



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

AGENDA

5th Meeting, 2014 (Session 4)

Thursday 13 March 2014

The Committee will meet at 9.30 am in Committee Room 1.

1. **Decision on taking business in private:** The Committee will decide whether to take item 3, on follow-up work to its Having and Keeping a Home inquiry, in private at this and future meetings.
2. **Fathers and parenting:** The Committee will take evidence from—
 - Michelle Campbell, Volunteer Development Co-ordinator, Fife Gingerbread;
 - David Drysdale, National Development Manager, Fathers Network Scotland;
 - Robert Hall, Chairman, Familyman Playgroup;
 - Ewan Jeffrey, Chair, Gay Dads Scotland;
 - Thomas Lynch, Chairman, Dads Rock;
 - Neil McIntosh, Senior Children and Fathers Worker, One Parent Families Scotland;
 - Clare Simpson, Project Manager, Parenting across Scotland;
 - Kenny Spence, Manager, Edinburgh Lone Fathers Project.
3. **Having and Keeping a Home: steps to preventing homelessness among young people:** The Committee will consider its approach to follow-up work.

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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

Agenda item 2

PRIVATE PAPER	EO/S4/14/5/1 (P)
Note by SPICe	EO/S4/14/5/2
Submission from Edinburgh Lone Fathers Project	EO/S4/14/5/3
Submission from Fathers Network Scotland	EO/S4/14/5/4
Submission from Gay Dads Scotland	EO/S4/14/5/5
Submission from One Parent Families Scotland	EO/S4/14/5/6
Submission from Parenting across Scotland	EO/S4/14/5/7

Agenda item 3

PRIVATE PAPER	EO/S4/14/5/8 (P)
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Equal Opportunities Committee
Fathers & parenting
Summary of Evidence submissions

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to summarise the written evidence that was received as part of the Fathers and Parenting Inquiry and draw out the key themes. A collated list of recommendations with a focus on issues relating to active fatherhood, including employment, education, and healthcare is available in Annexe A.

Overview

2. The Committee received a mixture of evidence from parenting organisations and fathers themselves. The evidence suggests that men increasingly want to spend time with their children and take a more active parenting role. Some submissions outlined the positive influence a more active father figure can have for the child's development and general financial and emotional wellbeing of the family.

3. However, there are a number of barriers which stand in the way of them achieving this. Overall there was a feeling that men do not receive the same flexibility in the workplace to address child care requirements. There was also the feeling that support services available to parents are really directed at the mothers and that fathers are not perceived as being equal in parenting skills or responsibilities. There was also the suggestion that front line workers make, possibly unintentional, assumptions about who will be the main carer and the quality of care provided by men. It was also noted that front line workers and care staff are mostly female.

4. In addition the Committee received a number of anonymous submissions from fathers that are currently experiencing issues around residence of their children and rights to access.

Key themes

Engaging Fathers

5. The majority of the submissions received outlined the desire for fathers to be more active participants in the development and parenting of their children. Investment in parenting support was seen to be just as important for men as it is for women. It was viewed that fathers ideally should be involved right at the beginning with an understanding of the importance of the early years. There was also the suggestion that societal views are slowly changing regarding how dads should interact with their children. However, more work needs to be done, particularly in the area of separated fathers who suggested that their input was viewed by many as "nice to have around but not essential".

6. Evidence also suggested that fathers were typically seen by service providers to be more difficult to engage with. Services are accustomed to supporting the needs of mothers. Men can present differently which can challenge traditional views about the ways in which support is provided and managed. Additionally fathers, if separated,

don't tend to have residence of the child and be at work during the day. As such fathers require specific approaches.

7. Fathers stated that they often feel intimidated or unwelcome at groups which are focused at women. This is down to both the other female participants and the staff. It is also hard to find support that is tailored to father's specific needs which can lead to feelings of isolation.

8. One submission acknowledged the positive results of setting up referrals with existing services like nurseries, particularly for fathers who are at risk of poverty or substance abuse. This was seen to demystify the role of family support services and any perceived threat. Some fathers were also seen to respond better to male support workers or activity leaders. This can be a challenge for the traditionally female dominated social work and care sector.

Workplace issues

9. Whether they are separated or part of a couple fathers are more likely to be working and expressed views on the difficulty managing work and family life. While it is recognised that mothers also face this difficulty it was noted that in some companies fathers would be less likely to be granted flexible working, reduced hours or be allowed time off to look after children during holidays or when they are sick. An example was also given of colleagues being less likely to show compassion and understanding for the parenting issues of male staff. It was highlighted that there has been research which suggests that young fathers are more resentful of this situation.

10. Workers at the upper levels of some organisations expressed guilt about the time that they had to dedicate to the job as opposed to spending time with their children. However, it was noted that they tended to be offered greater flexibility than workers lower down the pay scale.

11. It was considered vital that employers recognise the need of fathers as parents and that there is adequate support in the workplace to allow fathers to be active parents. This also applies to the support made available to those looking to enter employment or training. One submission suggested that this was particularly important for young or teenage dads. While some progress will be made in upcoming changes to parental leave there was seen to be much more to be done.

Childcare

12. The affordability, flexibility and provision of childcare was seen as a major issue. Greater flexibility would make it easier for parents to split caring responsibilities more evenly, allowing women to return to work. This flexibility is important both in the provision but also in how entitlements are structured. The childcare workforce is mostly female and tends to be low paid. Higher paid jobs and more opportunity for career progression may encourage more men into the role.

'Father Friendly' Information sources and Publicity Materials

13. As part of the National Parenting Strategy, the Scottish Government commissioned Children 1st to undertake a mapping exercise of current parenting information resources. The research discovered a wealth of information resources available, but found that only a relatively small number of parenting resources were explicitly aimed at fathers, lone fathers or separated fathers. The research found that

many information resources, while claiming to be for a universal audience, were more targeted at mothers, than fathers. The research also highlighted that some information resources may alienate fathers due to the language, wording and photos used to illustrate the resource.

14. These findings were mirrored in other submissions and the importance of positive role models for fathers was deemed as important.

Finance

15. Information on benefit eligibility was seen to be hard to find. Fathers also suggested that they will often have no entitlement to benefits for the child even if they have part time care or suffer from long delays when trying to establish a claim. This can lead to them not having enough money to feed the child or heat the house when the child is visiting or cover travel or activity costs. An example stated that often the benefits agency will not acknowledge this as an issue. Furthermore the local authority will often refuse financial assistance to allow the father to have contact with this child because they have already had public funds to support their upkeep. In some circumstance delays can lead to situations where fathers, who cannot work because of childcare issues, have no income. Evidence suggests that this leads to fathers feeling inadequate and lessened their perceptions of themselves as “good fathers” and providers.

Attitudes of front line workers and access to information

Education

16. While there are some positive examples of relationships between schools and fathers there were cases reported of phone calls and emails going unanswered, failure to record contact details appropriately so that non-resident fathers receive communications from the school, schools calling mothers in the first instance, even when the father has been set out as primary contact and teachers ‘just checking’ with the mother before engaging with the non-resident father. ‘Children in Scotland’ is producing guidelines to help Schools deal with this issue.

Health

17. Examples were offered of hospitals or GPs refusing to engage with non-resident fathers or provide medical information on their children’s health. However Renfrewshire Council highlighted the challenges facing health visitors when parents are estranged. Often conflicting information is provided by each parent and the health visitor is in the difficult position of having to determine what is factual.

Social Services / Children’s Services

18. Mothers were often viewed as naturally more capable than men and it was noted that there is a tendency to assume the mother will be the main carer no matter the circumstances. For example in some cases a mother with persistent drug or alcohol problems may be given more ‘chances’ to resolve the problem than a father in the same circumstance.

19. There was the suggestion by some fathers and fathers groups that wishing to be involved in a child’s life was viewed with suspicion or as a danger and that upon separation they had to prove that they were suitable to perform activities which were considered normal when the couple were together.

20. The recently passed Children and Young People (Scotland) Act requires the development of local Children's Services Plans which focuses on early intervention and parenting support. It was noted in one submission that there is a danger that these plans could become "maternal normative" and assume mothers as the main care givers.

Housing

21. An example was given of separated parents of a child of additional support needs. Often the house which is adapted to meet those needs will be that of the mother. In some cases the father will not be able to obtain appropriate ground floor social housing making overnight visits and being involved in the care of the child more difficult.

22. The so called 'bedroom tax' impacts on fathers having overnight visits with their children or shared residence arrangements. Due to changes in Welfare legislation parents who are not considered to be the main carer will need to pay extra to keep a room 'spare' for their children to visit. Discretionary Housing Payments may be available to help depending on circumstance.

Job Centre

23. Fathers may face difficulties at the Job Centre in terms of scheduling of appointments during non-child friendly times or assumptions that the mother is the main carer. It was also suggested in one submission that it would depend on who was on duty at the job centre that day whether a father would get sanctioned for missing an appointment due to child care issues. The lone parent adviser at the job centre was also said to be at a loss with what to do with lone fathers as many of the part time jobs are focused at women.

Action

24. South Lanarkshire Council highlighted in their submission the programme of work it is undertaking in order to change the culture within Health, Educations, Social work and the Voluntary sector to ensure that dads are routinely included in all aspects of their child's development and education. This includes things like getting information from schools sent to the non-resident parent and housing allocations policies which are friendly to split residence. North Ayrshire Council is also involved in training and awareness raising with staff to improve the involvement of fathers.

Examples of services available

25. Overall the provision of support groups aimed at fathers was viewed in the submissions as poor in comparison to the support available to mothers. Two submissions suggested that only one NHS board ran ante natal classes for fathers. Many groups were self-started by dads who acknowledged the gap in provision. It was noted that support tends to focus on older fathers. However, that services focused on more vulnerable, younger fathers were also very important.

26. Organisations that submitted went into detail on the type of services that they provide. Overall groups provide a range of activities from practical hands on support in the form of cooking lessons, days out or musical instrument training to more emotional peer support for the fathers. Positive interactions often focused around physical activities. Groups were seen as valuable supports for father who at times

found it more difficult than mothers to talk to friends or family. They were seen to increase confidence in parenting skills, allow one to one time with the child, provide the opportunities for informal support, reduce isolation and allow fathers to share experiences.

27. Barnardos said that partnership was very important to success and highlighted that the way in which programmes are delivered, rather than the type of programme, can be a key element of success. Focusing on the strengths of parents, their relationships with their children, the relationship between staff and client and overall taking a holistic approach and working to identify barriers.

28. Renfrewshire council said that it has two 'First time Mother Groups'. However, the content of the group is not specific to mothers beyond the first week. It is considering changing the name of the group to 'First Time Parents'. However, other submissions went further calling for father focused groups as in many cases 'parents' groups were groups for mothers in all but name and some fathers felt unwelcome due to the female focus.

Benefits of increasing fathers' involvement in their child's development

29. Evidence reported that increased involvement of fathers in their child's development resulted in children being more open, happier and confident. It also reported better educational attainment, less likelihood of being in trouble with the police, better relationships in adolescence and a reduction in homelessness and mental health problems. In particular support groups gave fathers a range of coping strategies reducing possible physical punishments and confrontation between the father and the child.

