation of fathers in Centre activities. Staff have been trained in recognising the needs of men within activities and timing events to suit working fathers, for example those on shift work.”

Extract from OFSTED® report for the Margaret McMillan Children’s Centre

“I think there has been a much higher profile for working with fathers, including increasing numbers of fathers known to services, having an identified contact for support, [and] helping with developing further work with young fathers.”

“The piece of work that [the worker] originally supported has helped shape our working practices.”

However, the issue of sustainability was once again voiced:

“I worry about once [the worker] is not there – we need to look at how we work to improve in the longer term.”

“I’m not sure if we can sustain it. It’s good to work with another agency from outside and with a male worker. Work with under 5s will always be female dominated and we can become insular and inward looking.”

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4.4.1 A key factor contributing to success was the approach of deploying a highly skilled male worker. 82% of stakeholders felt that such a dedicated fathers’ development worker is an effective use of resources – to ‘some’ or ‘a large’ extent, with approximately 50% responding ‘a large’ extent.

“...a dedicated father’s worker is essential, and without this there is a huge gap in service for these young men.”

“It was a practical resource that was visible and drove the fathers’ work forward”

“I think it is very important to have a lead person for this work in the borough. I think it is an effective use of resources.”

However, there were inevitable constraints in terms of only one person endeavouring to fulfil the breadth of this work:

“(The worker) was too stretched – co-ordinating across health, midwifery, social care and children’s centres – and so was not always able to follow through or make the most impact.”

Similarly, some respondents highlighted the difficulty in embedding changes in service provision, working practices and mindset within the project’s three-year time span:

“(The worker) supported male workers in children’s centres but three years is not enough to embed this.”

“This work needs time – you don’t get changes quickly.”

4.4.2 Many respondents spoke of the strength of WWM’s multidisciplinary and partnership working across health, social care and early years’ sectors:

“What contributed to success? Effective communication and that I gained from (the worker’s) experience with fathers. It became a really good network (for example with social care) to think about a family holistically.”

4.4.3 Some commented on the value of working within a wider strategic initiative, championing fathers’ development work:

“I feel that Islington is more open to working with various partners in relation to working with men and fathers – this is real engagement and not just steering groups and policies.”

4.4.4 However, some respondents raised the challenge faced by WWM in building sustainability and delivering systemic organisational change as an external organisation that is at the same time responding to the needs of individual fathers.

“The challenge of the project may have benefitted individuals, but as to the long term benefit – I’m not sure. Could we have done more strategically? ... From Year 1 WWM should be asking [local authorities] to be more engaged, think strategically, for example developing a sustainability strategy with agreed outcomes”

Some respondents believed that working with an external organisation was a benefit while others felt that a greater degree of integration within the management structure of the Local Authority would have been beneficial.

“It was good to work with another agency from outside. WWM brings values, systems and a team.”

“I think that the project although funded externally could have been more fully integrated (within Islington Borough) at a management level, to build and add to the good operational links at a key worker level.”

4.4.5 Engagement from WWM was positive but I think strategically more could have being done to adopt a matrix style management arrangement to ensure possible mainstream funding was discussed in a meaningful way

4.5 Conclusion

4.5.1 The project was broadly seen as effective in reaching many young and separated fathers who may not otherwise have engaged with mainstream family support services. There is evidence that the project has provided a valuable platform that enabled these fathers to make positive and permanent changes to their lives and the lives of their children. Providing dedicated father-specific services appears to have been highly valued by fathers and agencies alike.

4.5.2 At the same time, notwithstanding (a) the challenging context of an absence of legislative framework, and (b) an economic environment of reduction in budgets and generic services, the project was seen as highly effective in demonstrating the far-reaching benefits of working with fathers. The project was instrumental in influencing changes in mindset and working practices within mainstream agencies, and emphasising the importance of multidisciplinary and multi-agency working across health, social care and children’s services. There is evidence of fathers’ work and fathers’ engagement targets being incorporated into strategic plans, cross-sector working leading to referrals for support across different agencies and an increased emphasis on fathers generally.

4.5.3 However, engaging with younger fathers was particularly challenging and required specific outreach work and service provision; one to one work was effective but highly resource-intensive, and the sustainability of such work beyond the duration of the project was a concern. Moreover, delivering the breadth of this project through a sole, albeit highly-skilled, worker and within a three-year time span has its limitations; concern was expressed as to whether incremental successes would be sustainable beyond the duration of the project without Local Authority resources being identified for this work.

