

FATHERS IN BARNET

Research into the availability of/and need for
father support groups and services within the
Sure Start areas of Underhill & West Hendon,
London Borough of Barnet

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By

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'I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.' John 10:10

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Executive Summary

Sure Start is the Government's programme to support children, families and communities through the integration of early education, childcare, health and family support. Sure Start is committed to delivering the best start in life for every child, better opportunities for parents, affordable, good quality childcare and stronger, safer communities. It is also a cornerstone of the Government's drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. Sure Start local programmes are a key part of delivering this aim. They are based in areas of disadvantage and aim to improve the health and well being of young children under 4 and their families, so that children have a greater opportunity to flourish when they go to school.¹

As part of the local evaluation of West Hendon and Underhill, Wards in the London Borough of Barnet, it has been suggested that fathers are not involved with the services provided and indeed in the development of their children. Comments like *'dads are hiding'*, *'men don't know what they want'*, *'there aren't many dads'*, *'on Saturdays I see dads with buggies so they must be out there'* have demanded the necessity of a research project into fathers in these two areas.

There is a common perception that men need support and access to services: *'we should not exclude men,' 'we need a strategy for working with dads, co-ordinated services,' 'we should be trying harder to get dads involved in baby's upbringing, 'specific efforts should be made to seek their opinion (dads) and make them feel their opinion is valued and counted', 'definitely more dads need to be at toddler groups', 'we would like dads to be involved in activities, in partnership' and 'dads should participate in the decision making process'.* There have even been some suggestions as to what support is needed: *'dads need support for post natal depression, discipline, tantrums and education'* although others have stated that *'we need to know what fathers issues are.'*

This report is aimed at providing a wide understanding as to the issues relating to services for parents, in particularly for fathers, and what, if anything needs to be done in the future.

The focus is on Sure Start, as the sponsors of the report, and the first issue to be examined is their role within West Hendon and Underhill. Our opening paragraph describes the National directive for Sure Start but, when talking about fathers, our findings have different viewpoints about the implementation of this programme. *'All our events are in the middle of the day – no access for working dads', 'very often meetings etc. are held in mornings or during daytime if father happens to be working they can't attend. Therefore, meetings should be scheduled to suit working fathers schedules', 'current environment of Sure Start office is very unfriendly (8th floor of office block)' and 'dads should be asked to be involved more in groups rather than being made to feel inadequate by staff and by mums.'*

¹ Taken from the National Evaluation of Sure Start, August 2003

There is a common misunderstanding about the role of Sure Start – *‘never heard of SS, what do they do?’*, *‘still unclear of the role of SS in this area’*, and that there is a *‘lack of clarity as to why one venue was chosen as a children’s centre and not others!’* However, some people know exactly what Sure Start is about – *‘Sure Start are great for bringing kids and families together’*, *‘Sure Start is a slow process but they are definitely getting there’*, *‘the best form of advertising is by word of mouth and this can be done by those who have had positive Sure Start experiences.’*

free@last were not commissioned to evaluate the effectiveness of the Sure Start programme, except in it’s work with fathers, and we have only researched into the mainstream areas of this work. We have included several impacts and influences based on culture and faith but not a specific section and we have not developed any thoughts based on gay and lesbian parenting as this was not a theme highlighted by any of the service providers or residents interviewed.

This report is simply based on research into the involvement of father’s in their children’s lives in the London Borough of West Hendon and Underhill.

1. Introduction

The Brief

The Board of Sure Start Underhill and West Henden have highlighted the lack of involvement/engagement of fathers that live within these two areas and are now seeking to redress this omission by commissioning free@last to carry out some base line work. Many of the Sure Start groups within the two areas have been targeted or designed to attract mothers, there now needs to be research into:

- whether there are already fathers groups operating within/outside the Sure Start programme
- if there are groups already in place to look into the possibilities of Sure Start Underhill and West Henden working with them and sharing best practice
- whether there is a need for the programme to run its own group
- where there are groups running, how can Sure Start support them
- what kind of groups fathers would prefer

There would need to be:

- an assessment of need in both areas, taking into account the different make up of each area
- consultation with fathers within both areas
- an assessment of the possibility of bringing the groups together to meet at least once or twice a year
- consultation with other related community groups
- consultation with relevant Sure Start practitioners

Methodology

Before any interviews had been arranged the priority for us was to walk around both of the programme areas. It is only through seeing the areas up close and personal that we could begin to assess the different needs of the very diverse communities that we are researching. Using a variety of maps, websites and library documents we were able to build a picture of the demographics, the physical state of the areas and the links between each smaller community within the defined project areas. We then began the process of identifying professionals, volunteers and local parents who could help us complete the picture of what it is like to live and parent in these areas.

In order for us to simplify the interviewing process we took the key aims and objectives of Sure Start and of our consultation brief, and created our key question 'how do fathers influence and impact the development of their children during the first 4 years of their lives?' This was obviously adapted to conform with the relevant setting that we were in when interviewing. We also encouraged some of the service providers to involve the children by drawing or writing about their dads.

We have accumulated a wealth of information and have sifted through the details to create a rounded report that highlights the local situation (regarding fathers, services and provision), the local need, and the way forward for Sure Start and practitioners in these two areas.

2. Observations of the National Evaluation of Sure Start (Fathers in Sure Start 2001)

The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) highlighted many similarities found by us during our consultation process. This report, although compiled 4 years ago, recognised many changes that need to be made in order for fathers to be truly included in services that are offered to mothers and 'parents' (these include Parent and Toddler groups which are still perceived as mother only groups). It is unfortunate that the barriers presented in this report are still present and discriminatory attitudes have yet to be challenged and eradicated.

There is a common misconception that fathers are not involved in their children's lives. Indeed the NESS reports that

'in terms of absolute measures of father's involvement, most estimates have indicated an upward trend since the 1970s. With increases especially sharp since 1985 and in particular for those men with children under the age of 5.... who devoted less than 15 minutes per day to child related activities (as their main activity) in the mid 1970s in comparison to 2 hrs a day by the late 1990s.'

Is the explanation for father's greater involvement with their children over the last 30 years due to the academic discovery of improved children's development through male involvement? The NASS reports suggest that although *'this might reflect a greater commitment to fatherhood, the likely explanation is that young mothers are far more involved in the labour force and their partners often work complementary shifts to share out childcare.'* This may apply to a small number in our society but we, at free@last, beg to differ, as the luxury of flexible hours is far from a reality for the majority of the labour workforce.

The evidence of men's greater involvement is based, not just in theoretical writings but in everyday life. As you walk in the park or push your trolley up and down the shopping aisles you will see men, men who are fathers out with their families. Fathers are spending time with their children, whether that is carrying out the essential chores of the home or recreational activities dads are involved. So why do we, as statutory and voluntary organisations, feel it is our job to educate them in their role as a father and provide gender specific services?