Legal issues

30. There were a number of submissions received directly from fathers experiencing difficulties in establishing residence or access arrangements with their children. They focused on the challenges in maintaining a civil or constructive relationship with the child's mother, the expensive nature of the legal action involved and facing perceived preconceptions on the part of social workers and the courts who were seen to be heavily biased on the part of the Mother. Evidence also outlined the considerable stress and emotional upset caused by the whole situation which at times was unfolding over a prolonged period of time.

31. Evidence and recommendations related to justice issues fall out with the scope of the Committee and will be forwarded on for the attention of the Justice Committee.

Annexe A: Recommendations

All submissions made comment on the situation for fathers in Scotland and some made observations on how this could be improved. However, a number of submissions set out explicit recommendations directed at the Parliament, Scottish Government, Health Boards or Local Authorities which are included below. (As noted above recommendations related to justice matters will be forwarded onto the Justice Committee.)

Families Need Fathers would welcome:

- An unequivocal statement by the Committee which acknowledges the need for both parents to be involved in the children's lives after separation (unless it is shown that this isn't in the best interests of the child).
- A show of political leadership in the form of an enthusiastic speech about the positive contributions of fathers to the care and welfare of Scottish Children.
- Guidance to GPs to enable them to be more even handed about the provision of information about their Children's Health to both parents.
- Posters, leaflets and general information should be 'father friendly'. Just being gender neutral is not enough when good parenting is seen to be the province of mothers alone.
- Schools Inspectorate should explicitly include assessing schools on efforts made to include fathers, especially non-resident fathers. Without this the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act will remain a low priority.
- (two further recommendations on justice matters)

Dads Club would welcome:

- Proactively hiring more men in early years services to help tackle the assumption that men are less capable parents.
- Greater emphasis placed on health visitors to document their interaction with fathers.
- Greater expectations placed on social workers to involve fathers in care planning and audits of cases to ensure that this is happening.
- Improved support and efficiency levels from DWP and HMRC dealing with cases of fathers taking over the care of children 0-4 yrs.
- Tackling the geographical inconsistency of support groups by providing greater emphasis and funding to create similar support across the country.
- A more proactive approach by Government to targeting negative attitudes against fathers in the same way that government has been involved in addressing other forms of prejudice.

Children in Scotland would welcome:

- Systematic provision of ante-natal education specifically designed for fathers, available and accessible to all.
- As GIRFEC is now enshrined in statute, all 'named persons', and any other professionals involved in assessing and planning for families, should ensure that they involve and include the child's father in all relevant processes

- Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate should actively consider how effectively establishments for pre-school children engage with fathers; this issue should be routinely looked at in inspection processes
- Consistent with the National Parenting Strategy services should value and support mothers and fathers equally, for example in play, communication and other activities that promote children's healthy development.

Barnardos would welcome:

- As national and local policy plans are developed there is due attention paid to holistic family support approaches, as well as due investment in targeted support to both fathers and mothers.
- All prison staff to be trained to a basic level to understand and support fathers with their parental responsibilities, in order to secure better outcomes for the relevant children.
- Consideration of recruitment and access to the social work and childcare professions which are current underrepresented in terms of men.
- Highlighting the role of the Health Improvement Services in involving fathers, especially young, vulnerable fathers at the early stages of pregnancy and child development.
- A stronger emphasis in Relationship, Sexual Health and Parenting Education on parenting and raising children. Particularly emphasising the benefits to young men of a positive relationship with babies and the benefit this can have on their development.
- The Committee following the work of the early years taskforce in terms of the increased quality, availability and flexibility of childcare in Scotland.
- Further consideration of whether anything more can be done to encourage employers to be family friendly in their work practices and allow flexible working for their employees. Family friendly workplace awards for example.

STUC would welcome:

- Further consideration for measures to improve policies for effective flexible working, including part time work in good quality jobs which would benefit all parents with caring responsibilities.

One Parent Families Scotland would welcome:

Contact with Services

- Early Years Services. Some of the fathers felt that they had encountered views from nursery staff which assumed that they are not as capable as mothers. The Fathers would like to see Early Years Services being proactive and encouraging more men to work in these services.
- Health Visiting Services. Some fathers felt that Health Visitors fail to acknowledge the role fathers play in the health of their children. The fathers suggested that health visitors should document their interaction with fathers.
- Social Work Services. Some fathers reported a feeling of fear when working with Social Work Services and some said that they had been treated with suspicion by Social Workers around about why they wanted to care for their child(ren). The fathers would like to see greater expectations

placed on social workers to really involve fathers in care planning, within the framework of the appropriate legislation

- Education Services. Some father felt excluded from important meetings about their child (ren) when the mother was included. Fathers suggested that would like schools to be more proactive in involving separated fathers. However OPFS fully appreciates that any decisions around contact and involvement should be in the best interests of the child.
- JCP & HMRC There was a unanimous view from Fathers that the attitude of JCP staff on the phone and in Jobcentres is uncaring of their circumstances as single parents and disregards their role as fathers. Fathers felt strongly that JCP & HMRC should review processes around how benefits are set up and transitioned between separated parents. They felt that it is important to look at the inefficiency that often surrounds fathers taking over the care of children 0-4 yrs and improve the support from the DWP and HMRC.

Provision of services

- Fathers felt that some of the challenges they face as single fathers are unique, and valued tailored support from agencies which understand and were able to support them to be the best parents they can be to their children. Fathers said they would like to see greater emphasis and funding made available for support for single fathers and their children across the country. It was also suggested that statutory services should be more aware of specific support services for lone fathers so they can signpost them on.

Societal attitudes towards Single Fathers

- Fathers we spoke to wanted to be treated as parents who have the same skills and challenges that mothers do. Fathers said they would like to see a government campaign to challenge the stereotypes about fathers still very much present in Britain. The campaign would aim to challenge the stereotypes about single dads and instead show them for what they really are – hardworking, resourceful and a vital part of the diversity of family life.

Parental Rights and Responsibilities for Fathers and Shared Care

The Government should remove the obstacles that make it harder for low-income couples to share post-separation care.

- OPFS believes the principles, which put the welfare of the child at the centre, should continue to be paramount and would not support a presumption of 'shared parenting/care'
- Parents sharing care should both be entitled to take advantage of the flexibilities available to single parents on Jobseeker's Allowance, such as the ability to fit working hours around school hours if their child is aged under 13.
- The Government should reverse housing benefit changes to the age limit for the shared room rate which would mean any single person under 35 would only be able to claim a lower rate intended for a room in shared accommodation, as these hit the parent in a shared care arrangement not deemed the main carer.

Childcare

Childcare is a major determining factor in how many hours single dads can work and we know that many fathers have said they would work more hours if they could find good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable.

- The Scottish government to take the lead in implementing the Early Years Framework by legislating to provide a childcare place for every child.
- A universal entitlement to early childhood education and care, with subsidies to limit what parents pay themselves, would make the benefits of early learning available to every child.
- The UK government should reverse its childcare tax credit cut which reduced support for childcare costs from 80% to 70%

Employment and family life

Fathers who are the main carer of their child/ren told us how difficult it is to combine the role of sole carer & breadwinner and that a recognition that single parents in work would benefit from a more family friendly work environment.

- Employers should be encouraged and be made aware of the benefits of flexible working and family-friendly practice.
- Government & Business organisations should promote more tolerance for men who need to spend time with their children.
- Policies such as adequately paid parental leave, improving rights to request flexible working, provision of decent and well-paid part-time jobs, and access to affordable and quality childcare are crucial to supporting single dads to sustain employment.
- System of paid parental leave introduced which as a minimum should incorporate a set number of paid days for the care of children who are ill, which operates in a similar way to statutory sick pay for individuals.
- In addition, we believe that unpaid parental leave should be available until a child is aged 18.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

FATHERS AND PARENTING

SUBMISSION FROM EDINBURGH LONE FATHERS PROJECT (DADS CLUB)

Founded in 2000, is a partnership between Gilmerton Child and Family Centre and One Parent Families Scotland.

The Scottish Governments National Parenting Strategy is promoting the involvement of fathers and the positive impact they can have on their children's lives. There is also a desire to promote greater involvement of Fathers in all areas that concern their children's lives.

If it wasn't for The Lone Fathers Project, we believe there are fathers who would have given up the hope of ever seeing their children again.

This unique partnership between Gilmerton Child and Family Centre and One Parent Families Scotland, provides support to single fathers with young children and 'contact fathers' who look after their children for short periods of time.

Many of the fathers feel extremely isolated, lacking both friends and or family support. They are unlikely to meet other lone fathers and often feel cut off from friends because of child care issues. By bringing these dads together our project helps them realise they are not alone.

There are many benefits to this type of collaboration, for example the child and family centre works with a number of families where contact and residency is an issue. The support of the fathers worker and the key worker in the centre has helped support the best outcomes for the child.

This local authority/voluntary sector partnership brings together local parenting support, with those with experience of providing assistance on financial, legal and other issues to single parents. Working together, it has been possible to develop a successful formula for involving single fathers and their children.

The project is the longest running project of its kind in Scotland and was originally set up after realising that very few fathers were interested in coming along to more traditional social activities, such as coffee mornings.

Rather than using centre-based group work for support, a programme of sport, visits and outdoor activities are on offer every Saturday, while individual support takes place throughout the week - all activities allow the fathers to spend time with their children and make friends with one another.

Apart from the outings or activities that take place on Saturdays, the project offers the dads chances to take part in activities throughout the week. These usually take place on a Monday or a Tuesday. This can range from meeting up for a chat, catching up with any problems that may have arisen and also, the chance for peer support amongst the dads.

The guys support each other and once they get to know each other, can build up a friendship where they are more likely to talk about their children and what it's like being a father. It takes time to build relationships."

Fathers show significant gains in self-confidence and self-esteem, due both to the support offered by the project worker and also from other participants. Once the fathers gain confidence in the service they are willing to open up and disclose personal issues and problems. Fathers have also seen improvements in the behaviour of their children as well as their performance at nursery. All the fathers in the group had very similar issues and concerns and from this a collective strength was nurtured and channelled into a positive direction. This allowed the individual fathers to learn through empathy, that the experiences of others were similar to their own and could reflect on this.

Parenting support is available from both the project worker and by the other dads taking part in the project. Having professional support and peer role models is extremely important to the group.

Over the years, we have met many fathers who without the right support, are struggling to overcome what can be overwhelming barriers. Most services are still geared towards women and the bulk of parenting is still done by mums but if we accept that looking after a child is down to both parents we need to provide support for fathers as well.

Men currently studying to be child carers or working in the field are in the minority, and often feel isolated. Some researchers argue that childcare centres should consider the hidden message that all-female childcare centres may send to children.

According to research, the presence of male childcare workers can help to challenge stereotypical views of men and women, encourage staff to change their own gender assumptions, and avoid children developing a skewed picture of the roles of men and women in society.

At pre-school level children begin to explore adult roles; with male care givers in their lives, boys will have positive male role models, and all children will benefit from the different qualities which men can bring to work with children, such as an adventurous approach to outside play and sport activities.

More fathers will get actively involved in childcare and events at local centres when the number of male care workers increases

Children learn more and do better if they have more than one adult in their life, There is also extensive research to show that if a dad is involved in the early years, he will play a part right through the child's life. Children benefit from positive interactions with their

fathers and play is crucial for their development. The positive outcomes are so massive, it is difficult to quantify them.