4.5.4 As some respondents noted, civil society organisations such as ours face inevitable challenges in influencing systemic organisational change within mainstream services as an external agency that is (a) at the same time responding to the needs of individual fathers, and (b) constrained by funding from the donor community. There is clearly a need for further Local Authority commitment to embed changes in strategy, working practices and mindset to ensure that mainstream family services are fully and actively father-inclusive.

4.5.5 Learning from the Islington project, it is clear that any future projects we undertake to support individual Local Authorities to introduce and embed this paradigm shift in service-provision would require greater funding for two, not one, highly-skilled staff: one dedicated to engaging with and supporting fathers directly, while the second works directly with the Local Authority at both strategic and operational levels.
5. EXAMINING CHANGE BETWEEN TWO WAVES OF DATA COLLECTION: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY (MAY 2014)

5.1 A quantitative study was undertaken during the course of the Islington project by Dr Victoria Bourne of the Royal Holloway University to examine (a) changes in fathers’ self-reported psychological variables during the study period, and (b) the self-selected use of father-specific and other services between two time points.

5.2 Given the complexity of people’s lives, their individual differences, and how they interpret their personal circumstances and construct their own meanings, quantitative studies have unavoidable limitations. Additionally, and inevitably, some participants disengaged during the course of the study and, given limited resources, we were unable to investigate who disengaged and why they disengaged. A future study might be capable of investigating such questions in order to further learn from these fathers. Nonetheless, whilst not exhaustive, this study provides valuable data that essentially validates the fundamental nature and direction of our work.

5.3 The fathers in our study were aged between 18 and 52, and

- were broadly married / living with their partner or divorced / separated / single, categorised here as: Cohabiting – 57%, Non-cohabiting – 43%
- whose ethnicity were self-reported as White British, White European, Asian, Black Caribbean, Black Other, and Mixed, categorised here as: White – 57%, Non-white – 43%

The participants had between one to five children, with a statistical average of 1.9 children per father. 41 fathers participated in the initial assessment and 23 participated in the final evaluation phase.

5.4 Changes in psychological variables

5.4.1 The psychological variables that were considered were: parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive; parenting confidence; parenting stress; fathering inventory; social support from: significant other, family, and friends; and satisfaction with life.

5.4.2 Taking the group as a whole, only two psychological variables revealed significant positive differences between the two time points, both relating to parenting styles: authoritative parenting and permissive parenting. Authoritative parenting is where parents establish clear rules and boundaries, but in a fair and democratic manner, unlike authoritarian parenting which is typically characterised by strict rules, high expectations, use of punishments and a lack of warmth. Permissive parenting is where parents tend to be friendly and nurturing towards their child, but fail to establish rules and boundaries. These findings suggest that some fathers became more authoritative while others became more permissive over the six month period. The parenting styles questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix B.

5.4.3 Disaggregating the group as a whole in terms of cohabiting and non-cohabiting fathers, for cohabiting fathers there was no significant change in permissive parenting but these fathers displayed a near-significant increase in authoritative parenting.

5.4.4 For non-white fathers, there was a near significant decrease in authoritarian parenting; in contrast, for white fathers, there was no significant change in this parenting style.

5.4.5 In terms of other psychological variables for the disaggregated group, for cohabiting fathers, there was a significant decrease in the level of social support needed from a significant other. For white fathers, there was a change approaching significant for the fathering inventory measure, whilst for non-white fathers there was no significant change. The Fathering Inventory questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix C.

5.5 Which psychological variables are associated with a change in the use of services?

5.5.1 Correlation analyses were conducted between psychological variables and changes in use of services. For this exercise, six additional psychological variables were considered, relating to the participants’ relationships with their own parents: Relationship with and attachment to their mother and father respectively in terms of (i) trust, (ii) communication and (iii) alienation.

5.5.2 No correlation was found for any of the parenting style, parenting stress or fathering inventory variables, indicating that a change in the use of services was not associated with these variables. For parenting confidence, the results suggest that non-white fathers with lower levels of parenting confidence increased their contact with services between time point one and time point two.

5.5.3 Looking at the variables regarding participants’ relationship with their own parents, a number of correlations were found

- For the group as a whole, the results suggest that participants with poorer relationships with their own parents – low levels of trust in both their mother and father, and poor communication with their father – increased their use of services during the six month period.