One such field of expertise is health, and the NASS report states that the young men interviewed *'reported feeling excluded from anti-natal and post-natal care and in turn health care professionals described a distant relationship to fathers. They often knew little about the fathers, and did not see them as central to their task, and felt they lacked the skills to engage with men.'* This is a common complaint amongst men who recognise that they have a role to play during labour and the early stages of childbirth but feel

isolated by the 'system'. Yes there are some Midwives and Health Visitors who encourage the involvement of fathers but their inclusion has limits, based on the fact that all the reports and forms connected to childbirth are mother and baby focused. The father may not feel the physical pain of childbirth (except nail marks!!) but they certainly feel the emotional stress of labour, childbirth and the rest of their children's lives. One of the researchers recalls watching in horror as his wife was in tremendous pain during labour and knowing there was absolutely nothing he could do to stop it! Not once was he asked if he was ok, and yes the focus had to be on the physical birth, but there was never any support or encouragement for what he, as the dad, went through. The NESS recognises the *'under- representation of men and fathers in health and social care settings as users of services'* and the difficulties of involving men are often due to the fact that no-one thinks about them, or provokes questions about service delivery or professionals attitudes.

The NESS also indicated *'that family support services may be insensitive to the need of fathers. Ghete et al (2000) recently found that many workers at family centres felt unease at engaging fathers. Fathers also expressed dissatisfaction with the activities on offer at family centres.'* These activities, as with West Hendon and Underhill, were female orientated, but on occasions they were 'male friendly' – like sports, outings, and fun days.

Our research showed that initially a high percentage of professionals said they worked with dads, or had dads attend their services. We found this to be more of an awareness of dads and as with the National picture *'programmes might typically have one or two fathers or male carers who regularly access services (perhaps on a weekly basis).'* Indeed *'a key theme was the difficulty that they had in engaging with local dads.'*

A significant discovery was that *'very few [men] were employed in roles that involved working directly with children. The great majority tended to be concentrated in traditionally male positions. For example, male staff were often caretakers or handymen. In addition, a few programmes employed male tutors to deliver training to parents.'* *'The main reason given by programme managers for the lack of male applicants was the traditional societal concept of work with children as women's work. In addition, one programme manager pointed out that the poor wages associated with childcare work were also a barrier. Poor pay meant that childcare positions were often taken to provide a family's second rather than primary household income.'*

As we have discovered women want men to be involved but are not 100% confident that they can cope and truly look after 'their baby'! If a child is crying in the middle of the night the mother wants the father to share the responsibility (because she is physically shattered) but, even after the dad has been in, they would still lie in bed awake wondering whether the baby is ok – did dad put the dummy in the right place? Have they covered her over properly? etc. *'There was evidence from interviews that some mothers found it hard to relinquish responsibility for childcare to their male partners. Behaviours or beliefs of mothers may limit father's opportunities to participate*

in family life.' On a less serious analogy the same feelings are expressed when the man lends 'his' car to his partner!!

The NESS developed a strategy for involving fathers, some of which are as follows:

- Ensuring that positive images of fatherhood are visible within Sure Start buildings (e.g. displaying photos of dads with their children)
- Providing services in evenings or weekends to encourage participation from working dads
- Raising the awareness among staff (e.g. Health Visitors and midwives) about the importance of engaging fathers
- Starting up fathers groups
- Advertising Sure Start services in venues where fathers may gather (e.g. pubs, social clubs and bookmakers)
- Consulting with fathers to ensure that service delivery is meeting their needs
- Provision of services

The main recommendations from the NESS are:

- Increase the visibility of male workers at all levels to make the Sure Start environment more male friendly. Lack of male presence was identified as a key barrier to father involvement.
- Increase the provision of father-focused services consulting with fathers to inform service delivery and building on men's interests.
- Using peer support
- Developing sensitivity to the needs of different groups within the community of fathers.
- Early identification of fathers as a priority.
- Programme wide commitment to father involvement.
- A strategy for involving fathers.
- Provision of services specifically for fathers.
- Presence of a dedicated staff member (often a dads worker) for encouraging father's involvement.

There are many similarities between the NESS evaluation and our findings, which shows that during the last four years there still hasn't been a national drive and strategy implemented and professional influence on the involvement of fathers is non-existent.

At free@last we believe that one of the main reasons for this neglect of support and guidance for fathers is due to a lack of understanding about the role of fathers and the different needs of men. This report uses the information given by local residents and professional workers from the West Hendon and Underhill areas as a baseline to develop the theories presented.

3. The Local Picture

A great deal of time was spent trying to create an accurate picture of each project area in order that we can make appropriate recommendations based on the specifics of each area. This has been achieved through our visual judgements as we walked around the areas, conversations with local residents and professionals, and using statistically information (particularly the 2001 Census).

West Hendon

West Hendon is a complex and diverse area both in terms of status, opportunities and cultures. With 43% of its population being born overseas there is a wealth of difference that could either flourish together or breed significant walls of uncertainty. Each culture, language and class of people makes the decision to segregate or integrate and West Hendon has the demographical potential to become a truly flourishing neighbourhood.

However, this area (which we believe has 5 separate communities within the programme boundary) is unlikely to mix due to the constraints of familiarity, difference, distance and travel (such as crossing the M1!, class, culture etc.).

So, the first decision to be made is whether this Sure Start (local programme) is the right body to bring forth unity amongst the 5 communities, celebrating and developing difference? Should this not be appropriate, there is the advantage of having points of contact in each community (schools, faith groups, community centres etc.) where local people can access support and services.

The make-up of each area is as follows:

Area 1 – (around Hyde School)

- The Pavilion in the park – which has a café, a ladies gym and a professional film studio.
- There is a large park with parking and a play area for young children. This park has easy access from all areas of the surrounding houses.
- This area is very clean and very quiet, (considering we walked around at school home time!).
- There is easy access to bus routes, supermarket and the allotments.

Area 2 – (around Russell Road and Herbert Road)

- There is a community centre (which we never saw open during our visiting times).
- A Methodist Church (Barnet M.C. – also never seen open when visiting).

- Most of the housing is well kept and economically “middle class”.

Area 3 – (around Barnet College and St John’s Church)

- There is a satellite of Barnet College, which is easily accessible, with a good student library/computer room near reception. A good variety of courses are on offer.
- A Multi-Cultural Community Centre which is used by Sure Start for meetings but there are no activities for under 4’s except a crèche run by the Somali group (self-funded).
- St John’s Church is a large Anglican Church, which rents its back hall to a local play group (not a Sure Start group) and a parent and toddler group (which is funded by Sure Start).
- There is a small health centre on the edge of this community.
- The housing is very nice and well kept, definitely economically “middle classed”.

Area 4 – (around Parkfield School)

- This is a very quiet estate that has a large primary school (soon to include the Programmes Children Centre).
- The housing stock was well kept.
- There are no parks or fields for children to access easily.
- There is 1 newsagent/grocer on the edge of the estate.

Area 5 – (Flats on edge of Brent Reservoir)

- This area only has tower blocks as housing.
- There are 3 centres here, Lakeview (a 54 place referral centre for the Borough, but also provides services for children/parents in the surrounding community); an unused hall; and a multi-use community centre (which is used for meetings – residents and agency).
- This was by far the area where we experienced the most activity by young people and adults.
- The housing is due to be redeveloped (in 10 years time) and much discussion and strategic development is being negotiated between the resident’s association and the housing providers. This causes several problems as the whole focus appears to be on the future redevelopment rather than apportioning concern and thought for the people who will continue to live on the estate whilst plans are being made.
- The Edgware Road borders this estate and there is a Catholic Church and community hall on the main road, which is used by the LakeView centre to provide keep fit sessions.