Dads are quick to praise the project. In one recent case, a father who had been going to court for two years to get access to his child was granted a court order for contact on a Saturday morning with the Dads' Club. The father, who did not wish to be named, said: "The Dads' Club offered the opportunity for me to demonstrate to the courts that not only should I have contact with my children but also that I was more than capable of looking after them. I nearly gave up hope and can't thank the Dads' club enough for helping me rebuild my relationship with my children."

Kenny Spence
Edinburgh Lone Fathers Project (Dads Club)
10 March 2014

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

FATHERS AND PARENTING

SUBMISSION FROM FATHERS NETWORK SCOTLAND

Including Fathers From the Very Beginning

Services to Fathers are an equality issue primarily around gender equality.

A trustee of Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) attended a 'Dads To Be' course run by maternity services in West Lothian in 2005. As a consequence he bathes his three boys, a role he has undertaken from day one of being a new father.

In 2011 FNS worked in partnership with Children in Scotland, NHS Lothian and the NCT to produce a 'Dads To Be' resource for professionals providing antenatal education and support to fathers – see:

<http://fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk/archive/Dads2b.pdf>

As far as we're aware, West Lothian is still the only area in Scotland to run an antenatal course specifically for dads.

It is our hope and desire that every dad in Scotland has the opportunity to attend a 'Dads To Be' type antenatal course and be prepared and encouraged in having a meaningful role from the very beginning of their child's life.

What Fathers Want

Nearly 70% of fathers want to be more involved in their child's education and even higher proportions of non-resident parents (81%).

In a recent study 60% of parents said fathers should spend more time with their children. (Equality and Human Rights Commission)

Employment is still a barrier to dads' involvement. Despite flexible working being good for dads it is still not fully utilised by men in the UK. In a UK Working Mums survey of 2000 mums in 2012 it was found that four per cent of fathers worked part time and 16% had some other kind of flexible working arrangement.

Creating a father friendly working culture in Scotland will allow fathers to negotiate shared parenting of their children more easily, providing a more rounded experience for Scotland's children in the future.

There needs to be recognition that family break-up costs all in the family and in society and heightens the risk of poverty and of families falling below the poverty line.

This links the need for support for families before break up and support for families after and can be a key component in tackling inequality, particularly at the economic level.

Services' Neglect of Fathers

In spite of recent research developments and insights regarding the need for services to support fathers, services remain very fragmented and projects that do

exist are often left to their own devices and self-funded despite their services being relied upon by the statutory services. Research has discovered that: 'Father inclusive practice was not seen to be routine or mainstream in family services (Page et al 2008). For instance, of a sample of 382 Scottish services for parents, only three services were adapted to suit the needs of fathers (Hutton et al. 2007).

There is also a demonstrable lack of uptake by fathers of generic 'parents' groups and services. Specific groups of fathers such as young fathers may experience an intensified sense of exclusion and thus remain on the fringes of service provision, particularly at a time and age when they are most in need. Different equality communities of single dads will have multiple disadvantage both culturally and their ability to access support and services.

Encouraging and supporting fathers to play an active role in their child's upbringing is key if we are to improve the health, wellbeing and life chances of Scotland's children and young people.

The National Parenting Strategy, 2012.

The Changing Role of Fathers

There has been a marked increase in the role fathers play in childcare and domestic life and also a major shift in the manner in which fatherhood is viewed. A more active role is evident throughout childhood as well as a shift away from the more traditional (perhaps stereotypical) married breadwinner and disciplinarian. (O'Brien, 2005; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003; Sullivan and Dex 2009).

The role of father or father-figure is complex. Those in the role can be single or married; externally employed or a stay at home father; gay or straight; an adoptive or step-parent; and crucially, can be a more than capable caregiver to children as they face the various challenges that come with growing up.

The inclusion of a significant emphasis on fathers and fathering in the Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy (2012) is the most recent example of official attention. Fathers' right to be named on their child's birth certificate has been extended through legislation (in 2003) and the father role recognised by the extension of parental leave.

Why Dad Matters?

Research findings indicate that fathers' involvement with their children links to higher educational achievement and occupational mobility irrespective of the child's gender (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004; Flouri, 2005; Sarkadi et al 2008; Flouri and Buchanan, 2002).

Low fatherly involvement also indicates detrimental outcomes in these areas. Positive outcomes are also demonstrated in relation to fathers' involvement and children's behaviour including lower levels of police involvement at a later stage (Hango, 2007; Blanden, 2006) Fathers' interest has also been shown to have a positive influence on mental health (Flouri, 2005).

The benefits of involved fathering, no matter the family makeup, extend beyond those that accrue for the child. Mothers and fathers themselves have been found to

gain when fathers are included. Failure to involve fathers impacts on mothers by placing an unfair burden on them in relation to the disciplinary role and, in cases of suspected neglect or abuse, an unfair burden of investigation and responsibility (Gillies, 2004).

Studies involving young fathers point to the negative effect ignoring them has on children's well-being as a lack of perceived support among expectant teenage mothers correlated with high scores on a Child Abuse Potential Inventory (Zelenko et al, 2001; Kalil et al, 2005).

Decreased involvement of young fathers is significantly associated with young mothers' increased parenting stress. Non-resident fathers have an important role to play as the quality of time rather than the amount of time is shown to be significant (Asmussen and Weizel, 2010).

In public expenditure terms, the high cost of residential and other forms of childcare is likely to be substantially reduced with a greater systematic involvement of fathers and paternal relatives in care proceedings (Bellany, 2009). More involved fatherhood also contributes to men's self-improvement in relation to turning men away from crime and self-harm and preventing recidivism among prisoners.

Vulnerable children seem to be in the greatest need of ongoing positive relationships with their biological fathers or father figure. They tend to do worse when father-child relationships are poor or non-existent compared to those who are supported by their fathers (Dunn et al, 2004).

From father-proving to father-proofing

The value of positively involved fathering is incontestable and proven (Burgess, 2008). Involved fathers ensure that children, women and families as a whole benefit. A consensus is emerging that we now need to move from having to prove the value of fathers' involvement to designing services that include rather than exclude them, thus the use of the term 'father proofing'.

A key determinant of whether services are doing the best they can to involve fathers obviously includes encouraging positive attitudes among staff (men and women) and the dedication of father-friendly provision.

However, the importance of image projected by services should not be underestimated. Image, first impression, 'feel' of a place, waiting room or reception area, all these things give off messages which can say that this service is really just for women and mothers. Such messages can be conveyed in policy, publicity, training materials and just the 'look' of services.

Father-proofing is not only about the importance of depicting men as involved or capable of being involved in the lives of their children and families, it is also a tool for drawing men into the services we offer in family welfare, child care and public health. And it is also as much about ceasing to depict women as sole carers with the sole responsibility for the health, welfare and safety of children and families.

As indicated at the beginning, father-proofing on its own will have limited effect if it is not part of a strategy to change cultures, attitudes and practices about children, families and mothers and fathers.

Paternity leave usage could increase support to mothers and hence families.

Supporting fathers through a major transition point in life has better outcomes for families, mothers and their children. Keeping families together should be a priority and better-supported fathers throughout the process at pre and antenatal stages as well as through paternity leave can only enhance their involvement at the key transition points.

The economist Ankita Patnaik shows impact of Quebec in 2006 increasing the financial benefits for paid leave and offering five weeks that could be taken only by fathers. "That's what really made a difference. Now dads might feel bad for not taking leave—your baby loses this time with parents." Since then, the percentage of Quebecois fathers taking paternity leave has skyrocketed, from about 10 percent in 2001 to more than 80 percent in 2010.

In Quebec, women whose husbands were eligible for the new leave were more likely to return to their original employers and were more likely to work full-time, resulting in their spending "considerably" more hours on paid work. (When women work full-time, it alters the home division of labour more than when they work part-time.) And as women were spending more time working for pay, men were spending less: the Quebec paternity-leave policy resulted in a small but long-term decrease in fathers' time at work.

The policy has achieved many of the hoped-for long-term outcomes, chief among them is more fluidity in who does what around the house. Previous studies found that fathers who take paternity leave are more likely, a year or so down the road, to change diapers, bathe their children, read them bedtime stories, and get up at night to tend to them. Patnaik's study confirmed this; looking at time-use diaries, she found that men who were eligible for the new leave—whether or not they took it—ended up spending more time later on routine chores like shopping and cooking.

At present in Scotland it is not known how fathers are supported at work, how paternity leave is being utilized and therefore how future changes in legislation will affect employers or families. As the review *Fathers at Work* by Burnett et al (2012) from Lancaster University concludes: "Fathers perceive that, while family-friendly policies might in theory be available to 'parents' these are in practice targeted at working mothers."

Fathers Network Scotland - building a father friendly world.

Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) is a Scottish Charity. Until April 2013 we were a wholly voluntary organisation. We were instrumental in setting up the Fathers Roundtable for the Scottish Government to input into the National Parenting Strategy. This was published in October 2012 and contained a number of promises on fathers.

Our mission is to create a safe and compassionate Scotland where all children, their families and communities are enriched and strengthened through the full and welcome involvement of their fathers.

We do this by supporting organisations to positively engage, support, and empower men to become the best fathers they can be.

In April, SG awarded FNS two years funding as a strategic partner to support FNS to deliver on these priorities.

We have published a number of reports and briefing papers on the engagement of fathers in child and family services and our main product is spearheaded by our work on 'father-proofing'. Our publication, Where's Dad is available on the Fathers Network Scotland Website through the following link
<http://www.fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk/archive/WheresDad.pdf>

We have also included a link to the Dad Matters publication by FNS that highlights the issues around father inclusive services.
<http://www.fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk/archive/DadMatters.pdf>

David Drysdale
Chair
Fathers Network Scotland
21 February 2014

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
FATHERS AND PARENTING
FURTHER SUBMISSION FROM FATHERS NETWORK SCOTLAND

Where's Dad?



Father-Proofing Your Work

Dr Gary Clapton

September 2013



From father-proving to father-proofing

The value of positively involved fathering is incontestable and proven (Burgess, 2008). Involved fathers ensure that children, women and families as a whole benefit. A consensus is emerging that we now need to move from having to prove the value of fathers to designing services that include rather than exclude them, thus the use of the term 'father-proofing'. In the welfare services, debate has turned to how best to engage with fathers with discussions taking place about, for instance, how to reach out to young fathers, ensure the participation in children's lives of fathers in prison and work with men who are or have been deemed to be angry or aggressive.

A key determinant of whether services are doing the best they can to involve fathers obviously includes encouraging positive attitudes among staff (men and women) and the dedication of father-friendly provision. However, the importance of image projected by services should not be underestimated. Image, first impression, 'feel' of a place, waiting room or reception area, all these things give off messages which can say that this service is really just for women and mothers. Such messages can be conveyed in policy, publicity, training materials and just the 'look' of services. This paper advances some suggestions concerning how to father-proof services by countering such messages and begins by providing some examples of what not to do.

Images

Leaflets, posters, websites and other publicity materials convey powerful messages about what constitutes a family and who a service is designed for. The following two images advertise two key Scottish Government policies.