5.5.4 In terms of social support, the results suggest that fathers with lower levels of social support from family and friends at time point one increased their use of services. Disaggregating the cohort for cohabiting and non-cohabiting fathers, and for white and non-white fathers, this was only true for non-cohabiting fathers regarding social support from friends and for non-white fathers regarding social support from family.

5.5.5 Fathers with lower levels of satisfaction with life at time point one increased their use of services during the six month period. This correlation was significant for non-cohabitating and non-white fathers, but not for cohabiting fathers or white fathers.
5.6 Self-selected use of father-specific and other (medical, social etc) services
5.6.1 Overall, whether looking at the participants as one group, or separately in terms of co-habiting and non-cohabiting fathers, and white and non-white fathers, there was no significant change in the number of services reported to have been used between the time points.

5.7 The impact of fathers’ use of services on the development of their children
5.7.1 The study divided participants’ children between those under 24 months and those aged two years and above in order to determine whether the use of services by fathers impact on the development of their children. Once again, as the number of participants within each measurement is relatively small, findings are indicative rather than conclusive.

• For children under 24 months, fathers reported that their child had achieved significantly more age-appropriate behaviours at time point two. The indication is therefore that fathers who are more engaged in parenting services have children who are more advanced developmentally.

• For older children, however, there were no significant differences between the two waves of data collection.

5.7.2 Again, because of relatively limited number of participants, we did not disaggregate these older children into different age groups, but there would be significant value in increasing the number of participants, and disaggregating children aged 2 and above into different age groups.

5.8 Conclusion
5.8.1 Whilst there is clearly a need for further studies with greater numbers of participants and more detailed analyses, this study is nevertheless encouraging in validating our father-specific program, and verifies the need for father-inclusive services.

6.2 Conversely, fathers (and mothers) can have negative influences on child development. Consequently, effective engagement by support services with both fathers and mothers is crucial to child outcomes. Stanley and Gamble (2005) suggested three central motivations for active engagement with the issue of children’s development and presented this as a hierarchy in terms of importance: child wellbeing, gender equality and fathers’ development. Rather than a hierarchy, Featherstone et al. (2007) subsequently argued that these motivations must be seen as equally important, given the interdependence between these domains. We agree. Our Fathers’ Development programme is rooted in the interdependency of these spheres and an understanding of a father’s fundamental role as caregiver.

6.3 Throughout our history of this work, we have developed a profound understanding of the internal or psychological barriers and external barriers to involved fatherhood faced by separated and young fathers, particularly those from disadvantaged socio-economic communities or marginalised backgrounds. Internal barriers include low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in fathering skills whilst external barriers include a lack of father-specific support (perceived or otherwise). Broadly, internal and external barriers combine to create a cycle of disengagement from fatherhood that prevent these fathers developing and maintaining constructive relationships with their child and the child’s mother, and accessing mainstream support services.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

6.1 In conclusion, there is considerable research evidence that a father’s positive and active involvement in his child’s life from an early age is associated with a range of positive outcomes for the child, not only in early years but beyond into adolescence and adulthood. These include better cognitive development, higher educational attainment, fewer behavioural difficulties and improved mental health. Equally, evidence from the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Parenting and Social Mobility (2015) suggests that interventions to improve the quality of a child’s life can be instrumental in increasing social mobility.

6.4 Mainstream services are seemingly delivered on a gender-neutral basis, yet non-resident fathers are often viewed through the lens of mothers, reflecting the mother’s gatekeeping behaviour or the father’s relationship with the mother rather than his relationship with the child; fathers are rarely seen as caregivers in their own right but instead as financial providers, and at times as a risk to be managed. Fathers are an important resource in early years child development, which is conducive to bringing about social mobility, but are underused and often sidelined when family services are developed. This issue means that parenting support is often designed with mothers in mind, and parental engagement conducted in environments preferable to women. Parliamentary Inquiry into Parenting and Social Mobility (2015)

6.5 Endeavouring to address these issues, our projects adopt a multi-strand approach:

a) working directly with fathers to address their needs;

b) working with agencies such as Sure Start children’s centres and the Prison Advice and Care Trust to introduce and support dedicated father-specific services;

c) and working at a more strategic level with Local Authorities to:

• raise awareness of the importance of fatherhood and fathers’ development work;

• promote effective partnership-working across local agencies to provide holistic support to families in need; and

• deliver training to multi-agency practitioners.