Comments and other useful statistics for West Hendon include:

- The Wards highest proportion of workforce is in the wholesale, retail and car repair industries are from West Hendon (20.7%)
- 9.1% of people here travel to work on foot or by bicycle (2nd highest in the Ward)

- In 2001 there were 913 children under the age of 5.
- This area houses the highest population of Muslim and Hindu's in the Borough.
- There is low unemployment in this area (3.9% compared to Barnet's average of 3.4%). However, of those unemployed or economically inactive, 718 were considered 'long-term unemployed' or have never worked.
- In 2001 there were 597 lone parents in this area (10.4%), giving them a Ward Ranking of 6th (the Ward average is 9.7%).
- It has been commented that in West Hendon *'they are all working class and on benefits'*
- *'There are a lot of lone parents (or claims that dads are not around – sometimes this is because of the benefit issues).'*
- *'We have some drug activities but this does not seem to be a major problem to local residents'*
- There are no children from lone parent families at Parkfield Nursery and Infant School.
- *'Parents around Parkfield School are financially secure'*

There are several organisations that are, and have been, working in this area for many years. The experience and understanding of the area is generally good although some views and opinions are based on relationships with only a small number of people who use their services and are therefore not a true representative view of the whole area (which is obviously difficult as there are 5 very different communities). There are currently only two geographical areas that have service provision/potential provision accessible to dads. Two areas were found to have nothing accessible for local residents.

Underhill

Underhill is not, in contrast, as culturally diverse as West Hendon with 82% of its inhabitants being born in England, with 75% of the population describing themselves as 'White British'. (3rd highest in the Ward)². There are, however, the same difficulties in terms of status and opportunities, with a very clear divide between those who have and those who have not. The challenge for this community in terms of 'flourishing' is to share the wealth of resources and skills amongst each other. With no where (except for Barnet & District Table Tennis League) for the imagination starved and under-resourced people to develop creative, sustainable 'hobbies' there is a definite divide between those who use opportunities to improve their standards of living and those who are oppressed.

By far the largest negative attitude to damage community spirit and unity in Underhill relates to education, with many parents considering their children's needs to be more important than those who are economically disadvantaged. This is always a sensitive issue, particularly one that is highlighted by the

² These figures are from the 2001 Census and do not include the high rise of Somali inhabitants since that time.

Government's importance placed on SAT's results, but is detrimental to the process of building positive relationships in a flourishing neighbourhood!

However, this area (which we believe has easily 5, if not more, separate communities within the programme boundary) is again unlikely to mix due to the constraints of familiarity, difference, necessity and travel (such as class differences, no reason to mix [limited social/recreational communities], etc.) there isn't even a pub! (which some would consider a good thing and others would consider a part of English culture!).

The make-up of each area is as follows:

Area 1 – (near Brent football ground)

- Mainly privately owned housing with easy access to the playing fields and children's play area.
- There is the Barnet Table Tennis Club who have excellent facilities and the members are willing to provide sessions for young children and their parents (at exceptionally affordable prices).
- These residents have easy walking access to the main Barnet High Street.

Area 2 – (Dollis Valley Estate)

- Another estate of flats that is to be redeveloped during the next decade. Again, as with West Hendon, the regeneration focus is on the redevelopment rather than meeting the needs of the people who live there now.
- There is a Post Office, Chinese take away and restored furniture shop (part of the Dollis Valley Centre).
- Although there are no gardens on this estate there is plenty of grass areas, which are active with families playing/relaxing during the summer; and plenty of car park spaces (showing unemployment is not an issue as most families seem to be able to afford fairly decent cars).
- There is a building which was previously used for youth work but is now run as a satellite by Barnet College for computer courses, and is also used by members of the Somali community. We had difficulty accessing this building and it was very unappealing.
- *'People on the estate are made up of domestic violence victims, hospital workers, B&B's for asylum seekers and refugees, and people who have lived there all their lives.'*
- *'This is an outer London estate – people from inner London would love to live here.'*
- *'Unemployment is not an issue – people work in the hospitals, supermarkets, and commute to work.'*
- *'The estate is a community in its own right, and won't mix with anyone else.'*

Area 3 – (surrounding Barnet and Underhill Primary Schools)

- There is another Post Office, Co-op supermarket, discount store and pet shop. (all of these are easily accessible to the Dollis Valley Estate).
- The 2 schools have many differences, particularly in SAT's results and size, although both have high numbers of families from the Sure Start areas that attend. Barnet School is soon to be rebuilt in Area 1 as part of the redevelopment plans.
- The housing is predominantly "middle class" and has easy access to the recreation areas to the south of the project area.

Area 4 – (around Whitings School)

- Whitings School is a large Primary School at the far end of Underhill.
- There is another Post Office, a Café, hairdressers, bakery, fish & chip shop, grocery, pharmacy and a second hand shop.
- The only place of worship actually in the programme area is a United Reformed Church opposite these shops.
- It has been suggested that this area should have included the area between Endersby Road and Ryecroft Crescent as they have the same issues as other roads near the school.
- Again the houses and gardens look remarkable well kept and pride has obviously helped develop these properties.

Just outside the area is Underhill Baptist Church, which provides parent and toddler sessions (funded by Sure Start); St Stephens C. of E., which also provides parent and toddler sessions (again funded by Sure Start); St Catherine's Catholic School and a new health centre (still being built).

Comments and other useful statistics for Underhill include:

- 64.9% regard themselves as Christian. (Highest Ward Ranking, which is strange as the URC, has only 16 members!)
- 13.4% work in the fields of Health and Social Work.
- This area has the 3rd highest ranking for Council tenants.
- 14.2% of the population are lone parents (the 3rd highest in the Ward).
- Unemployment again is low, with 360 people registered as unemployed (3.3% - below Ward Average). However, 4.7% said they were 'long term' unemployed or have never worked. (*one person thought that 90% don't work, and those that do are in low paid/black market jobs*). However, 1 school stated that 24% of their children are on free school meals, which could suggest a ¼ of the population being on benefits or low income!
- Underhill has the 3rd highest disability figure with 2522 people (16%).
- *'There used to be fun days organised on the park, but not any more.'*
- *'The average age of dads is in their mid-twenties', 'average age of dads is 24 (up to about 32 years old)', 'dads are mainly between late 20's and early 40's – 30 something being the*

majority. *'dads are in their 30's'* (Different estimates are due to the different services provided and different viewpoints of professionals/residents.)

- *'There is no through traffic – people are here for a reason.'*
- *'This is certainly a lower class area.'*
- Some community services are under-used, which could be attributed to the fact that local residents are not aware of those services and the facilities they provide. (We did not see an inter-agency marketing strategy anywhere).
- *'Most commonly in this area both parents work whether full or part time so grandparents play important role in child's upbringing.'*

There are some organisations who work across both West Hendon and Underhill and services that are provided include volunteer support for families in crisis (suffering post-natal depression, multi-births, fleeing arranged marriages, refugees etc.). The majority of these services are based on referrals and are known to Sure Start, though not necessarily known to all the 'grass-roots' workers on the patch.

4. The Findings

There are significant perceptions and attitudes expressed from the professional arena and also from the parents, that men and women are very different, and behave differently with their children. We were not surprised by the jovial banter between men and women, particularly in single sexed groups, even to a point of stereotypical sexism! However, we discovered that underneath the humour and political correctness were attitudes that cause barriers to services and resentment in relationships.

