

FATHER FIGURES



CONFERENCE REPORT

19th March 2004

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Speaker – Julie Mellor, Equal Opportunities Commission UK discussed recent changes that have enhanced equal opportunities;

- 2 weeks paid paternity leave.
- Parental entitlement to 13 wks unpaid parental leave before child's 5th birthday.
- Designated leave for men and flexibility in how couples take leave.
- Publicity for male provision.

EOC WAY FORWARD

- Research involving fathers.
- Partnership with other agencies including the Scottish Exec.
- Better employment rights.
- Working with employers

WISH LIST

- Paid leave for first year, with designated period for fathers only.
- Flexible parental leave.
- Reliable under 5 child care – extended day and summer holiday cover.
- Flexible working for all, by mutual agreement for life/work balance.
- Credits in pension system for looking after children.
- High quality childcare workforce.
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Speaker – Yvonne Strachan , Head of Equality Unit – Scottish Exec

- Scottish Exec committed to equal opportunities, inequalities affect every area of life regards gender, sex and race.
- Child's needs responded to sensitively.
- Variations in needs between parents. Work with fathers specifically still embryonic.
- 61% of fathers took 2wks paternity leave.
- 1/3 of all childcare taken by men.
- Women's labour position still weak in comparison with men but greatly improved.
- Both seeking better work/life balance which means looking at working hours, perceived assumptions about roles.
- Gov action on parental leave and flexible working helpful.

BUT

- Men feel they have less accessibility to flexibility.
- Men work longest hours in Europe, compared to women's part time working.
- Women's earnings 16% less than men, particularly if part time; this loss of earnings pressurise who is mainly responsible for childcare. Resolving women's inequalities can help men's inequalities!
- Demand for change because of father's changing roles will fuel change and attitudes and research and providers.

WISH LIST - Family Law, improve father's rights.

- Quality of Childcare.
 - Equalities of pay, less disparity, time out can be more equally shared.
 - Employment Practice, to be seen as a good thing rather than enforced by law.
 - Hours worked, need to support men who take leave and be open and equal about flexible working.
- Role for wider discussion on role of fathers, wider role of fathers to be welcomed.

Speaker - Charlie Lewis, Lancaster University.

This talk was radically cut due to the speaker's late arrival and his own miscalculation of the time allotted to his talk. This was a great pity as it was an interesting talk, although somewhat disjointed. The main points were;

- Early years influence of the mother promoted closeness up to age 16.
- Similarly true of father/ child involvement.
- Those boys with close relationships with fathers had less contact with the police at age 16 than those without contact.
- At age 33 those with good father attachments had better and more satisfying stable relationships than those without.
- Fathers did not have to live with the child in order to gain this beneficial effect but to have regular quality contact.
- It appears fathers' influence has a long term "slowburn" effect compared to mothers' more initial obvious one.

PM – Families Affected by Imprisonment – workshop 'Fathers Inside'

- Families Feel** - punished and stigmatised,
- unsupported and not given information needed to cope and make sense of their situation.
 - Prisoners are up to 6 times less likely to re offend if strong family ties are maintained.
 - Children who have a relative in prison are more vulnerable to later involvement with the justice system.
 - Many families don't maintain contact if they are victims of the crime.
 - 13,500 children a year in Scotland are affected and suffer significant mental health problems and the physical symptoms of stress, bedwetting etc.
 - Visits crucial in maintaining relationships. Cost and distance crucial. Often 5 – 12 hours travelling including 45 min visit and 3 – 4 changes of transport.

- Pressure points** - Initial incarceration with sense of powerlessness, usually in denial and with no opportunity of working through practical issues with partners.
- Attitudes of prison officers crucial for families to continue visits.
 - Prisoners welfare; difficult to ascertain from families
 - Fantasy on home leave and release – the reality of adjustment and re establishing relationships.

What works - Research shows a number of positive outcomes when family ties maintained. What is less clear is whether support intervention for prisoners' families is effective.

- Need factual and support based information.
- Need visits, help with travel and play provision for children.
- Visitor centres and pro active work with families to provide independent venue for families to share concerns.
- Support staff and support groups.

Families Outside – a national charity working on behalf of families affected by imprisonment.

- Helpline: 0500 839383. 200 calls a year, 100% increase over last year.
- Research, helping to improve policy and practice.
- National standards for children visiting prison.
- Increasingly involved with Scottish Exec through care policy.

Finished with officer who works with prisoners encouraging positive contacts with children: videos of reading bedtime stories for their kids which are sent to the children and provide a continuous reference point for family.

A one off 2 hour family contact time with whole family.

On phone calls and visits always ask child how they are and ask what they are doing.

Videos of "Father Centres" where dads can meet, talk, relax and develop skills. Personal testimony from dads to say how much they have enjoyed and benefitted from contacts established.

Gill Bayfield April 2004