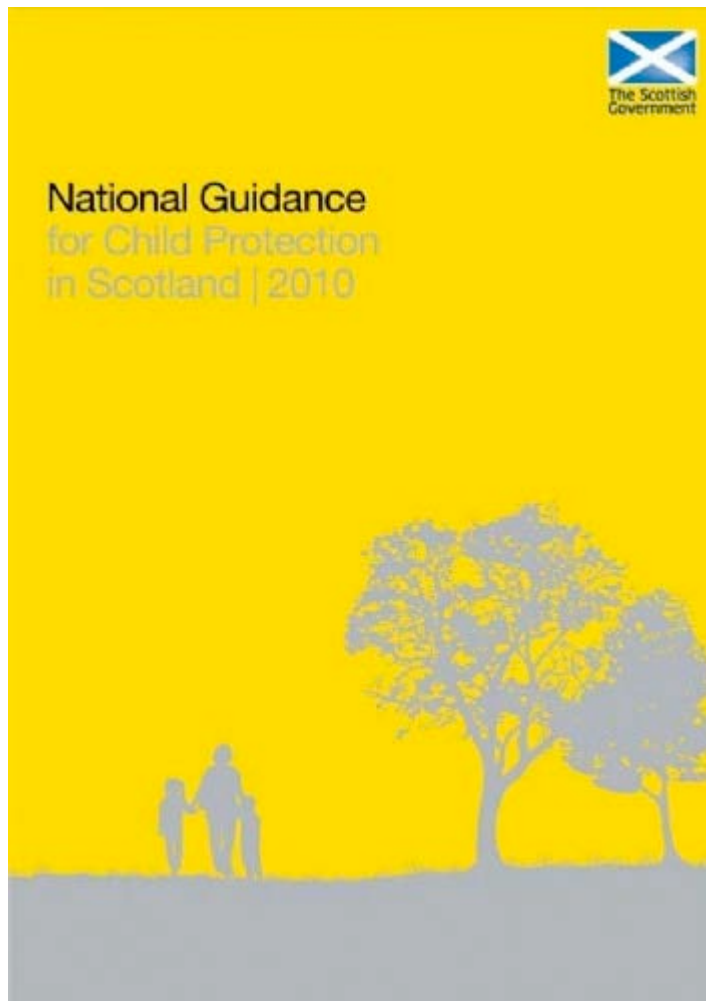


(*The Early Years Framework*, 2009 p.6)



(*Curriculum for Excellence factfile — Parents as partners*, Learning and Teaching Scotland, October, 2010)

The next image is taken from the front cover of the current Scottish Government guidance on child protection (The above image is repeated on the cover of this year's *Child Protection Guidance for Health Professionals*, Scottish Government, 2013).



All three images suggest two things. Firstly that children are women's business and secondly that men by being invisible are dispensable in the lives of families. These images, and the messages they give out, are perpetuated throughout a vast swathe of child welfare publicity materials.

For example, the three parents on the webpage of leading Scottish child protection online resource are all women. <http://withscotland.org> (accessed 3 June 2013):



On occasion the issue is not so much one of omission but rather, implicitly, one of commission, i.e. families are depicted as women and children-only as in this advert carried by a leading Scottish welfare charity:

The image shows the top section of the Quarriers website. The header is red with the Quarriers logo and tagline 'Transforming Lives'. Navigation links include News, Contact, and social media icons. A search bar is also present. Below the header is a navigation menu with links: HOME, WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO, GET INVOLVED, RESOURCES, and DONATE. The main banner features a woman holding a baby with the text 'IT'S A FAMILY THING'. Below the banner are five colorful icons representing different ways to get involved: 'WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES' (purple piggy bank), 'GIVE YOUR TIME' (orange alarm clock), 'ORGANISE AN EVENT' (green starburst), 'CASE STUDIES' (blue briefcase), and 'DONATE ONLINE' (red heart).

Official examples are no less frequent:



(*Healthy, Happy Kids, Simple steps to a healthy weight for children and their families*, NHS Health Scotland, 2013, p.5)

This cover even refers to what is depicted as the whole family.

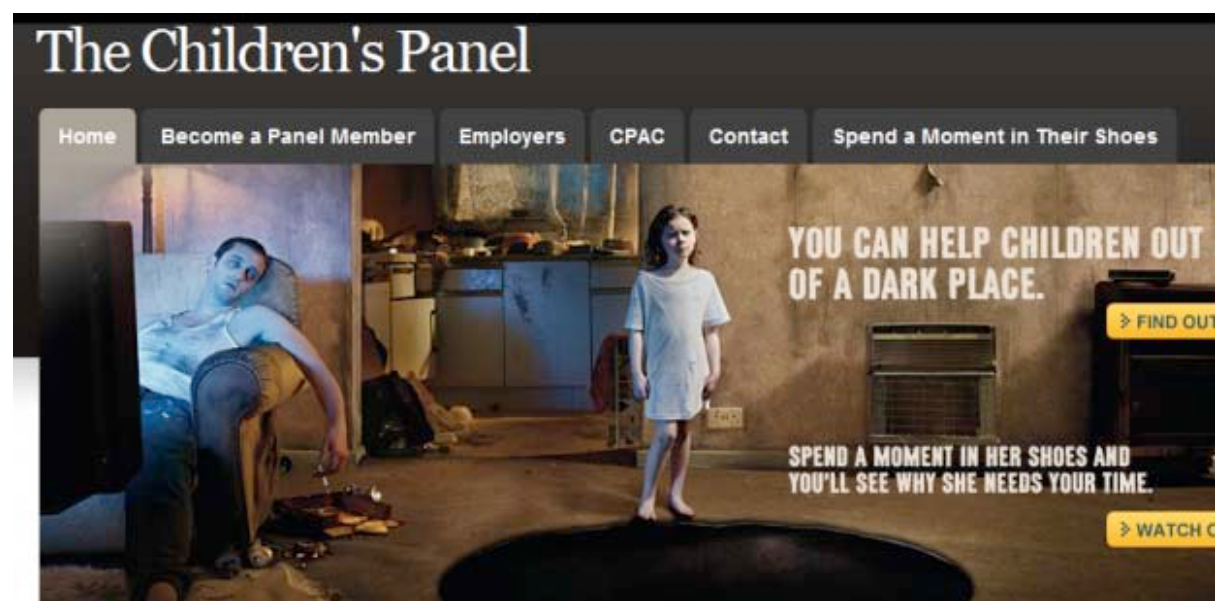
The notion of women-only, fatherless families is also perpetuated in online materials:

The Early Years Network was established by NHS Health Scotland to support the early years workforce in the implementation of the early years framework and other key early years policies. Recognising the importance of working across sectors to improve outcomes in the early years, the network provides practitioners with a vehicle for

sharing knowledge and learning and disseminating evidence, policy and practice. Click here: www.maternal-and-early-years.org.uk

If this is done, and note in passing that the title of the web pages indicates that mothers are the sole adult subject of these early years materials, the one image of an adult on the page is that of a mother reading with her child.

When images of fathers are presented these are generally not positive, most especially in social work materials:



If every picture conveys a story, or in the above cases, a message that fathers are either non-existent or to be treated with suspicion, then the words and phrases used in these leaflets, booklets, on-line materials and other such documents also give a subtle (and sometime not so subtle) communication.

Language

In the most studiously neutral examples aimed at mothers and fathers, in an effort not to identify only mothers with child-care, the words 'parent' or 'parents' is used as in 'parent and toddler group'. However very few people read or hear 'mother' or 'father' in this and other examples because of the societal default understanding that parent equals mother.

Elsewhere mothers are often 'mums' and fathers are often, well, fathers, or 'the father':

Claire's mum engaged well with education services for all four children. Claire's father was not available during the home visit.

(*GIRFEC Training Materials*, Lanarkshire, 2010, p. 13 'Claire aged four')

Public health and education worked together with Claire's mum and the children to support understanding of the father's illness and help mum to prepare the children for changed circumstances (ibid, p14)

<http://www.girfecinlanarkshire.co.uk/girfec-resources/Item%2018%20Practice%20examples/Item%2018%20Practice%20examples.pdf>

Using the familiar 'mum' renders 'father' unfamiliar.

A similar set of coded messages, and these are generally unintended, can be found in much in-house training materials. These are also accompanied by an unconscious deprecation of fathers.

Case Studies, practice scenarios and training examples

Within agencies, training and staff development activities, often either by commission (depicting fathers as pervasively abusive or useless) or omission (rendering fathers invisible) repeat the message that fathers are dispensable and mothers are to be regarded as the sole carers. The impressions of fathers and fathering fall into a number of categories.

The disappearing father

- *John is six and his performance at school has dropped significantly over the last term, since his move to a new school. He finds it difficult to concentrate and fit into an ordered and structured school environment. John has also been refusing to go to school at least once a week and his parents have struggled to get him there. His parents are worried that this may be linked to some form of bullying. John has asthma that makes him feel like he cannot fully take part in play with other children. John's mother is at her wits end and is completely unsure of what to do next. John will talk to her about some things but starts shouting and screaming if he is asked about school. John's mum is desperate to get help from someone (national guidelines quoted from Clapton, 2013)*

In the above example the story starts with parents yet proceeds to the child's mother (the caring one) and ends with 'mum' still doing the worry and caring.

The father as problematic

In the following on-line child protection resource parents are divided into mother and father three times:

- 'Watch this video clip of Consultant Perinatal Psychotherapist Amanda Jones working with two different mums and their babies' and
- 'For example, a child whose mother is admitted to hospital might cope very well despite feeling upset and worried. In contrast, a child who is also trying to cope with poorly controlled asthma, parental substance misuse and bullying is likely to be more at risk.'
- Then comes the fathers' mention. But in the following terms: 'Routinely involve fathers when assessing risk'

(NHS Education for Scotland, On-line Child Protection Module

<http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/home/learning-and-cpd/learning-spaces/child-online-protection.aspx> accessed 3 June 2013)

Other common examples are more explicit about the risky fathers.

The threatening father

It is difficult to find examples in the many books, papers and training materials where fathers are an asset. Instead fathers are regularly portrayed as alcoholic, drug-taking, wife-beating, child-harming brutes. See for example the 'Craig's Story' video made by the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children which begins "My dad was always in a bad mood, always fighting, especially when he went down the pub' (CELCIS) http://www.celcis.org/resources/entry/craigs_story

Examples of such routine and lazy depictions stretch to disabled (and thus unable to help) grandfathers and routinely risky step fathers and boyfriends.

Supposing that none of these messages were received by the kind of fathers who, it may be thought, need encouragement to involve themselves with services and they come looking for help. How might they be greeted before they talk to anyone?

Physical surroundings

Walk in the door of the clinic, GP waiting area, family centre, social work office. Look around, look around again.

These are not places where men and fathers are expected to be.

Posters and leaflets on the walls and tables are mostly intended for women e.g. Weightwatchers, Moon Walk or have images of women and children (Fostering campaigns) or carry hotlines and warnings to women about dangers such as rape (Rape Crisis). When men feature it is generally negatively as in domestic violence or the common Zero Tolerance posters.



Other posters have depictions of men as threats (sometimes just as a pair of knuckles or a shadowy gang of males being warned about knife crime) and it is very rare that there will be adverts for services for men/fathers or that men are shown in anything other than a negative (let alone neutral) light.

If our man/father decides to wait and is oblivious to the walls and leaflets on the tables what can he read? These areas are generally stocked with *Bella*, *Take a Break* or an old *Cosmopolitan*.



Once in contact with staff and practitioners, the range and quality of attitudes and services for fathers is another matter and has been discussed elsewhere (see for instance, Clapton, 2013).

Father proofing: why do it?