There is a definite stigma attached to the role and the 'care' services, (by this we mean looking after/developing children under the age of 5), the main perception being that it is 'women's work' rather than 'men's work'. This perception relates both to the home and to the public sphere, and is confirmed to many by the reality of how many men are involved in this field – whether that be 'house husbands', primary school teachers, child care workers etc.

Localised Education

In our discussions with the schools it was widely recognised that mums are more likely to bring the children to school, stay for assemblies, attend workshops, take responsibility on the PTA and play a more active role in the child's learning environment. Obviously there are exceptions to the rule and there are dads who do all these things, but there are always more mothers recorded as being involved than fathers. There were many reasons given as to why schools think that dads are absent from these duties/involvement, and these include time commitments (many dads are at work and only have *'small windows of time and focus'*), lack of motivation (although this applies to many mums as well!) and feeling uncomfortable or anxious. It is suggested that anxiety and uncomfortableness is felt either because of their own lack of confidence (*'dads self worth is low', 'the dads need confidence in their own abilities before they will be involved', 'they feel as though they have nothing to offer'*), negative experiences of school when they were children (*'poor literacy of parents'*); or because there are no other men around.

The men who are involved with schools appear to be grandfathers, or other male relatives, or dads who have 'flexible' jobs (generally the more upper pay scale careers), or they have a specific reason for being there. This has included dads invited to fix broken toys, a chef who cooked pasta for the class, or a painter and decorator who painted a wall. The majority of these dads had a purpose, a specific job to do where they felt useful and within their own comfort zone. They were not in school to 'care' but to 'get the job done'! It was stated that *'when they do come and get involved they are good and confident'* and we believe that this is because they are either acting within their comfort zones or are naturally confident anyway.

It is commented that *'lot's of dads pick up the children but do not come inside'* and *'we have an induction day but dads do not come'*. Certainly schools make the efforts to involve dads, particularly those who do not live with their children, by sending information to both parents (*'dads getting the same service as the mom'* etc.) and encouraging dads to attend events and performances. One school has purposefully changed the times of their performances to 9 a.m. as it is easier for working parents to arrive later at work rather than to leave in the middle of the afternoon. Children in Nursery's are taught about the different roles of fathers and mothers in a positive, equalitarian way rather than stereotypical *'moms do the ironing, dads go out to work'*. However, somewhere along the way the understanding of roles is confused and this perception of equal roles becomes challenged. This learning in school is taught by women and may conflict with the true picture that is represented by the lifestyles of their parents. Therefore learning, without the involvement of men, is one-sided and possibly distorted. So if dads are *'absent'* from the public learning environment how do they influence the educational development of their children?

Pre-School Care Groups

There is a definite lack of male workers in the public pre-school care environment (childcare workers, play workers, nursery workers etc), and men have expressed their feelings of awkwardness and being uncomfortable going into situations where all the other adults are female – *'there is nothing more frightening than walking into a room full of women'*! Professional women in these roles have suggested agreement with this as they have said that *'if a dad comes along we try to make him feel comfortable'*. This shows that they do not have many men *'come along'* and if they did they would feel uncomfortable anyway! The other side of this shows that *'many women would feel uncomfortable having men around'* and reasons for this relate to personal experiences of domestic violence/abuse and also the perception that all men involved in the *'care'* industry are homosexuals or paedophiles. Some moms go to the Parent and Toddler groups *'to get away from their partners for a couple of hours'* and greatly value the feminine space. They are very protective over this time and are suspicious of men who *'threaten'* their comfort zones. One woman said *'I would not want to walk into a group of men, so why should they be expected to come into a group of women?'* There was even the *'saloon syndrome'* displayed at one group as *'with one dad it was quite funny as when he entered the room everyone looked at him and went quiet.'* This is highlighted in the belief, from some women, that the *'care'* groups, and responsibilities of childcare, are not only the role of mothers but that men are incapable of *'doing it properly!'* Comments, or negative attitudes, such as *'men don't know what they are doing'*, *'there always needs to be a women around for maternal reasons, as men do not know what to do with their children'*, *'men in groups of mothers can be mothered'* and *'men are always judged by women of their ability to parent'*. It is even suggested that *'a dad would need to be brave to enter an all female environment.'* To emphasise the discomfort and uncertainty of dads who already feel insecure, possibly with a lack of confidence and embarrassment, in a female group it has been stated that *'a man cannot look after a child and the women will take*

over if the baby cries.' It has been suggested that people who are judged or labelled feel afraid but in this situation we believe it is an excuse for some dads not to attend because they do not want to enter this 'female world of care'!

With some interviewees the issue of vulnerability was discussed in the context of health visitors conducting home visits when the dad is on his own, and obviously the health and safety is paramount to the workers and should never be compromised. The discussion then focused on the vulnerability of men and although, at first impression, there would seemingly be no risk of harm to a dad, they can be put in vulnerable positions that challenge their emotive state. These included, as suggested earlier, entering 'a room full of women carers' and parenting that dads are excluded from, such as *'being unable to get involved in breast feeding'* (highlighted also by one mum who said *'I'm sure my husband would breast feed if he could'*).

There was a question asked *'How do we treat men in group settings?'* A reply was given *'dads should be asked to be involved more in groups rather than being made to feel inadequate by staff and by moms.'* The answers lie in friendly, welcoming environments, male workers and gender specific groups, all of which are detailed in the recommendations section.

Men's Employment in the Care Industry

As a common statement was made about the need for having male workers around we asked the question 'why is the 'care industry' dominated by women?' and the most common answer was the low pay. Entry level salaries would not support a family if it was the only source of income and therefore the positions are commonly applied for by women who are seeking employment to 'top-up' their families income, or have been involved in Parent & Toddler groups and have either volunteered and then moved into employment or enjoyed the care environment enough to become trained/employed. We have also stated that men's (and some women's) perception of the care industry is for women only and one man said that *'if you see a job advertised for childcare men are going to think that it is for a women'* and from a lady *'this is not a career that men want to get in to.'* During the consultation it was noticed that the only two male workers we saw were employed as a chef and a handyman! There is also the fact that women are naturally instinctive at the care 'role' and this will be discussed in more depth further on in the report.

The Services Currently Provided

The current perception of services provided for dads are considered to be *'mainly centred around mothers and children'*, (and this includes the paperwork – such as forms used by midwives and health visitors), *'there are none'*, *'they are one-offs, like the men's health day'*, *'parents are definitely engaged'*, *'dads would access benefits and community groups.'*

The reality is that many organisations (both voluntary and statutory) claimed to provide services for dads. The list included trips, outings, parents and toddler groups, after school activities, rhyme times, reading sessions, workshops, speech therapy, clinical/education psychologists, direct parent work, health issues, parenting work depending on the issues, computer classes, parents evenings, performances, father's day activities, membership on the Sure Start Board and Parent Forums, and '*we provide what ever we can!*'

The truth is to be explored in the word 'inclusion'. Many professionals have said that they are inclusive, and that the same opportunities provided for mothers are also provided for fathers. However, when questioned further about the reality of inclusion we discovered that this, in the main, meant 'invitation'. Fathers would be invited to attend various activities, through letters, word of mouth, and even personal invitations/visits. There were disappointingly few occasions where thought was given to provide specific information for fathers, except where the dad was not living with the child. This was an acceptable view expressed by one person when she said '*why should we single out dads to need specific work?*' and another said '*we are assuming that men need something different from women.*' It was also presumed that the fathers presence in the same room (be that for parents evening, parent and toddler group or a health visit etc.) meant that he was involved and included. This is far from the truth in most circumstances, for instance – if a dad is in the room whilst a mum is receiving support/being questioned about her post natal depression there would be no necessity to question the man as to how he is feeling or whether he really did understand what was going on. Also, in a Rhyme and Time session a man may be present in body but does he feel like he belongs and is comfortable to join in all the actions and activities – especially when his child gets off his lap and goes and plays somewhere else? Inclusion is not merely a presence, but receiving the same support, opportunities and positive attitudes towards them, as everyone else involved in the same thing.