6.6 Evidence, both anecdotal and statistical, from our recently-completed project in the London Borough of Islington demonstrates the need for, and benefits of, this work. Our work achieved a range of positive outcomes for children, their families and mainstream agencies alike. However, there were anticipated limitations. There is inevitably an issue of sustainability where projects are time-constrained, are not located within the management structure of the Local Authority, and are necessarily dependent on the mobilisation of resources from the donor community. The prevalence of structural barriers to engagement with disadvantaged fathers requires systemic change within mainstream services, which in turn requires interventions at a more strategic level.
6.7 We conclude that fathers’ development work must be delivered within a national framework that seeks to embed a father-inclusive approach into mainstream family support services for pregnancy, childbirth, parenting and family support. Relying largely on civil society organisations such as ours to address this crucial gap in services is not the most effective conduit to move forward what must be a nationwide agenda. Likewise, simply recruiting dedicated ‘fathers’ workers’ at children’s centres is neither cost-effective nor sustainable in the long-term. Whilst there is evidence of change within some community-based agencies, support for non-resident and young fathers continues to vary from area to area; surely an issue as important as this cannot be determined by postcode lottery?

6.8 Supporting otherwise disengaged fathers towards active and positive engagement in the lives of their children must be addressed and embedded at a macro level rather than left to the remit of voluntary organisations and community-based agencies at what can only be a micro level. While the government is currently reviewing the future role of Sure Start children’s centres and the allocation of funding for universal and targeted interventions, this may address certain aspects of service provision; however, we believe that there is a need for a broader and more comprehensive structural review to deliver systemic reform.

6.9 As this paper reveals, the benefit of action is far-reaching; at the same time, the cost of inaction is simply unthinkable. Evidence-based investment in fathers’ development will not only impact child wellbeing and child outcomes, but deliver significant benefits into adulthood and the next generation of fathers. Such investment will consequently serve as a key factor in the avoidance of costs to society in relation to repeated patterns of disadvantage in future generations.

The value of this work must be understood from a broad perspective of social, environmental and economic return on investment at individual, community and societal levels in this and future generations.

6.10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

... services are failing woefully short in engaging with fathers, arguably paying insufficient attention to their role in a child’s development and future life chances. Parliamentary Inquiry into Parenting and Social Mobility (2015)

6.10.1 A national framework is required to ensure strategic and sustainable change in policy, services and practices

Action is needed beyond policy documents that emphasise the importance of father-child relationships but fail to instil systemic structural change to front-line services. Change is needed in both design and delivery of mainstream family services in relation to fathers, regardless of whether he is living with the child or not.

A national framework is required to embed a father-inclusive approach into mainstream services for pregnancy, childbirth and parenting/family support. This framework should:

- require Local Authorities to build father-inclusive work into their strategic plans and commit/safeguard the required funding through changing economic conditions and competing priorities to ensure sustainability and ensure that investment already made is not lost;
- require that Local Authorities’ local-area needs assessments include fathers as well as mothers, including those living apart, so that all family support services can be aligned accordingly;
- ensure that training is provided for health and social care practitioners;
- ensure that data collection by agencies to monitor, target and reach fathers and mothers, and assess patterns of service use;
- require Local Authorities to have a complete understanding of local-area needs so that all family support services can be aligned accordingly.

What is required is a step change that leads to a consistent approach between agencies nationwide, and seamless information-sharing and partnership-working across local areas. Fatherhood should not be seen in isolation from other social issues.

Local Authorities need to have a complete understanding of local-area needs so that all family support services can be aligned accordingly. What is required is a step change that leads to a consistent approach between agencies nationwide, and seamless information-sharing and partnership-working across local areas. Fatherhood should not be seen in isolation from other social issues.

6.10.2 Local Authorities should have a strategic approach to working with fathers.

The compelling message from our programme is that a strategic and ‘joined-up’ approach to working with fathers is necessary. The interdependence of social issues must be understood and addressed in a holistic manner with partnership and multi-agency working across local areas. Fatherhood should not be seen in isolation from other social issues.

Local Authorities need to have a complete understanding of local-area needs so that all family support services can be aligned accordingly. What is required is a step change that leads to a consistent approach between agencies nationwide, and seamless information-sharing and partnership-working across local agencies so that support services can identify and engage with fathers and mothers in disadvantaged families holistically. This is not achievable without a clear understanding of the interdependence of social issues, or without effective systems that deliver an integrated approach.