Father-proofing is not only about the importance of depicting men as involved or capable of being involved in the lives of their children and families, it is also a tool for drawing men into the services we offer in family welfare, child care and public health. And it is also as much about ceasing to depict women as sole carers with the sole responsibility for the health, welfare and safety of children and families. In this sense, flipped, father-proofing is mother-proofing.

As indicated at the beginning father-proofing on its own will have limited effect if it is not part of a strategy to change cultures, attitudes and practices about children, families and mothers and fathers.

But it can be a place to start.

September 2013

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<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/uploads/publications/247.pdf>

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

FATHERS AND PARENTING

SUBMISSION FROM GAY DADS SCOTLAND

Who, what, why

Gay Dads Scotland (GDS) is a small, volunteer run, Scottish registered charity which has been operating for about 15 years.

There is a substantial, but largely invisible population of gay fathers in Scotland, the vast majority of whom entered into a traditional marriage at a time when societal attitudes to homosexuality were much less liberal than they are today.

GDS's primary focus is to host support groups for these gay fathers. In addition, we also have a small number of members who have children by donor insemination.

Our objective is to provide an environment where such fathers can discuss and work through the challenges and difficult choices which their situation presents, in a way that will result in a positive outcome, not just for him, but also for his spouse and children.

The group operates support group meetings on a monthly basis in Edinburgh, where gay fathers can meet and provide mutual support. It is our pooled experience that can sometimes help individuals, as none of us is a trained counsellor. The attendees are generally a mixture of men who are actively seeking support along with others who are "giving back" to the group. Typical attendance is 6 to 16 people, and most months there will be one or two new attendees, who come from all walks of life and a wide age group

Our geographical remit is Scotland-wide. At present we are only hosting support group meeting in Edinburgh. Men have come to our meetings from as far away as Inverness, Aberdeen, Dumfries and Girvan. There is regular attendance from Fife and Central Scotland. Only occasionally do we get attendees from Glasgow. For about five years we also hosted meeting in Glasgow, but these were discontinued as the numbers attending were insufficient to provide mutual support. We are at the early stages of exploring the possibility of hosting meetings in Aberdeen.

We are also engaged in providing information to agencies involved in working with gay parents and to raising public awareness of gay parenting, with the objective of combating discrimination against gay fathers and their children.

New members are sometimes directed to us by their GP, a counsellor or mainstream support agencies, such as the *Samaritans*. We maintain a website at www.gaydadsscotland.org.uk

Father's perspective

Such was the general lack of awareness and acceptance of homosexuality in the past that many men did not come to realise their true sexuality until after they were married and had had children. Others may have had some varying degree of understanding, but either bowed to societal pressure or perhaps felt that that was a part of them that could be set aside.

We do not know the statistics for the number of families where the father is gay, but we believe it to be a large number. During the more than 15 years that GDS has been running we have met many hundreds of gay fathers, but feel that this is only a tiny proportion.

It is typically the case that someone who finds himself in this position is under enormous emotional stress. On the one hand, he loves his wife and children and is desperate not to break up the family. On the other, he has come to realise that there is a part of his true identity that must be addressed. These seem to be irreconcilable and result in feelings of stress and guilt. Many fathers are very isolated and believe that they are the only ones to be in their position. It is commonly the case that, when they first come to one of our meeting fathers exhibit or report high levels of stress, depression, anxiety and guilt.

Spouse's perspective

There is a need for better support for wives of gay men. We are sympathetic to the position of the wife in these situations - it is not her fault that her husband or partner turned out to be gay. We do not feel that there are circumstances where a gay husband should not tell his wife. If she then decides to agree to continue the relationship, perhaps until their children are older or beyond that, then that is an informed decision.

Child's perspective

Everything GDS does is directly or indirectly aimed at protecting the welfare of the children of our members.

Whether or when to "come out" to one's children is a regular subject of concern from new members. It is actually rare for there to be an adverse reaction from a child to the news that dad is gay. They tend to be much more concerned that mum and dad might split up. Where there has been an adverse reaction it is because they believe, not always correctly, that dad has not treated mum fairly.

Both parents are also commonly worried that there will be bullying at school and, sadly, this does occur.

Happily, for the most part, gay fathers and their children go on to have very positive experiences.

Outcomes

There are a wide spectrum of outcome scenarios, including:

- Some fathers decide to continue to internalise their sexuality and never tell their wives or children.
- Some come out to their wives, who is accepting and they negotiate a way to continue to live as a family, perhaps until the children are older.
- Many come out to their wives, there is a separation/divorce and they continue to successfully co-parent their children.
- Some come out to their wives or are “found out”, there is a bad reaction. Sometimes the father then has a lot of trouble maintaining contact with his children.

Clearly, real life is more complex than this simplified list. However, in our experience the two most important issues leading to a happy outcome are:

- Being honest with one's spouse
- Being honest with one's children

Fortunately, we see more happy than unhappy outcomes. However, the unhappy outcomes are often tragic, not just for the father, but also for his spouse and children. We have seen a number of cases where contact between the father and the children has been made very difficult or where the children will no longer agree to see their father. Poor communication is the most common reason for such breakdowns and outcomes.

Looking to the future

We aim to extend out geographic spread of our support groups to other Scottish towns.

The age profile of gay fathers coming to our support group suggests that fewer young gay men are marrying as a result of societal pressure or lack of awareness about their sexuality.

That said, there remain a number of social groups where young gay men are still marrying straight spouses. We know that working class men rarely come to our support group meetings, nor do we see men from any of the ethnic communities and we would like to find outreach routes to these groups.

Ewan Jeffrey
Chair, Gay Dads Scotland
10 March 2014

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

FATHERS AND PARENTING

SUBMISSION FROM ONE PARENT FAMILIES SCOTLAND

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is Scotland's national single parent organisation. Building on over 65 years of advocacy and service-delivery expertise, OPFS provides expert information, advice & support, along with training activities, work preparation programmes & flexible childcare. Services include:

- National Information Service for lone parents and others working with lone parents:
- Community based advocacy, family support services and personal development programmes in Dundee, Falkirk, Edinburgh, Lanarkshire & Glasgow.
- Marks & Spencer Lone Parent Programme
- Lone Parent Peer Mentoring Service
- Specialist Services: young lone parents; lone & contact fathers; student lone parents.
- Training for intermediaries and Lone Parents
- Flexible childcare services in seven L.A.'s : Glasgow ; Renfrewshire; Lanarkshire; Fife; Dundee; Angus and Aberdeenshire
- Mobile crèche services
- Policy, Research and lobbying decision makers at all levels in government
- 200 + staff, turnover of over £2m

Around 8% of Scotland's 165,500 single parents are fathers.¹ This means approximately 13,240 families in Scotland are headed by a single dad. Working on a day-to-day basis with families, OPFS is well-placed to represent the views of single parents - both single mothers and single fathers - and to support them to engage with policy makers on important issues and concerns.

Partnership working represents an important means of influencing policy, and OPFS is involved in a significant number of partnerships including: the Early Years Collaborative; Parenting across Scotland; Education Scotland Family Learning Network; CPAG; Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform, the Poverty

¹ Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics

Alliance, the Ministerial Advisory Group on Child Poverty, and the Scottish Government's Welfare Reform Scrutiny Group.

1. Introduction

OPFS is please to be able to contribute to Equal Opportunities Committee call for views on Fathers and Parenting. OPFS has gathered feedback from fathers whom we work with as well as using case studies from out one to one work with fathers in Dundee, Falkirk, Edinburgh and Lanarkshire. Through the experiences fathers we are able to identify the key challenges they face in their day-to-day life and to describe the type of service OPFS provides to meet fathers needs. The committee has asked contributions to identify the key challenges fathers face in day-to-day life and the quality of support currently available to them. In particular:

1. What day to day challenges do you experience as a lone / unmarried father in Scotland?
2. Do you experience any particular challenges in a specific aspect of your life for example - work / family / social?
3. Do you experience any particular challenges dealing with a specific subject for example - finance or dealing with access or care arrangements?
4. What kinds of support and or services are available to you and do they meet your needs?
5. Do you feel you get equal access to all types of public facilities when out with your children?
6. If you said that you experience challenges, what are your thoughts on public perception and general awareness of the issue?

OPFS response to these questions this submission will cover:

- Single Dads & Contact Dads
- Facts about Single Parents (Mothers & Fathers)
- OPFS services for Fathers
- OPFS Survey of Single & Contact Dads
- Issues around being a Single Dad
- Policy Context
- Conclusions & Recommendations
- Appendix Dads Case Studies

One Parent Families Scotland aims to challenge the myths and stereotypes about one parent families whether headed by a single mother or a single father. It can be a challenge to bring up your children on your own, being solely responsible for their care and the family income. Single parents do a great job and are worthy of recognition as well as support and advice to get through hard times. The media's coverage of single parents is often dominated by negative headlines where they are talked about in a negative or stereotypical light. The facts rather than the myths about one parent families challenge perceptions of lone mums & dads, who deserve to be congratulated and not condemned.

2. Definitions

A single parent is a parent, not living with a spouse or partner, who has most of the day-to-day responsibilities in raising the child or children. A single parent is usually considered the primary caregiver, meaning the parent the children have residency with the majority of the time.² If the parents are separated or divorced, children often live with the primary care-giver and have contact with their other parent. With standard contact orders one parent has the majority of responsibility for the day-to-day routine, while the other – usually the separated father – sees the children at the weekend or selected weekdays.

The other option “shared care” involves sharing care of children post-separation. This is less common.

In its locally based project work OPFS works with both Single Fathers and Contact Fathers. There is recognition in this submission that the issues facing both groups can be significantly different – these differences are made evident by the fathers themselves.

3. Facts about Single Parents (Mothers & Fathers)

The facts about lone parents

- It is estimated that there are over 165,500 single parents with 281,000 children in Scotland³.
- By 2033, Lone Parent Households are projected to rise to 238,000 (from 24% to 38%)⁴
- Less than 2 per cent of lone parents are teenagers⁵
- Around 8% of single parents are fathers⁶

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_parents

³ Household Projections for Scotland, National Records of Scotland, June 2012

⁴ Household Projections for Scotland, National Records of Scotland, 2008

⁵ Annual Population Survey (APS), (Labour Force Survey plus boost), 2009 data

⁶ Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics

- The median age of lone parents is 38.1 ⁷
- 59.2% of lone parents are in work in Scotland, up 14.5 percentage points since 1997 ⁸

Single Parent Families and Poverty

- Around four in every 10 (41 per cent) of children in lone parent families are poor,

compared to just over two in every 10 of children in couple families ⁹

- The poverty rate for one parent families where the parent works part time is 23 per cent, and 18 per cent where the parent works full time ¹⁰
- 38 per cent of lone parents said that money always runs out before the end of the week/month compared to 19 per cent of couples ¹¹

Family Life

- At least 9 per cent of single parents share the care of their child equally, or nearly equally, with the other parent ¹²
- The majority of children have face to face contact with their other parent. 71 per cent of resident parents said that their child had direct contact with the other parent ¹³
- Parental separation by itself is not considered predictive of poor outcomes in children ¹⁴ Parental conflict has been identified as a key mediating variable in producing negative outcomes in children. A comparison between couple families experiencing high levels of conflict with single parent families found that children fared less well in conflicted couple families, demonstrating that family functioning has a greater impact than family structure in contributing to child outcomes ¹⁵

4. OPFS Services for Fathers

Single Fathers, can often find it difficult to find the information that's relevant to them. Some feel that they are viewed differently or that sometimes its not easy to find the right support tailored to a fathers needs. Fathers have told us all of this can make the job of bringing up children on their own feel very isolating.