Relationships

Obviously relationships play a key role to the success of a child's positive development. There are some parents who, through various difficulties, provide instability from the very start of the child's life. These include father's (predominately expressed by interviewees as teenage fathers) who have many children with different women. In one school '*there are fights with other children as they realise they have the same dad who [splashes it around].*' Teenage dads have fewer opportunities for being involved with, or influencing their child's development as either the mother or 'mother-in-law' denies them access or they '*treat the baby like a Barbie doll*' and do not fully grasp their responsibilities. Much of this relies in the fact that teenage dads are teenagers before they are dads and many of them are not ready to 'settle down and run the family home'! There is one teenage parents group in the programme and '*it is hard enough to get moms to this let alone dads. They sit like they are at secondary school and behave with no manners or boundaries (they are of*

course still only teenagers). The teenage males walk in and straight out again!'

Other difficulties expressed include *'the dads will pop in until another man is on the scene', 'there are many families where there are several children all with different fathers', 'some children are raised by grandparents, 'domestic violence' and 'dads are always working and don't see the kids as they are in bed before they get home'.*

A rather serious issue has been raised from several different sources, and one that is bubbling under the relational surface waiting to explode. This is resentment. Some moms felt that as their partners worked, they (the mums) should take the main responsibilities for the childcare. However, some women felt that the physical demand of high amounts of routine/daily chores that are associated with house care, and the emotional strain of childcare (and the absence of adult conversation) deserve the same amount of support and personal space as their partners who go out to work. Many men believe that because they are paid to go to work then their role is more valuable (and tiring) than the 'housewife'! This is a fallacy. Male comments include *'it is not my job to do house work',* and women have said *'I do everything, he thinks it's the woman's role to look after kids and cater for him, 'it is expected that the woman does all the childcare, 'childcare is 99 times out of 100 left to the mother' and 'men take things for granted.'* Where expectations are not discussed, and equal support not given, subconscious resentment is brewing.

The relationships that are described as successful at positively influencing their children are the one's that involve good communication and equality. Certainly good communication is confirmed by parents and professionals who make conscious decisions, with their partners, to identify roles and responsibilities. Statements include *'we decided before our child was born that all responsibilities will be shared', 'relationships should be equal, and if they are not it should be a choice that is made', 'each family will work out their roles' and 'relationship difficulties are caused by the expectations of roles that are not clarified'.* There are, however, comments made that dispute the clarification of roles, *'there should not be defining roles in relationships as it should be shared' and 'friction starts when you start defining roles.'*

We believe that these last two comments do not contradict the initial statements as they are relating to equality and not choice, and the role of the father is far more complex than equality in the home (discussed later). Equality can be seen in many different ways and some parents have said *'I do all the jobs in the house in partnership with partner', 'she does everything during the day and I try to do my bit when I come home from work', 'I can do everything in the house that my partner does' and 'my husband is very good – he does the shopping'.* But even those who have stated their equal roles agree that a 50/50 split in practicalities (changing nappies, ironing, washing etc.) was an impossible expectation. Although a man may be 'equal' in the practicalities (which would obviously be through choice, a conscious decision made by one or both parties), there are many areas where equality is a myth. The obvious, already referred to area is breastfeeding, and it is unlikely that

men would feel comfortable, or accepted, in the conversational world of the women's group. This alienation of fatherhood specifically means that if a man chooses to see his role as completely shared responsibilities and involvement he would only be allowed to fulfil this role in the private sphere. So, does equality really exist or is it that two people have recognised the need for support, involvement and shared responsibilities for both the household chores, the care and development of their children and for 'paid' employment? And is it true that, in all areas of life, that where father is willing to take shared involvement in the private sphere and in the public arena he has a stereotypical image to live up to, and this does not include the world of 'care'?

The relationships that we witnessed as 'successful' in their attempts to positively influence the development of their children, were the ones that made choices together, discussed and agreed upon values, beliefs and principles together, and enjoyed each others presence. Simply put – the reality of love.

The Role of the Father

In conducting our research we were constantly presented with conflicting opinions as to the role of the father and how confused and unclear this definition seemed to be. Peoples' understanding included '*men are climbing frames*', '*we think dads should be involved in the same way as mums – if they are not working*', '*dads are there to spoil their kids – moms do everything else*' and '*playing, just getting on the floor with them.*' Another commented on the fact that '*men's role in society is complex*' highlighting the difficulties of a clear, universal understanding and acceptance of the fathers role.

One of the difficulties in understanding the role of the father is in the mixed messages that have been portrayed over the last few years that have led to '*men losing their identity as the role in which they should be playing is confused, distorted and in conflict.*' For some they think that the '*power had shifted and has become unclear.*' It has been said that '*women have successfully broken into the working world of men and now they expect men to break into their world of care.*' Is this so? Well certainly women have taken a large share of the labour market and are enjoying jobs in a wide variety of careers, but do they expect their husbands/partners to share the care? (One lady commented that '*women do want men to do the care but complain when they do!*') The British traditional view (back in the olden days!) was that men went out to work, then to the pub and then home to his tea on the table, and then to discipline the children before they went to bed, before sitting in his armchair with the newspaper or television on. Times have certainly changed for many families but have the attitudes of men changed? For a majority of men this is still what they expect and therefore causes confusion when told by society that this is not acceptable anymore, that the 'modern man' is involved in all areas of home and family life.

One interviewee described the different roles as '*the hunter and gatherer syndrome*' and an observation of a lone father was that '*it was his job to work rather than care, his instinct is to provide material needs rather than pastoral*

care.’ However, another commented that *‘cultural barriers need to be broken, the view of men as workers and women as housekeepers to stay at home and look after their children and husband.’* There were many other people who believed that the role of the dad should include this pastoral role, and some dads interviewed felt as though it is their duty to share the load of home and child rearing. Some dads said *‘I slide into my role of bathing every night and bottle feeding’, ‘I change nappies and am there at bedtime’, ‘shopping trips can be fun’, ‘I would like to do a lot more but it is my work commitments’, ‘I want to be with my child’* and *‘it is important to get involved from birth, to get a bond with the child that the mother normally has.’*

Whilst researching we questioned what is involved in being a dad – how can a man prepare himself for fatherhood and raising his child? Suggested key areas of involvement and development included: the need to multi-task, learn anger management, learn patience, offering support and encouragement to partners during breast-feeding, more quality and interactive time with their children, establish routines and boundaries that are consistent, to guide the child, to teach about life, to educate – particularly manners/morals/judgments, broaden children’s minds, provide opportunities and development of skills, teach positive relationships, independence, inter-action with other children, to respect difference, creative play and the development of children’s character, personality and confidence.