There needs to be an effective and sensitive data-collection system to support partnership working, such that agencies can access accurate and up-to-date information on fathers potentially in need of support in order to target such support.

Existing referral and assessment processes should be enhanced to ensure fathers’ data is collected systematically and accurately.

The data collected must be employed to assess patterns of service-use, such that service-provisions generating low father involvement can be identified and remedied.

Local Authorities set the culture, direction and resources of local services. The proposed national framework will require them to make changes, but good Local Authorities can act already to:

- develop and implement a ‘fatherhood’ policy for all their statutory responsibilities, including children in need and child protection which should include consideration of pathways of referral and assessment for early identification of fathers and targeting of support;
- embed father-inclusive practices in agency objectives with targets for engagement with fathers for the organisation and for individual practitioners;
- ensure that local-area needs assessments include fathers as well as mothers, including those living apart;
- ensure that fathers’ data is collected systematically and accurately and is used to assess patterns of service use and identify services which have low father involvement;
- include men in service delivery as practitioners and well as service users.

6.10.3 A comprehensive training programme should be incorporated within the national framework.

Our goal is to instil a change of mindset and behaviour, and ensure all relevant services are ‘father-inclusive’. Mainstream agencies must be able demonstrate a broader understanding of a father’s contribution to his children’s lives beyond the financial, at all stages of the children’s development. There must be a presumption of shared parenting for non-resident fathers; fathers accessing support, attending parenting classes, etc with or without the child’s mother must be seen as the norm to avoid fear of stigmatisation.
A comprehensive nationwide training programme is required for health and social care agencies on fathers as caregivers and father-inclusive practices. The social cost of failure to change the prevailing mindset must be understood.

6.10.4 Specific provisions are required for ‘early years’ services

‘Early years’ services, such as Sure Start children’s centres are governed by the Childcare Act 2006, as amended in 2009, with guidance published by the Department of Education (updated 2013). OFSTED’s inspection framework has also been published. OFSTED guidance in relation to their inspection criteria and the key judgements made by their inspectors, is in our view somewhat limited: these refer simply to ‘parents’ as a collective unit rather than seeking to ensure that mothers and fathers, particularly those who live apart, are equally engaged with. For example, there are no requirements around percentages of fathers (or male carers) directly engaged with, or around recruitment of appropriate staff and allocation of resources for targeting / engaging directly with fathers. Moreover, the overall grading of children’s centres is not influenced by fathers’ involvement in any way. Whilst there are some OFSTED reports that highlight examples of good practice with mention of fathers, these are few and far between and there is no statutory requirement for doing so.

We therefore recommend that all services linked with ‘early years’ should be required to have a role in providing support / resources to fathers; this would include an engagement strategy based on proven best practice and would involve all relevant disciplines: midwifery, health visitors, social workers etc.

We recommend the formulation of key targets around fathers’ engagement within each discipline to allow support to fathers to be effectively monitored.

6.10.5 Working with fathers should be recognised as critical to the success of key statutory responsibilities

Fathers must be part of any and all family support; even where domestic violence has taken place, it is possible to work separately with fathers and mothers. We recommend that:

- a clear code of practice is developed for the involvement of fathers and mothers and other caregivers. It should be understood by all staff and made visible to all families;
- better pathways and referral processes are developed between generic ‘preventative’ service provision such as children’s centres and ‘crisis’ intervention services such as children in need; in doing so, vulnerable fathers may be identified and supported on a timely basis;
- the engagement of statutory child protection services with fathers, especially younger fathers, is improved. This could reduce the numbers of children entering the care system by engaging fathers and the extended paternal family. In the climate of significant resource rationalisation, supporting families to avoid children entering the care system would have obvious benefits for all concerned: children, parents, Local Authorities and associated stakeholders;
- fathers are provided with appropriately focussed and gender-specific information pre- and post-birth; and
- strategic plans and service provision are not gender-neutral but implement gender-differentiated strategies where appropriate.

6.10.6 Local Authorities should set targets and monitor outcomes of their fatherhood strategies and policies.

Outcomes should include the following:

- practices, procedures and systems are institutionalised to promote father-inclusion;
- an increase in the number of men consulted prior to initiating care proceedings;
- accurate and up to date details of fathers as well as mothers readily available as an integral part of referrals, including telephone numbers, addresses, age so that agencies have the information required to engage with fathers.