⁷ Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics

⁸ Working and Workless Households, 2012, Table P. ONS Statistical Bulletin, August 2012

⁹ Households Below Average Income, An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95 – 2009/10, Table 4.14ts. Department for Work and Pensions, 2011

¹⁰ Households Below Average Income, An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95 – 2009/10, Table 4.11ts. Department for Work and Pensions, 2011

¹¹ Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 8.8. DWP, 2010

¹² Problematic contact after separation and divorce. Peacey V. ; Hunt, J. Gingerbread, 2008

¹³ I'm not saying it was easy...Contact problems in separated families. Peacey, V., Hunt, J. Gingerbread, 2009

¹⁴ Impact of Family Breakdown on Children's Well-Being. Mooney, A., Oliver, C., Smith, M. Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, 2009

¹⁵ Impact of Family Breakdown on Children's Well-Being. Mooney, A., Oliver, C., Smith, M. Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, 2009

There are times when single dads need support that's more tailored to their situation, and that when they are dealing with a problem they may find it more helpful to hear how other dads have coped. Around 8% of single parents are men. While they face the same challenges as single mums, as a significant minority single fathers can sometimes feel particularly isolated and in need of mutual support. Single fathers are nearly four times more likely to have a common mental disorder than other men.¹⁶

Early Years Early Action – OPFS Dads Project.

UK research in relation to services for families reported that many are very gendered and make assumptions about the roles of fathers.¹⁷ This concurs with the overwhelming comments made by fathers taking part in OPFS Early Years Early Action project (2012) who stated that there were few services specifically for fathers and little understanding of their needs. One Parent Families Scotland's Early Years Early Action project was funded by Scottish Government from 2010-12. The project evaluation reported that fathers identified that involvement in the project resulted in a notable improvement in their ability to set routines and boundaries for their children

Through pictorial evaluation tools, children showed increased levels of participation in physical activities and one-to-one time with their fathers. Other findings from the children's feedback show an appreciation that a father's role can include elements of fun, nurturing and quality family interaction. As a result of increased family interaction:

- 81% of fathers said that the parent-child relationship was strengthened.
- 62% of fathers felt they had a better awareness of the benefits of play
- 67% reported an increase in the number of activities regularly attended.

Through parenting advice and support fathers developed consistent parenting styles which allowed both fathers and children to increase their resilience and trust in others.

Theorists such as Wilson and Prior (2011)¹⁸ state that interaction between fathers and their children often surrounds physically activity. The OPFS project adopted this approach which lead directly to an increase in feelings of attachment, regulation of emotions and development of closer bonds between father and child. However, it was important that financial constraints were recognised and activities undertaken were affordable and sustainable.

¹⁶ C. Cooper, P.E. Bebbington, H. Meltzer, D. Bhugra. T. Brugha, R. Jenkins, M. Farrell and M. King (2000) Depression and common mental disorders in single parents: results of the 2000 National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey UCL, London UK.

¹⁷ <http://www.communitycare.co.uk>

¹⁸ "Father involvement and child well-being", Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health, Volume 47, Issue 7, pages 405–407, July 2011

One Parent Families Scotland Fathers' Workers reported that the success of the project was attributed to there being a service tailored to the needs of fathers in particular the provision of a male support worker. Time allocated to promoting positive relationships with fathers and their children was also reported to be a significant contributing factor to the success of the project. In line with the GIRFEC model practitioners ensured that children felt confident about the help they were receiving, had an understanding of the support offered, felt carefully listened to and had their wishes heard and understood. This proved highly successful as one father commented: *"The project is having a great impact in helping [his child] and making [his child] feel comfortable with the changes that are happening in his life"*.

"Us Together" Third Sector Early Intervention Fund

One Parent Families Scotland has a 12 year track record of working with lone fathers and their children. With funding from the Third Sector Early Intervention Fund we have developed "Us Together: Supporting Scotland's Children and their Fathers"

The Us Together team consists of: 1 Senior Children and Fathers Worker, four Children and Fathers Workers based In Edinburgh, Falkirk, Dundee, and North Lanarkshire.

These areas were chosen as there was awareness that within Edinburgh, Falkirk, Dundee and North Lanarkshire there were no specific support services offered to lone and contact fathers and their children. Our services are unique and tailored to the needs of lone and contact fathers and their children. In these areas a dedicated Children and Fathers Worker offers support fathers and their children on a one to one basis or through group work or family activities.

OPFS offers a person-centred approach using the SHANNARI model, My World Triangle¹⁹ and pictorial genograms for younger children. This is reviewed at regular intervals to ensure positive outcomes or future needs are identified. Upon referral, each child is assessed by a staff member to consider all aspects of the child's life. This includes their health, social skills, confidence, educational progress and their ability to form good relationships. We work with other agencies /services to ensure fathers and their children have access to appropriate support in all areas of their lives.

In addition to "Us Together," One Parent Families Scotland also delivers the Edinburgh Lone Fathers Project, Edinburgh Dads Club. The Dads Club is an activity-based parenting support project for single and contact fathers with young children in Edinburgh. It is carried out jointly by Gilmerton Child & Family Centre and One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS), with financial support from Edinburgh Childcare Partnership through the Sure Start programme. The Dads Club is supported by a full time Lone Fathers Worker.

¹⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1141/0065063.pdf>

Some of the fathers who use our services are severely disadvantaged and living on the margins of society. In order to ensure that we are reaching out to the most marginalised fathers, we advertise and provide outreach services in the places that such fathers are likely to frequent and through working in partnership with other statutory and third sector organisations. However, we also understand that working fathers may require support. We therefore ensure that these fathers are targeted through press and publicity materials displayed in and around the local areas. To enable working fathers to access our service, we offer support and group activities outwith normal working hours.

“Us Together “aims to achieve the following 4 outcomes:

Outcome 1: The health and wellbeing of children will be improved by low cost play and physical activity. By identifying and encouraging fathers to attend affordable and sustainable group activities/outings and individual outings with their children, we improve children's health and wellbeing. Opportunities that promote positive interactions create an environment that offers the best start for our children. Children therefore experience a broad range of activities within their local area that fathers might not have been aware of. We promote the benefits of play (both indoor and outdoor) which ultimately lead to improved physical and mental wellbeing for children.

Outcome 2: The relationship between child and father becomes resilient and stronger in the early years. This involves fathers in a learning process that helps them understand and contribute to giving positive and sustainable support to their children. We offer direct support to strengthen bonds between child and father and continually assess the children's progress.

Outcome 3: Children and their fathers are encouraged to learn within the home and group activities within their local community therefore creating a learning environment for both. By encouraging fathers to improve their numeracy and literacy skills, they are in a better position to support their children's life-long education thus becoming more resilient and able to take responsibility for their own actions. Fathers and children are encouraged to learn within the home and through educational visits and group activities.

Outcome 4: Fathers grow in self-confidence and increase parenting capacity.

Fathers are given targeted one-to-one support and group work support. The dedicated fathers' worker provides an advocacy role, information and advice on a wide range of lone parent issues and can signpost to relevant agencies. Fathers are given tips and strategies on how to improve their self-esteem and self-confidence. Parenting advice is offered on a one-to-one and group basis.

5. OPFS Survey of Single & Contact Dads

One Parent Families Scotland held 5 focus group discussions in Jan 2014 to ask single and contact fathers for their input in this call for evidence. 29 fathers took part in these discussions. This short video gives fathers a voice <https://vimeo.com/79215711>

From the feedback it was apparent that like mothers, these fathers want the best for their children. It was recognised that also like mothers, this is more difficult to achieve as a single parent. The fathers recognised that there are a number of complex issues facing lone and fathers and that these issues will not be overcome quickly.

Contact with Services

Some of the fathers felt that “separated fathers “are seen as nice to have around but not essential to the development of children.” This view of men and fathers is quite entrenched in our culture, and by extension is present in the staff that the project encounters in many different areas.

Fathers were concerned about how they are treated by Early Years Services. Some of the fathers felt that they had encountered views from nursery staff which assumed that they are not as capable as mothers, and not respected accordingly. The fathers would like to see these services being proactive and encouraging more men to work in these services.

Fathers also expressed concern about Health Visiting Services. Some fathers felt that these services were based around the needs of mothers and that staff fail to acknowledge the role fathers play in the health of their children. The fathers suggested that health visitors should document their interaction with fathers.

Some fathers raised concerns about their treatment by Social Work Services. Some reported that they felt at times children had been made “accommodated children” based on misconceptions of their parenting abilities and ignoring their parental rights and responsibilities. Fathers also reported a feeling of fear when working with Social Work Services and some said that they had been treated with suspicion by Social Workers around about why they wanted to care for their child(ren). One father said that “I have found the Social Work service to be completely against my point of view. I have consistently felt that my opinion and feelings are always neglected by Social Work. They have never listened to mine or my son’s opinions” The fathers would like to see greater expectations placed on social workers to really involve fathers in care planning.

Some of the contact fathers we spoke to raised negative experiences dealing with Education Services. Some of them had been left out of important meetings about their child(ren) when the mother was included. They would like schools to be more proactive in involving separated fathers. However OPFS fully appreciates that any decisions around contact and involvement should be in the best interests of the child.

Many of the fathers were sole carers of their children and some of them in receipt of benefits. There was a unanimous feeling that the attitude of staff on the phone and in Jobcentres is uncaring of their circumstances as single parents and disregards their role as fathers (assuming that there is a mother doing the majority of the child care). Fathers expressed concern around how benefits are set up and transitioned between separated parents. Many of them have had to endure a huge gap of time until HMRC confirms that they are rightly claiming Child Benefit on behalf of their child (ren). This means that they cannot make applications for Income Support, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. Some fathers said that because of their caring responsibilities they cannot work however due to the time delay in claiming benefits they have had no income. They felt that it is important to look at the inefficiency that often surrounds fathers taking over the care of children 0-4 yrs and improve the support from the DWP and HMRC.

Provision of services

Fathers felt that services such as those delivered by One Parent Families Scotland are a good model of support. They acknowledge some of the challenges they face as single fathers, and valued the support available to them to be the best parents they can be to their children. Some of them travel a long way to be part of OPFS services, and are aware that most parts of Scotland do not have access to this kind of support. They would like to see greater emphasis and funding made available for similar support across the country. It was also suggested that statutory service should be more aware of specific support services for lone fathers.

Societal attitudes towards Single Fathers

The fathers we spoke to wanted to be treated as parents who have the same skills and challenges that mothers do. There was mixed responses to asking fathers what they felt about societal attitudes to lone fathers, some negative and some positive. Some fathers felt that *"Attitudes are changing, single dads are more accepted. Male carers have proved their abilities"* while other responses were more negative *"People think of Dads as the weaker parent, we aren't as good as mums"*

Issues around parental rights and responsibilities for fathers.

Some of the fathers who responded to the OPFS survey raised issues around parental rights and responsibilities. These were mainly around the financial implications that they have faced. There was a feeling of unfairness around the cost of court fees that fathers have to pay when requesting custody or access to their child (ren). Some of the fathers also felt that the way in which benefits were paid was unfair, especially for fathers who have shared custody at 50%. Some of the fathers responding to the survey said they felt alienated or devalued by society's attitude to dads and how they perceive they are regarded as male carers.