We spent time with four men who have made the choice not to work but to stay at home to raise their children, and these dads were proud to be ‘house husbands’. Their comments on the role of the father include, *‘I do all the jobs in the house but leave the bath and bed time to mum’, ‘I do all the jobs in the house in partnership with my partner’, ‘dad’s must have the stability and belief that they can do it’, ‘I do everything at home and mum comes home from work and spends a couple of hours every night with our child’, ‘I see this as a major role in lots of relationships today as it is easier for women to get into work’* and *‘I think that there should not be defining roles in our relationship but that it should be shared.’*

Other conflicting opinions for men to deal with have included *‘the Government are saying that fathers must take a more active role’, ‘the Government are telling men to work but also be involved in their child’s education’, ‘a bit more encouragement from Government level to get dads involved’. ‘There has been a significant increase in dads at home since the new paternity laws of two weeks leave has come into force’, ‘househusbands/wives should be paid by the Government as it is essential to have a parent available for the children at all times.’*

We have come to the conclusion that fathers need to be able to fulfil four roles - to Protect, to Provide, to Play and to Prepare (the 4 P’s). Using the ‘hunter/gatherer syndrome’ a man is instinctively designed to protect, and certainly all fathers that we know would protect their children to the death! To provide is also an in-built characteristic of men, as we feel it is our responsibility to provide the necessities for our family (food, warmth, clothing etc.) – [although the good management of spending the money appears to be

more suited to our partners!]. Play, particularly 'rough' play, is also an inherent role of the male species although some thought that *'dads don't know what games to play with kids'* but again we believe that this relates to the creative learning games at an earlier age rather than playing with the 'toys for the boys'! It is our belief that these three characteristics/roles of the father would not be disputed, but the final one, to Prepare, is widely contested. One of our interviewees said that *'dads are more involved with homework at secondary school'* stating that it is more likely for women to prepare children in the general, basic skills of learning and for men to be involved with the more complex, specific learning in secondary education. This is not suggesting anything derogatory towards women's abilities but to recognise where the differences are in the general involvement of both parents. Preparation for the majority of fathers starts when the children are preparing for secondary school and it is interesting how many divorces and separations occur just at the time when the fathers role is about to come to fruition!

Most men would feel that the early 'care' preparation is better suited to mothers and we believe that this is because maternity is caught and paternity is taught. (*'Dads are not well equipped to cope with parenting issues'*) Fathers need to learn how to fulfil the 'care' duties, how to hold the baby, how to chose the right clothes, how to stop a baby crying etc. Obviously there are exceptions to the rule (men are flattered when someone calls us a 'natural' with our children – a compliment not normally given to mothers!) and this is generally when men make a conscious choice to be involved with the early 'care' and development of their children.

We believe that there are five different areas where men could receive support –

1. for fathers who choose to take a 'care' role
2. for fathers who are forced into a 'care' role
3. for fathers who are regularly involved with parenting but do not take the main 'care' role
4. for fathers who are not involved with the regular parenting of their children
5. for fathers to be

Obviously support can only be offered to these different groups of fathers if they ask for help or believe they would benefit from support.

Do Dads Really Need Support?

One person said *'do men need help, or see themselves as needing help?'* If they do who has the responsibility for the support and guidance of helping dads to fulfil these different roles? Is it service providers and does this support just relate to their role as a father or to their role as a husband/partner? If we consider again the four P's (Provide, Protect, Play, Prepare) we need to ask ourselves where the elements of support and guidance are needed under these headings and whose responsibility it is to meet these needs? Take, for example, fulfilling the role of Provider. In it's rawest sense it is provision of

necessities (food, clothing, housing, warmth etc. – the material/physical essentials to live [which in modern day Britain we can realistically expect this to mean ‘basic’ comfort rather than to just exist]) and the father’s need may be for help getting a job or filling in the Job Seekers Allowance/Disability Living Allowance claim forms! So whose responsibility is this? Take it a step further and consider Protection. How does a man protect his family, and in what circumstances would a family need protecting? Is this about being able to fight (physically, with words, or to self sacrifice) and what would happen if he couldn’t protect? Take for example a family of refugees who have lost a child or mother in a war, what specific support would be needed to help the father who has protected some of his family but not all, and is now facing a greater hostility in our ‘free’ country? And how can a man separated from his children protect them? How can a perpetrator of child abuse/domestic violence protect his family when he is the one they need protecting from? We believe that there is not one organisation in West Hendon or Underhill that has the capacity, experience, expertise or resources to provide such a ‘holistic’ level of support and guidance for fathers, and this needs to be addressed. It is the professionals’ responsibility simply because they have chosen to work in the sphere of compassion and concern, and they are there to enable and equip people to take control of their own lives. One father described the Prepare role as teaching children to love *‘if you don’t care about them how will they be able to care for others?’* So how, as a service provider, do you teach love to a father who was unloved by his own father, or never even knew him? ‘Care’ is not just for the under 5’s! One man even said *‘some father’s don’t want to parent how they were parented’* and support for those dads who make themselves open to learn, needs to be a priority at all levels, nationally and locally. There are other areas of preparation that are generally left up to mum (the early ‘care’ years), however, *‘if the mom is not around dads should be able to cope!’* and this is where the differences of opinion lie in where a dad’s role is to Prepare their child. For Sure Start, whose focus is preparing the child for school, a natural direction of services is towards mothers as this is where the role is fulfilled best. However, we have hopefully recognised that some dads enjoy being involved and responsible for the early development of their child and services need to reflect the reality of these men.

The Husband/Partner Role

We have just considered the support needed for the man in his role as a father, but what about his other ‘roles’? It has been questioned as to why men need different services from women, and there is a common thought that men are too proud to ask for help anyway so why bother? Some comments include *‘all men come across as macho’*, *‘offer of support was given to one dad – he was very pragmatic and said “everything is fine”*, *‘my man would not ask for help.’* There is a certain level of male ego and *‘pride is challenged when we say dads need support.’* It is true that pride does prevent men from asking for help, particularly from strangers and organisations, as it is considered by some as a sign of weakness and men have to battle *‘internalised oppression, their brain barriers of pride and embarrassment etc.’*

However, it has been widely recognised that support and guidance from a wife, or partner, is extremely valuable. In fact, most people who commented on this subject were keen to state that mothers and fathers need to work at developing their roles together (and this can still apply if they live together or apart, it just takes much more effort to work through the differences and past hurts!). Substantial anecdotal evidence includes *'its up to both parents to be involved with the development of children'*, *'teamwork and understanding'*, *'as neither of us were parents before we had to learn together.'* One lady took it a step further and encouraged her husband to value sharing by *'training my husband to do the jobs at home.'* It may seem a funny statement (especially when just mentioning male pride and ego!) but mutual support, however learnt, is proven to be essential - *'from 0 to 9 months the women folk need every millimetre of our support and understanding'*, *'dads must learn to support our partner'*, *'children need same bond with father as with women folk.'* It is necessary to encourage this supportive relationship for a vast array of reasons, including one of the hardest jobs of parenting – consistent discipline and boundary setting. Parents may well fear disciplining their children, especially as this word conjures up the image of smacking and child abuse, but learning positive discipline and then uniting with a consistent mutual approach is a certain way of children seeing clearly their boundaries and living within them. (This consistency should also be discussed with schools as different rules, rewards and punishments at home and school can be very confusing for children and young people). Service providers have suggested addressing these issues by providing joint parenting training and recognising that *'partners are gatekeepers, motivators for dads attending.'* Another key area to recognise is when the relationship between the mother and father is severely strained because of the difficulties they are having with the child. Here support is needed for both parents, individually and together.