6.10.7 These proposals would lead to the much-needed paradigm shift in family support services. We recognise that these proposals require significant time and resources to introduce and embed; pending the vital paradigm shift required, there will be a continuing need for dedicated and one-to-one father-specific services, targeted to engage with ‘hard to reach’ fathers, for example younger fathers and separated fathers caught within a cycle of disengagement from fatherhood. While the present gap in services can be met by civil society organisations working in conjunction with Local Authorities, the need for such interventions by external organisations should diminish as mainstream services become more father-accessible and father-inclusive.
This study concludes that separated fathers in challenging circumstances feel there are a number of barriers to them being able to effectively engage in a relationship with their child and the child’s mother. This may result from difficulties with the child’s mother, from difficulties with the official or governmental agencies involved, from the lack of support available for fathers or from their own psychological issues. The findings suggest a number of possible policies to break the cycle of disengagement.

**TARGETING INTERVENTIONS**

Reaching the right groups
The rationale behind this study was to understand the barriers faced by separated fathers from black and minority ethnic communities, in order to design interventions targeting this group. However, the barriers we have identified are not specific to these fathers, but are more likely to be associated with disadvantage in general. Therefore, related interventions should target disadvantaged rather than Black and Minority Ethnic communities – although in practice these fathers will be disproportionately represented in these communities. A key finding from the literature review and from the focus groups was that young fathers, in particular, showed positive attitudes towards their child and their responsibilities, but found it difficult to translate these attitudes into behaviours. In addition, young fathers are often at a crisis point in their life and, therefore, more receptive to support, and are likely to be easier to reach than older fathers.

ACCESSING SUPPORT

This study has shown that for many fathers, low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence in being a ‘good’ dad and a fear of stigmatisation are key barriers in seeking help, and providing services may not be enough to overcome these barriers. Therefore, seeking help and accessing support services needs to become the norm. Long-term behaviour change activities (eg developing case studies and working with local champions) are needed here. Services for fathers also need to be highly visible, both to reach potential service users and to further the process of normalisation. Including more men in these services, especially early years services which are traditionally female dominated, will also help men to identify with the services. There is also a need to ensure that third parties (including friends and family, as well as professionals) are aware of the support available, so that they are in a position to provide guidance if needed.

PROVIDING SUPPORT

A significant barrier to accessing support was a perception that fathers were excluded from existing ‘family’ support services, sometimes reinforced by negative experiences of ‘official’ services. In addition, it appears that there is a genuine lack of services specifically designed for separated fathers. Therefore, there is a need to improve existing services, by ensuring that service providers understand the needs of fathers as well as mothers, and to develop new father-specific services.

SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

The study has shown that fathers may be resistant to using government services, and would prefer to use services provided by voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. This finding has two implications – firstly ‘official’ or ‘government’ services must be improved, and secondly new services should be developed by the VCS.

IMPROVING EXISTING SERVICES

There is a need to improve existing services targeting families so that they are more aware of fathers’ needs, more welcoming to fathers (either with the mother or alone), and recognise all aspects of the father’s role. This includes his contributions to the child’s overall upbringing, including educational, practical and emotional support, rather than focusing solely on financial contributions. In particular, more fathers (or at least men) should be included in the delivery of family services and in early years’ settings, to counter the perception that existing support caters only for mothers.

DEVELOPING NEW FATHER-SPECIFIC SERVICES

There is also a need to extend the services provided by VCS organisations, either by extending existing services or by developing new services for fathers. There was a particular call for more mediation and outreach work.

The fathers in the study recommend that fathers should be included in the design of new services, and the improvement of existing services, to ensure that they meet the needs of fathers, and that fathers are more likely to access them. They also stress the need for an empathetic and non-judgmental approach. Because some fathers feel that seeking support reflects on them badly, as a man and as a father, new services must portray a positive image of separated fathers.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Our literature review showed a need for more work to understand the barriers faced by many fathers, especially in primarily low-income and non-white populations, and therefore, we recommend that a more systematic approach be taken to understanding what works in helping fathers to engage with services.
APPENDIX B: PARENTING STYLE QUESTIONNAIRE

The extent to which parents engaged in the different parenting practices listed below were rated using the following scale:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Always

At the end of each section, the scores were added up and divided it by the number of questions in that section. The highest score indicated the father’s preferred parenting style.

AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING STYLE

1. When my child asks me why he/she has to do something I tell him/her it is because I said so, I am your parent, or because that is what I want.
2. I punish my child by taking privileges away from him/her (eg, TV, games, visiting friends).
3. I yell when I disapprove of my child’s behaviour.
4. I explode in anger towards my child.
5. I spank my child when I don’t like what he/she does or says.
6. I use criticism to make my child improve his/her behaviour.
7. I use threats as a form of punishment with little or no justification.
8. I punish my child by withholding emotional expressions (eg, kisses and cuddles).
9. I openly criticise my child when his/her behaviour does not meet my expectations.
10. I find myself struggling to try to change how my child thinks or feels about things.
11. I feel the need to point out my child’s past behavioural problems to make sure he/she will not do them again.
12. I remind my child that I am his/her parent.
13. I remind my child of all the things I am doing and I have done for him/her.

PERMISSIVE PARENTING STYLE

• I find it difficult to discipline my child.
• I give into my child when he/she causes a commotion about something.
• I spoil my child.
• I ignore my child’s bad behaviour.


APPENDIX C: FATHERING INVENTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

• The statements below were rated using the following scale: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree. (Uncertain not included)
• The self-aware man is one who takes responsibility for his own behaviour.
• Children need to learn to know that Dads don’t mess around when it comes to discipline.
• Boys should be taught to “take it like a man”.
• The best thing a Dad can do for his children is to love their mother.
• Masculinity is acceptable for a man and it ranges from very traditional to very non-traditional.
• Kids need to know right from wrong using whatever it takes.
• Putting yourself in your children’s place is a good way to find out how they feel.
• Boys need to learn to keep their feelings to themselves.
• Girls raised by fathers turn out to be “tomboys”.
• The Dad’s major role in the family is as the provider.
• Men and women grieve differently.
• Spirituality and masculinity do not mix well.
• Women handle stress differently than men.
• Being a man means following traditional gender roles.
• Hitting a punching bag or pillow is a good way to express anger.
• Men are raised to keep their problems to themselves.
• Fathering is more important than mothering.
• Men are better off being married.
• Harsh punishments help children know that Dads “mean business”.
• Dads are better than mothers at disciplining children.
• Fathers need to be the head of the household.
• It’s wrong for men to express their feelings in public.
• Dads need to push their children to do more.
• A spiritual family is one that feels membership for all its members.
• Dads who are soft on discipline raise spoiled kids.
• What parents expect from their children plays a big role in developing children’s self-worth.
• Females should have different careers than males.
• Feelings tell us something about an experience.
• Praising yourself in front of your children is a good way to model self-worth.
• Talking to someone about your anger is a waste of time.
• Moms and Dads – because they come from different backgrounds – should expect to raise their children differently.
• A son is better off being raised by his father than by his mother.

• There is no such thing as an “ideal” father.
• Fathers can’t do as good a job raising children as mothers.
• Real men don’t cry.
• Men need to be strong no matter what happens.
• Men should be able to “take a licking and keep on ticking”.
• Culture plays an important role in fathering.
• There are clear differences between the roles of a mother and a father.
• Men don’t need to go to the doctor as often as do women.
• Work should be more important for men than family.
• It’s okay to keep feelings inside.
• Fathers who “lay down the law” get the respect of their children.
• Balancing work and family is more important for women than for men.
• Certain feelings are good; certain feelings are bad.
• Fathers work; mothers take care of children. It’s that simple.
• Men don’t need to go to the doctor as often as do women.
• There are clear differences between the roles of a mother and a father.
• Work should be more important for men than family.
• It’s okay to keep feelings inside.
• Fathers who “lay down the law” get the respect of their children.
• Balancing work and family is more important for women than for men.
• Certain feelings are good; certain feelings are bad.
• Fathers work; mothers take care of children. It’s that simple.
• Men don’t need to go to the doctor as often as do women.
• There are clear differences between the roles of a mother and a father.
• Work should be more important for men than family.
• It’s okay to keep feelings inside.
• Fathers who “lay down the law” get the respect of their children.
• Balancing work and family is more important for women than for men.
• Certain feelings are good; certain feelings are bad.
• Fathers work; mothers take care of children. It’s that simple.


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