However OPFS supports the existing principal legal framework governing contact in Scotland set out in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995,²⁰ and the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006²¹ which define parental responsibilities and associated parental rights (PRRs). Amongst these is the responsibility (and associated right) of a non-resident parent to maintain contact with their child, if that would be in the child's best interests. S.11 of the Act sets out the orders a court can make, including an order in S.11(2) about where a child should live (a residence order) and an order regulating the arrangements for maintaining contact between a child and a person with whom the child is not living, e.g. a non-resident parent (a contact order). However these particular provisions are set in the context of the three overarching general principles guiding any court action in relation to children, as set out in s. 11(7) of the 1995 Act, namely

- 'the court must regard the welfare of the child as its paramount consideration',
- the no-order principle: that the court should only make an order if it is better than making no order,
- 'Taking account of the child's age and maturity, the court shall so far as practicable give the child the opportunity to indicate whether he or she wishes to express any views on the matter in dispute; if the child indicates that he or she does wish to express views, give him or her the opportunity to do so; and have regard to these views.'

OPFS believes these principles, which put the welfare of the child at the centre, should continue to be paramount and would not support a presumption of 'shared parenting/care'.

Whilst there are positive steps the government could take towards enabling shared care, a legal presumption of shared care would focus on parental entitlement rather than what is in the best interests of children, undermining the crucial legal principle that the child's welfare is paramount.

6. Issues around being a Single Dad

Becoming a Single Dad

Becoming a single dad is a life-changing event. Taking on responsibility for the main care of children can be an exciting prospect, but it also brings with it a lot of practical considerations, worries and questions. For dads who have just split up with their partner or are in the process of separating, the transition for the family can be quite difficult to cope with, for example if a partner has died then the single father requires specialist support

²⁰ Children (Scotland) Act 1995 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/36>

²¹ Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/2/contents>

“When we separated it was a shock to be left with the kids. It was the amount you need to deal with as well as the emotional turmoil. It’s having to learn so much so quickly! In the evenings at home you are alone. After the kids are in bed that’s when you worry – money, hanging on to your job, feeling no-one is there to turn to...juggling work and the kids. Will I be able to keep my job-that’s what goes through your head”

Work and Money

Making sure that the family has the money it needs can throw up a lot of questions for a single dad. How can a single dad find the right balance between working and being there for the kids? What if you need to take time off? Can you take paternity leave? What support is available if you want to return to education? And:

“How do I work my way through the minefield that is the benefits and tax credits system to make sure my children are well cared for and my family is getting everything that we are entitled to? Getting advice from OPFS on this was unbelievable. The weight was lifted from my shoulders”

Benefits, Tax Credits and Managing Money

Money is a vital part of family life. For single dads, it can be difficult to know exactly what money they are entitled to and often managing on one income, can stretch finances beyond their means. Understanding their benefit situation and having all the facts about what support is available can make managing money easier and less stressful.

Benefits and tax credits are supposed to help people get the financial support they need. As a single parent, it’s important dads and their children are able to access all the money you’re entitled to. Benefits and tax credits can be complex, as they are based entirely on a person’s specific situation.

Cuts to benefits and tax credits, changes to the rules on what kind of support is available to help single parents, charges to access the future statutory child maintenance system are just some of the challenges facing single dads.

“The government seem to be saying - work more, spend less time with your kids, pay more for your childcare and give the Child Support Agency a slice of your child maintenance payments. Never mind the fact that there are no jobs where I live, its often zero-hour contracts at low pay and re-training and support services are dwindling..”

Home, Health and Education

Day to day life as a single dad is challenging. Combining the role of sole carer and breadwinner raises many issues. Dads have told us that sometimes they come up against a problem which they need some help to work through.

“Sometimes being a single dad can be particularly difficult, and situations do arise that you feel you need some additional support to cope with. It isn’t

always easy to ask for help, but by doing so I felt I was in a much better position to think clearly, tackle problems directly and be there for my children when they really need me “

Childcare

The cost and availability of childcare are important factors in enabling dads to stay in work when they become the primary caregiver and in decisions single dads take to engage with training and employment. With childcare costs increasing in recent years, single parents have found it difficult to find childcare that meets their needs.

Childcare is also a major determining factor in how many hours single dads can work and we know that many fathers have said they would work more hours if they could find good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable. Scottish parents are facing some of the highest childcare costs in Britain, with some local authorities charging twice as much as others for daycare. Nursery prices in some areas are as high as southern England, with 25 hours of care over 50 weeks at the most expensive, costing £11,688.

A report, compiled by the Daycare Trust and Children in Scotland,²² found only a fifth of Scottish councils had enough daycare places to meet local demand.

7. Policy Context

Policies and initiatives supporting parents in Scotland are connected to a range of inter-related Scottish Government policy frameworks. The Scottish Governments National Performance Framework²³ acknowledges the growing awareness of the importance of early years for the long-term health, wellbeing, learning and life chances of Scotland's children. The overarching aims are detailed in GIRFEC²⁴ approach ensures that *anyone* providing support puts the child or young person – and their family – at the centre.

The Early Years Framework.²⁵ focuses on the needs of families with children from pre-birth to age eight. A central theme is the reduction of inequalities, particularly health inequalities. The parenting task group for the Framework recognised that: “Every child has the right to be planned for, prepared for and parented by adults who are aware of and responsive to their growing needs. We have a duty to support parents in developing the skills and capacities that will help them make the most of their role as parents, provide services which assist families with this responsibility and target support to those who need assistance to access those services” (Parenting Task Force, 2008).²⁶ At the same time it acknowledged that some parents faced particular challenges. We believe single dads should be recognised as a priority group requiring access to tailored support.

²² http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/Scottish_Childcare_Lottery.pdf

²³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms>

²⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/publications>

²⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/13095148/1>

²⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/parenting-report>

Alongside this, a number of other inter-related frameworks have been put in place to address specific inequalities relating to health, deprivation and social inclusion. Equally Well²⁷ recommends creating healthy environments that promote healthy lifestyles for children. Achieving Our Potential²⁸ acknowledges the risks faced by children and young people who experience poverty and that many children and young people are being held back by social and economic factors that limit their chances of escaping poverty when they are older. The Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland²⁹ sets out the Scottish Government's approach to tackling these risks by maximising household resources, improving children's life chances, addressing area-based disadvantage and working with local partners. Many single dads are living on extremely low incomes and their needs should be identified in any strategies to eradicate child poverty and tackle health inequalities.

The preventative spend agenda led by the Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee³⁰

recommended prioritising funding for early years" initiatives in recognition of the importance of positive child development upon national wellbeing across a wide range of indicators." It is clear from the analysis presented in this response by OPFS that continued investment in support for single dads fits extremely well into this preventative agenda.

The Early Years Collaborative³¹ is a part of the Scottish Government's plan to shift the balance of public services towards early intervention and prevention. In October 2012, the Scottish Government published its Parenting Strategy³² with the aim of providing better support to all parents. OPFS submitted evidence to the development of the parenting strategy and we are pleased to see that single parents are identified as a key target group.

The concept of "progressive universalism" (some services and support will be available to all parents and additional support will be targeted at those requiring it) informs the Children and Young People's Act.³³ In line with the goal to make employment, education and training more accessible for all parents, we hope the needs of single dads will feature as a priority in local authority plans when policy reaches the implementation stage.

UK government welfare reform³⁴ changes to the benefits system have had a devastating impact on single dads. They are now required to sign on when their youngest child is 5 years and to look for employment. OPFS has many cases of dads who have been sanctioned by JCP for reasons that do not meet the requirements of the legislation. Research yet to be published by OPFS has highlighted a significant number of issues and challenges experienced by lone

²⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/229649/0062206.pdf>

²⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/20103815/6>

²⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/6>

³⁰ <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/finance/reports-11/fir11-01.htm>

³¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years>

³² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00403769.pdf>

³³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/legislation>

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/simplifying-the-welfare-system-and-making-sure-work-pays>

parents, including single dads as they have attempted to make the transition to JSA and/or into employment. Of particular significance amongst these have been issues related to a lack of suitably flexible employment opportunities and corresponding affordable and available childcare.

8. Recommendations

Contact with Services

1. Early Years Services. Some of the fathers felt that they had encountered views from nursery staff which assumed that they are not as capable as mothers. *The Fathers would like to see Early Years Services being proactive and encouraging more men to work in these services.*
2. Health Visiting Services. Some fathers felt that Health Visitors fail to acknowledge the role fathers play in the health of their children. *The fathers suggested that health visitors should document their interaction with fathers.*
3. Social Work Services. Some fathers reported a feeling of fear when working with Social Work Services and some said that they had been treated with suspicion by Social Workers around about why they wanted to care for their child(ren). *The fathers would like to see greater expectations placed on social workers to really involve fathers in care planning, within the framework of the appropriate legislation*
4. Education Services. Some father felt excluded from important meetings about their child (ren) when the mother was included. *Fathers suggested that would like schools to be more proactive in involving separated fathers. However OPFS fully appreciates that any decisions around contact and involvement should be in the best interests of the child.*
5. JCP & HMRC There was a unanimous view from Fathers that the attitude of JCP staff on the phone and in Jobcentres is uncaring of their circumstances as single parents and disregards their role as fathers.

Fathers felt strongly that JCP & HMRC should review processes around how benefits are set up and transitioned between separated parents. They felt that it is important to look at the inefficiency that often surrounds fathers taking over the care of children 0-4 yrs and improve the support from the DWP and HMRC.

Provision of services

6. Fathers felt that some of the challenges they face as single fathers are unique, and valued tailored support from agencies which understand and were able to support them to be the best parents they can be to their children.

Fathers said they would like to see greater emphasis and funding made available for support for single fathers and their children across the country. It was also suggested that statutory services should be more aware of specific support services for lone fathers so they can signpost them on.

Societal attitudes towards Single Fathers

7. Fathers we spoke to wanted to be treated as parents who have the same skills and challenges that mothers do.

Fathers said they would like to see a government campaign to challenge the stereotypes about fathers still very much present in Britain. The campaign would aim to challenge the stereotypes about single dads and instead show them for what they really are – hardworking, resourceful and a vital part of the diversity of family life.

Parental Rights and Responsibilities for Fathers and Shared Care

8. The Government should remove the obstacles that make it harder for low-income couples to share post-separation care.

- *OPFS believes the principles, which put the welfare of the child at the centre, should continue to be paramount and would not support a presumption of 'shared parenting/care'*
- *Parents sharing care should both be entitled to take advantage of the flexibilities available to single parents on Jobseeker's Allowance, such as the ability to fit working hours around school hours if their child is aged under 13.*
- *The Government should reverse housing benefit changes to the age limit for the shared room rate which would mean any single person under 35 would only be able to claim a lower rate intended for a room in shared accommodation, as these hit the parent in a shared care arrangement not deemed the main carer.*

Childcare

Childcare is a major determining factor in how many hours single dads can work and we know that many fathers have said they would work more hours if they could find good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable.

- *The Scottish government to take the lead in implementing the Early Years Framework by legislating to provide a childcare place for every child.*
- *A universal entitlement to early childhood education and care, with subsidies to limit what parents pay themselves, would make the benefits of early learning available to every child.*
- *The UK government should reverse its childcare tax credit cut which reduced support for childcare costs from 80% to 70%*

Employment and family life

Fathers who are the main carer of their child/ren told us how difficult it is to combine the role of sole carer & breadwinner and that a recognition that single parents in work would benefit from a more family friendly work environment.