Family Support

When the office doors are shut and the answer phone is on where do parents in need go for help? Those interviewees who discussed this issue recognised that *'close family is very important'* for reasons such as *'helping with childcare as it is very expensive'* and *'playing with cousins.'* Comments about family support were generally from the Asian interviewees *'Asian families tend to stay together as a unit more for support reasons.'* It is obvious that extended family can provide all the support and guidance needed for a mother and father to learn about their roles, to experiment and even to fail, but without feeling judged and condemned for making a mistake. The importance of extended family support was also directed towards the mothers of teenage mums, and although this is very often supportive and positive it can also provide plenty of hostility as they 'take over' the parenting role and refuse involvement to the father of their grandchild. All '3' parents in this situation need support and guidance. Teenage fathers, in this instance, are certainly not seen as positive role models and it has been suggested several times that there is a need for all dads to be seen as this. So how are teenage dads educated/helped to realise their influence on their child (and also their peers)? This question should also be applied to those men who chose to 'father' lots of children but chose not to take responsibility and become their 'dads'!

Extended family is important for support and creating a community of interdependence would encourage 'surrogate' families to share the support and guidance needed. The West Hendon Muslim community were more than happy to provide support and shared experiences to father's in need, and this is essential to learning through shared experiences.

Culture & Faith

It may seem surprising to some readers of the openness of faith groups to provide assistance, and we believe this is generally for two reasons – firstly that many neighbourhoods do not see many examples of the faith communities actively engaging in the issues (and working together with different faiths), and secondly that the faith groups generally stay within their own communities. This often produces suspicion from both directions, and many service providers in West Hendon and in Underhill have experienced this. Women have '*come across difficulties with Asian men*' which was probably due to gender issues. '*Afghanistan dads have been cautious about free offerings – 2 Afghanistan men stood at the back of a session and only spoke to each other the whole time.*' It has also been recognised that some groups and buildings have been uninviting '*...it is God based so is uninviting*', '*I think the community are unaware of our facilities.*' Some of these attitudes lie with the beholder as they may not be 'religious' and find faith buildings and unfamiliar settings uncomfortable.

Other issues of culture relate to men who have challenged the cultures in which they live in take on the 'care' role. For some they feel that they are '*breaking the cultural mould*' and there is a definite need for supportive encouragement of decisions so important and challenging.

The other side to this is specific faith groups making a stand for their beliefs. The Catholic Church displays their value for the roles of both parents by make it necessary for families to attend church in order that their children can attend the local Catholic School, and be supported in the consistent boundaries between home/school life.

5. Recommendations

1. Male Friendly Environments

It has been suggested that service environments need to be male friendly. What does this mean? Do we need to put pictures of dads, sports cars and football players on the wall? Do we need to change the colour scheme of the room? Do we need to put a bar instead of a kettle in the room? Of course not! Dads, like moms, need to feel welcome, accepted and free to participate without being judged. This all starts with the first person that the dad meets when he walks into the room – and this could be anyone (not just the group leader!). The common problems that are currently experienced are a). The saloon syndrome where no-one is welcoming, and the other extreme of the women being so ecstatic that a man has arrived that he is pounced on and so he wants to run for his life! b). A father is not given the credibility that he can 'care' for his child without involvement from other people, and that he has attended the group to encourage his child to mix with others, and maybe even for adult company himself.

We therefore recommend that training is provided for all service providers (including volunteers) that challenges the negative attitudes towards fathers and controls the over-enthusiastic behaviour displayed because a man walks through the door! Training can be based on the findings in this report.

2. Class

It has been widely suggested that men from lower social classes choose to be less involved than those from more affluent families, *'social class is definitely an issue, the higher the class the more interest in fathering shown.'* If this is true then we have to recognise the different levels of involvement and the reasons why (expendable income, flexibility of time, self-esteem and confidence etc.) and adjust each service accordingly.

We therefore recommend that support is given to enable each service provider to identify the differences of their user groups and the potential beneficiaries from their chosen catchment areas to access whether there are any barriers relating to class, faith, culture or any other stereotypical lifestyle that stop dads accessing their services.

3. Gender Specific Groups/Activities

So why should men get something different? It is widely recognised, both during the consultation process and hopefully proved with this report, that *'dads are neglected'* and that *'groups should be set up for dads – gender specific but also culture and faith specific too.'* There are dads who need support and dads who can give support. No dad is an expert, we all have experiences and understanding that can be shared with others to help encourage and guide them in their parenting (more commonly known as 'peer-support'). Some of the dads interviewed expressed a desire to *'spend*

time with other dads to build up relationships for himself and his child', 'meet other fathers to discuss dads stuff, a bit of male bonding', 'mixing with other dads is vital. Dads need to be talking and sharing experiences, especially for single dads (This was also expressed by some mum's who saw the benefits of a fathers and toddler group for their partners/husbands). The two main reasons for this type of group would be 'to help dads cope with things that life throws up', and 'to provide more opportunities for the father/child relationships to grow.'

Suggested problems/barriers for this type of group were *'would there be enough dads wanting to come along?', 'who would advertise these events?', 'who would be expected to keep records?', 'who would be responsible for the groups?', 'a room full of blokes could be very competitive', 'how is my child compared to others', 'not sure if more dads would attend a specific group'* and one mum said that her partner *'would feel that men who attend during the week are not working so he would not want to mix with them!'*

We therefore recommend that a specific group for fathers be established. Some have provided a variety of suggestions to enable this to begin, *'playing sports – football or swimming', 'an allotment would be great fun for everyone who wants to be involved', 'using the table tennis club (in Underhill)', 'using the toy library on a Saturday morning (at Lakeview)', 'trips for dads and kids', providing task orientated groups like fixing things, developing a play area, designing a community centre (part of regeneration)', 'BBQ's', 'men's health rallies', and finally, from a mum 'doing darts, sports, something we are not there for!'. (There is even one dad who wants to produce a short film around the subject of househusbands!!).*

4. Employment of Male Workers

The above recommendation has an overwhelming double-barrelled condition, that it was run by a man! *'It should be male workers to get male perspectives through similar sorts of experiences', 'a male worker would help to bring in more dads. If a male worker is there it should be advertised so that dads know where to go for help and advice', 'I would feel more comfortable talking to male staff workers' and 'it is hard for professional women to reach men.'*

We therefore recommend that a male outreach worker be employed to develop the father specific services. As previously discussed in this report, it is difficult to encourage men into the 'care' industry as professionals, and therefore the responsibilities of this role and the pay and terms and conditions should reflect the necessity to have a man in post. It has also been suggested that a man with local knowledge is employed. Obviously the success of finding a suitably qualified candidate is reduced if the local geography is a requirement of the job, and it may be necessary to employ a local person without the relevant academic qualifications but with the relevant experience of fatherhood, organisation skills and local knowledge. (As an organisation with experience of taking such risks we can recommend this as a favourable option).

