

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
FATHERS AND PARENTING FATHERS AND PARENTING
SUBMISSION FROM CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND

Children in Scotland is pleased to submit evidence to the Equal Opportunities Committee. Since 2008, CiS has carried out, on behalf of the Scottish Government Equalities Unit, the 'Fathers and Families' project. This project is intended to support the implementation of the statutory gender equality duty by ensuring that fathers are treated as, and encouraged to be, equal parents to their children. In undertaking the project, CiS has developed partnerships with a range of organisations, particularly those working specifically with and on behalf of fathers. These organisations will be providing evidence on the broad range of issues in which the Committee is interested. Children in Scotland will focus largely on the specific areas of expertise and experience we have developed during the six years of the project's operation.

Pre-birth and early years

In 2011, Children in Scotland, in collaboration with a number of voluntary and public sector partners, produced the Dads2B CD-ROM¹. This provides a range of helpful resources for practitioners undertaking ante-natal education with prospective fathers. While the resource has been well received, its usage in practice has not been as extensive as intended; this is largely due to reduction in ante-natal education generally and only one NHS Board currently offering specific provision for fathers. The benefits that accrue to children when their father is positively involved in their lives (even if he is not resident in the household) is well evidenced.² Even early years programmes directed specifically at mothers, such as the Family-Nurse Partnership, have been shown to have better impact if the child's father has been included.³ If Scotland aspires to give its children the 'best start in life'⁴, then ensuring that fathers are actively involved, included, and valued is a critical and essential component of this. Practical measures that would support this include

- 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

¹ (http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk/docs/13302Dads2bResource_A-2.pdf)

² [http://www.ecdip.org/docs/pdf/IF%20Father%20Res%20Summary%20\(KD\).pdf](http://www.ecdip.org/docs/pdf/IF%20Father%20Res%20Summary%20(KD).pdf)

³ <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/fi-research-summary-should-parenting-programmes-engage-with-both-parents/>

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms>

- Consistent with the National Parenting Strategy⁵ services should value and support mothers and fathers equally, for example in play, communication and other activities that promote children's healthy development.

Non-resident fathers and schools

In collaboration with Families Need Fathers Scotland, Children in Scotland is developing good practice guidance for schools on involvement on non-resident parents (mostly, but not exclusively, fathers) in their children's education. This is being produced because of the frequency with which this issue is raised by separated parents in calls to the FNF helpline. Many reported being refused access to information about their child's educational progress and not being told about important meetings such as parent consultation nights.

As a starting point, Freedom of Information requests were made to all local authorities, to ascertain the nature of policy and practice in each council area. The majority of local authorities have no specific policy on the involvement of non-resident parents, and only one of those who responded indicated that a specific initiative aimed at involving both parents existed in their area. Only one authority knew the percentage of children in their schools who did not live with both their parents, and many relied on the resident parent to pass on information to the non-resident. Contact details for the non-resident parent was not routinely held in many schools, nor was there a clear local authority level procedure that required this. Research confirms that fathers' (resident or non-resident) involvement in supporting children's education leads to better outcomes; a study by the Centre for Research into Parenting and Children at Oxford University⁶, for example, found father involvement consistent with the following outcomes

- Better educational attainment
- Less likelihood of trouble with police
- Good relationships in adolescence and adulthood
- Less likely to become homeless
- Reduced incidence of later mental health problems.

Children in Scotland believes that practice in this area could be significantly improved. The good practice guide, currently under development, should be disseminated to all local authorities, who should then take steps to ensure that all schools are made aware of it and operate according to its principles. Examples of good practice include holding separate parent consultation events for non-resident parents, so that they can still contribute fully to their children's learning, even if the relationship between the parents is difficult, ensuring that the non-resident parent receives, timeously, a copy of all correspondence from school directly and encouraging fathers to become involved with school activities such as paired reading, fund-raising or sports.

⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/10/4789>

⁶ The-Role-of-Father-Involvement-and-Mother-Involvement-in-Adolescents-Psychological-Well-being.pdf (Buchanan & Flouri, 2003)

Conclusion

Children in Scotland believes that the evidence for the positive involvement of fathers in children's healthy learning and development is indisputable. This is of particular importance for children at risk of inequitable outcomes, where incidence of separated families is higher than average. We welcome the Scottish Parliament's attention to this issue and hope that positive action will result from the enquiry.

Marion Macleod
21 February 2014

Children in Scotland is the national umbrella organisation for the children's sector in Scotland.