- *Employers should be encouraged and be made aware of the benefits of flexible working and family-friendly practice.*
- *Government & Business organisations should promote more tolerance for men who need to spend time with their children.*
- *Policies such as adequately paid parental leave, improving rights to request flexible working, provision of decent and well-paid part-time jobs, and access to affordable and quality childcare are crucial to supporting single dads to sustain employment.*
- *system of paid parental leave introduced which as a minimum should incorporate a set number of paid days for the care of children who are ill, which operates in a similar way to statutory sick pay for individuals.*
- *In addition, we believe that unpaid parental leave should be available until a child is aged 18.*

9. Conclusions

It's often women who are associated with single parenthood. However Scotland's single dads are significant percentage of parents with the main care of their children. They face many of the same barriers single mothers face but the response above highlights some of the different challenges single dads face. A single dad responding to our survey put it this way:

"Society puts too many unnecessary barriers in our way. Lone fathers and their children deserve better. Becoming a lone-father family is difficult enough."

One Parent Families Scotland
28 February 2014

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

FATHERS AND PARENTING

SUBMISSION FROM PARENTING ACROSS SCOTLAND

About Parenting across Scotland

Parenting across Scotland (PAS) is a partnership of voluntary organisations working together to provide a focus for issues and concerns affecting parents and families in Scotland.

The PAS partners are CHILDREN 1ST, Aberlour Childcare Trust, Capability Scotland, Children in Scotland, Families Outside, One Parent Families Scotland, Relationships Scotland, Scottish Adoption, and The Spark.

The Parenting across Scotland partners work with thousands of disadvantaged families throughout Scotland. Partners provide services to families living in poverty, lone families, families affected by disability, families affected by substance abuse, kinship carers, adoptive families, separated families, stepfamilies and many others. We use the views and experiences of those using partner services to inform our policy responses.

PAS provides ***information and support*** to parents through:

- its website www.parentingacrossscotland.org
- its partners' helplines (Parentline, Lone Parent helpline, Advice Service Capability Scotland and Relationships helpline)
- our Ten Top Tips publications for parents

PAS works on ***policy*** through consultation responses, engagement with politicians and decision-makers, participation in government working groups, conferences and seminars, and its e-mail newsletter for practitioners.

PAS uses ***research*** to inform its policy and information work. We commission research and work with others to inform their research.

Surveys of parents - PAS has conducted representative surveys of parents in Scotland (undertaken on behalf of PAS by Ipsos-MORI). The results of our MORI polls can be found on the PAS website (<http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/publications/polls-and-surveys.aspx>).

Fathers

Introduction

[Please note: Parenting across Scotland's evidence considers fathers both generally, and specifically considers issues affecting single and non-resident fathers; the general comments about fathers will also be pertinent to single and separated fathers.]

The benefits to children, mothers and families (and fathers) of involved fathering have been clearly established (Flouri 2005; Lamb 2010). And on the ground, the facts of Scottish fathers' greater involvement are also clear - men living in Scotland are the most 'hands-on' fathers in the UK. More than 65% of Scottish fathers change their baby's nappies once a day or more, a fifth more than the UK average of 43%, and they are also most likely to watch their babies being born (Dex and Joshi 2004). (Extract from Gary Clapton's essay for Parenting across Scotland, see below).

Many fathers are (or want to be) playing a more active role in their child's life. A number of studies show fathers wanting to have more time to spend with their children. The Equality and Human Rights Commission report, Fathers, Family and Work, found that 54% of fathers with children under one felt they were not devoting enough time to them, while 42% of fathers felt they were not able to spend enough time with their children. The report also found 62% of fathers thought that, in general, fathers should spend more time caring for their children.

(http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/41_wb_fathers_family_and_work.pdf)

The quality of the time that fathers spend with their children is more important than either the amount of time that they spend together. For separated families establishing a relationship that puts the well-being of their child at the centre and minimises conflict between the couple is essential but problematic. Given how strong the evidence is around high levels of conflict producing negative outcomes for children, emphasis needs to be put and resources directed towards services which enable parents to work together for the benefit of their children.

We would draw the Committee's attention to Gary Clapton's article about fathers, Scottish Fathers: an absence in Scottish policies, in Parenting across Scotland's collection of parenting essays, Scotland: the best place in the world to bring up children, which addresses the need to include fathers:

<http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/publications/essays-about-parenting/parenting/scottish-fathers-an-absence-in-scottish-policies.aspx>

Services

Services for parents are generally seen as being geared up for women and not welcoming of men. Societal attitudes that parenting is primarily a female responsibility borne largely by mothers has undoubtedly had an impact on service design and development. From antenatal groups through to parents' evenings, fathers

often report feeling excluded and unwelcome. Attendees at many parents' groups tend to be primarily female. The workforce in childcare and other caring/children's services tend to be composed largely of women. Altogether the child raising sphere is perceived as a female environment. More needs to be done to redress this balance for fathers. Service design needs to consider the needs of fathers, ensure that they are represented in publicity materials and feel welcomed by services. Measures need to be taken to address the gender imbalance within the workforce so that men are better represented.

Fathers report workers in early years provision, childcare and educational settings seeing them as less capable or less involved simply because of their sex. Often fathers report not getting communication from schools and doctors about their children.

Because services often feel as if they are for women and indeed are often used almost exclusively by mothers to the exclusion of fathers, a number of services specifically designed for fathers have been developed. It is important that services specifically for men do exist and allow men a chance to develop their parenting skills and to engage with other fathers. Projects designed specifically for men often attract and engage men where universal services currently cannot. However, services specifically designed for fathers are relatively few and are geographically dispersed, making it difficult for many fathers to access support in their local area.

Information for parents is often seen to be designed and addressed to mothers, with the result that it is often not used by fathers. Parenting websites are often aimed primarily at mothers, even down to their names, netmums and mumsnet, for example. Research indicates that this is off-putting for many fathers, and that many fathers would welcome 'dad- specific' information. When Parenting across Scotland gathered together information for dads on its website, and had a marketing campaign aimed at dads (through social media and football programmes) to highlight this area of the website, website traffic soared, indicating that fathers were interested in receiving this sort of targeted information.

Fathers in the workplace

Fathers are more likely than mothers to be working whether they are separated or part of a couple. Yet their needs as parents are less likely to be considered within the workplace. Generally while both mothers and fathers experience difficulties combining work with family life, fathers are less likely to be seen as parents and to have their needs considered as valid. For example, fathers are twice as likely to have their requests for flexible working turned down as women (Dept for Business, Skills and Innovation 2012). Nearly one father in five who applied for flexible working in 2012 had their request turned down compared to one woman in ten.

A recent report by Working Families, Time, Health and the Family, found that:

“Fathers, particularly young fathers, are more resentful towards their employers about their work-life balance. Fathers in the 26-35 age group were the most resentful. Fathers with a single child tended to be more resentful towards their employers than fathers with more than one child. “

The full report is available here

<http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/admin/uploads/THFembargo27JanFinal.pdf>

We would also draw the Committee’s attention to the report by Working Families:

<http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/admin/uploads/Fathers%20research%20project%20interim%20report.pdf>

How fathers regard their parenting responsibilities is changing, which impacts on how they view their work commitments and what they need from their employers. In a study (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-26274518>) launched today (21 Feb 2014) researchers reported that more than a fifth of men wish they had looked after their children rather than returning to work. More than a third of men questioned told researchers that they worked full-time and were offered no flexibility at all by their employers.

Changing legislation (the Children and Families Act 2014 UK) from Westminster, parts of which have Scottish extent, will bring in new regulations relating to flexible working and to parental leave (including the provision to share maternity and paternal leave) later this year. While, undoubtedly, these provisions do not go far enough and more could be done (for example, allowing fathers more paid paternal leave), nonetheless they represent some progress and should be widely promoted in Scotland to enable fathers to take up legal rights which will improve fathers’ position in the workplace.

Contact issues

Contact issues are frequently a cause for dispute with fathers either being unable to gain access rights or access breaking down. Parentline report a significant volume of calls from men relating to these issues. Many fathers report bias by the courts in decision making, difficulty gaining access to their children and mothers withholding access for no valid reason. Conversely, mothers often report fathers failing to turn up for contact time, failing to pay maintenance or breaking agreements. Some fathers undoubtedly do face genuine difficulties with contact from assumptions made by the court to the mother breaking existing agreements. However, it should also be recognised that this is an area where emotions run high, and there may be perceived injustices and resentment on both sides with completely disparate accounts, and that the reality may lie somewhere between the two conflicting reports. Where this level of conflict exists between separated parents, it should be remembered that it is children who bear the brunt.

Evidence shows that parental relationships which are supportive, positive and co-operative are important for children’s well-being. High levels of conflict are associated with more negative outcomes. This is as true for children where parents

are separated as for couples, but is obviously more difficult to achieve. Services provided by our partner organisations, Relationships Scotland and the Spark, such as counselling, parenting apart classes, and family mediation, have a large part to play in minimising conflict between separated parents and achieving better outcomes for children. We refer the Committee to the evidence provided by Relationships Scotland. The Committee should also note that Relationships Scotland have recently called for mediation to be put on a mandatory footing and offered to all separating parents as a means to reducing conflict between parents. Given the impact that parental conflict has on children, the Committee should look at ways to minimise and alleviate this conflict for the benefit of children.

Fathers in prison

One group of fathers who are non-resident but are not often considered is fathers in prison. Many fathers still want to stay in contact while they are in prison, and often their families wish this to happen too. However, even where there is willingness for this to happen, a number of barriers often get in the way. For many families, the cost and time of travel can be a deterrent. Where prison visiting times are rigidly upheld and enforced, this can make it difficult for families to attend. Prison visiting facilities are often inappropriate for family visits. Sometimes too, the prison may use withdrawal of visiting rights as a disciplinary measure, impacting not only on the father but on the children anticipating a visit with their father.

Things are changing, and it seems to be becoming more accepted that a withdrawal of liberty does not, and should not, mean a withdrawal of parental responsibilities and contact. Evidence shows that recidivism is much reduced when prisoners are released and have maintained family contact. Equally importantly, children should not be deprived of a parent because their parent is deprived of their liberty.

A number of prisons are taking proactive and positive steps to engage with families and encourage sustained family relationships. Examples include play projects, parenting and relationship programmes and improved family visiting facilities within prisons. However, each prison has its own regime and the provision of programmes is not uniform throughout the prison estate, so that families affected by imprisonment throughout Scotland cannot expect the same treatment.

There may, of course, be instances where it is not safe or desirable to maintain contact, and risk assessments should be undertaken to ascertain whether this is the case. However, where it is safe to do so, encouraging and supporting fathers in prison to maintain contact with their family is often beneficial to the father, the children, the wider family and ultimately society in terms of its effect in reducing reoffending.

Additional information

Parenting across Scotland, in association with the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, is about to publish an evidence review, Fathers' contribution to children's wellbeing: a review of the literature. We would be happy to share this review with the Committee once it is finalised and published.

We have also attached a booklet produced from evidence about what matters for children after parents separate. This booklet has been widely disseminated to separating parents throughout Scotland.

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