5. Educating Dads

What do we teach dads? Some have suggested that *'dads need to be educated in the methods of fatherhood as not all dads can manage'* and that *'dads not well equipped to cope with parenting issues.'* As previously discussed, there are many, many different needs that fathers have and it is impossible for one organisation to provide enough support and guidance to met them all.

We therefore recommend that a variety of fun 'lessons' be produced (these could be delivered either by the new dads groups, or existing professionals services or by partners/wives – or even by free@last). These should start with the basic information that is necessary for potential dads to prepare themselves, and their partners, for the pregnancy, birth and early months of childcare. (One main issue that was expressed several times was *'raising awareness and educating fathers around breastfeeding. This is either seen as a sexual thing or as a special bonding between the baby and mother, so it is commonly where the father feels left out. However, he can learn how to encourage mum and understand the complexities involved.'*) Other topics to be discussed should include basic and creative play/learning like identifying shapes, colours and numbers whilst walking around, counting steps, or shopping; and also safety awareness (crossing roads etc.). Any dad can learn all of the above, whether they have learning difficulties or time/work pressures, involvement with their children and influencing their development does not have to be hard work, consuming or fearful – simply using their environment around them. It is not about how much time you spend with your child but what you do with that time.

5. Professional Relationships

Whilst conducting this research it is was apparent that many professionals, some of whom have been tirelessly committed to their community for many years, feel isolated, exhausted and under-valued. With comments like *'we have received nothing from Sure Start and have been to all their meetings', 'I have not seen a Sure Start worker since middle of January'* it was easy to see their despair and frustration at yet another 'scheme' to be parachuted into their neighbourhoods and provide, seemingly, more self-justifiable targets and 'brownie' points for the Government, rather than real opportunities, resources and concern for the people they worked with.

The design and implementation of Sure Start has had it's difficulties in West Hendon and Underhill, many of these due to the high turn-over of staff, and the negativity towards the programme (particularly the boundaries set) has not only caused feelings of resentment both towards the programme, but more alarmingly, towards other service providers. This is obviously not the intention of Sure Start but it is a reality that needs to be addressed.

We therefore recommend that Sure Start provide the opportunities for practitioners to truly understand the aims and objectives of the programme, to understand the responsibilities of the programme staff and to share their

frustrations and difficulties in a controlled and safe environment. Obviously this could be painful for some people and some may not wish to make themselves vulnerable. However, for a programme such as Sure Start, with its co-ordinator role, it is essential that inter-agency relationships are considered as important as the family relationships that all are trying to develop. Open, honest, considerate communication will enable each organisation to be more effective and individual professionals to feel supported and valued.

6. The Bigger Influence

It has already been stated that there are difficulties with the boundaries and time limitations of Sure Start. The Government has tried to provide several continuous programmes that enable progressive support – The Children’s Fund, Connexions etc., but there were no signs of inter-governmental programmes providing continuity and sustainable support for the people of West Hendon and Underhill.

We therefore recommend that Sure Start highlights the necessity for Central Government to provide sustainable programmes where those who are in need of support are not ‘stranded’ by Sure Start when their youngest child reaches the age of 4, and where service providers are not struggling to provide activities and services to people based on naturally changeable targets.

We also recommend that funding be used to develop the existing organisations in West Hendon and Underhill who have the capacity to deliver professional, effective, holistic services that meet the needs of the whole family. There are many service providers in the area that could make a massive difference if they were given the right support and purposeful, meaningful amounts of money to achieve their goals.

6. Conclusion

The main principle to apply when working with fathers is to be in a position where we can help them move to the next level in their parenting, should they be willing to receive support and guidance. At a bear minimum we should be asking ourselves, as a service provider or organisation 'when an issue arises, whether that be reactions to life/circumstances/pressures, or pro-actively seeking the development of fathering skills, who is there to provide help, support and guidance?' To be 'on the ball' we should be providing sustainable, positive relationships, opportunities, and 'environments of vulnerability' where dads can examine the relationships and situations they are currently in and learn how to develop them.

Dads do have a lot to offer, both to their children, partners/wives and professionals. It is our belief that services need to establish the specific needs for the families that they serve, particularly the fathers, and encourage and support other similar organisations to work together to provide a community wide, holistic service for fathers to be the best dads they can.

Appendix

1. Participants of Consultation

Name	Organisation or Resident	Area	Method
Tim Khan	Pre-School Learning Alliance		Face to Face
Jan Monte-Colombo	Sure Start	Both	Face to Face
Andrea Hall	Sure Start	Both	Face to Face
Trupti Makwana	Sure Start	Underhill	Face to Face
Smita Sethia	Sure Start	West Hendon	Face to Face
Christine Nicholls	Health Visitor	Underhill	Face to Face
Wendy Oliver	Valley Day Care	Underhill	Face to Face
Rosemary Watkins	Dollis Valley Centre	Underhill	Face to Face
Julia Weaver	Whittings School	Underhill	Face to Face
Julia Ross	St Catherine's School	Underhill	Face to Face
Pam Czerniewska	Speech Therapist	Underhill	Face to Face
Sue McKenzie	United Reformed Church	Underhill	Face to Face
Cameron Finney	Barnet Housing	West Hendon	Telephone
Wendy Bohan	Barnet Housing	West Hendon	Telephone
Ray Swart	Barnet Table Tennis	Underhill	Face to Face
Kate Green	Barnet Welfare Rights	Both	Face to Face
Raj Pandja	Sure Start	Both	Face to Face
Kirpal Dhadda	Home Start	Both	Face to Face
James Holland	Barnet tPCT	Both	Face to Face
Vickie Green	Barnet tPCT	Both	Face to Face
Heather McCarthy	Lakeview Centre	West Hendon	Face to Face
Hadassah Lev	Speech Therapist	West Hendon	Face to Face
Counsellor Ansuja Sodha	Barnet Council	West Hendon	Email
Anne Devison	Barnet Council Housing Department	Borough	Telephone
Penny and Sue	Hyde P & T group	West Hendon	Face to Face
Helen Simmons	Parent & Board Member	West Hendon	Face to Face
Glynis Ferrigno	St John's P & T	West Hendon	Face to Face
Mrs Maitland	Parkfield Nursery Sch	West Hendon	Face to Face
Rayan Mahmud	Islamic Teaching Centre	West Hendon	Face to Face
Margaret	Health Visitor	Both	Face to Face
Sue Prior	Baptist Church	Underhill	Face to Face
Liz Moore	Underhill Primary Sch.	Underhill	Face to Face
Susan Convery	Barnet Primary School	Underhill	Face to Face

5 mums	Various	West Hendon	Face to Face
12 mums	Various	Underhill	Face to Face
2 Dads	Various	West Hendon	Face to Face
5 Dads	Various	Underhill	Face to Face
5 Dads	Various	Underhill	Telephone
	Fat Sam's Father & Toddler	High Barnet	Telephone
Councillor Agnes Slocombe	Barnet Council	West Hendon	Email – did not reply
Councillor Arun Ghosh	Barnet Council	West Hendon	Email – did not reply
Councillor Fiona Bulmer	Barnet Council	Underhill	Email – did not reply
Councillor Anita Campbell	Barnet Council	Underhill	Email – did not reply
Councillor Peter Davis	Barnet Council	Underhill	Email – did not reply
Father John	St John's Church	West Hendon	Telephone – did not reply
Mrs Walters	The Hyde Nursery & Infant School	West Hendon	Telephone and visit – did not reply