

# **Dad's Club Evaluation**

**June 2005**

## **Summary of Dad's Club Evaluation**

### **Introduction**

- At present the only service aimed specifically at fathers is Dad's Club which is held weekly on a Saturday at ZigZags between 10 and 12. The sessions are informal with bacon sandwiches, toast and drinks served to all those who attend.
- Dad's Club contributes to the following Sure Start targets:
  - Increase percent of male carers accessing
  - Improved involvement of fathers in the Sure Start project
  - To reduce the proportion of children aged 0-3 years in the 600 Sure Start areas who are re-registered within the space of 12 months on the child protection register by 20 per cent by 2005
  - To increase the opportunities for play and physical activity for children and parents
  - To promote and provide for family mental health
- This evaluation aimed to ascertain whether the service could be improved and what outcomes were being achieved for fathers and their children.

### **Methodology**

- An informal focus group was held with three fathers during one Dad's Club. They were asked for the views on certain topic areas and the main points of the discussion were recorded on flipchart paper.

### **Results and reach**

- A verbatim transcription of the notes taken and agreed during the focus group is included in the main report.
- In the past year Dad's Club has seen 18 different fathers and twenty-five different children from within the area. On average each session has seen 2.3 fathers and 2.8 children but for the most recent three months the average attendance rises to 3.8 fathers and 4.8 children.

### **Discussion**

- A number of problems being experienced at Dad's Club at present will be resolved by completion of the ZigZags building which is now approaching final touches.
- Parking for ZigZags will remain an issue and not only for Dad's Club. Unfortunately there seems little the programme can do to resolve this issue.
- Attendance at Dad's Club will likely remain a sporadic affair; it was observed that for those that work the weekend is the only quality family time they have. Attendance at Dad's Club appears to largely be about earning "brownie points" with the mothers.
- Dad's Club offers a valuable opportunity for children to learn to play together in smaller groups and offers Dads respite due to the staff being able to entertain the children.
- Rather than look to change Dad's Club the feeling was it does exactly what is wanted at the moment. Other services can be developed or trialled but Dad's Club should remain as it is.

### Conclusions and recommendations

- The facilities available at ZigZags mean Dad's Club will be able to take many more fathers. A promotional campaign should be started to try and increase the numbers and then re-evaluate the service with a greater selection of fathers.
- Dad's Club has been successful because it has attracted fathers to the programme and offered opportunity for time with their children in a play setting. However there are a large number of fathers who do not attend for whatever reason and when attendance has increased new services for fathers should be investigated.
- To attract more fathers a summer timetable of excursions has been planned. This needs to be heavily promoted with both fathers and the mothers who will hopefully encourage fathers to attend.

## Dad's Club Evaluation

### Introduction

Engaging fathers in services remains a firm goal in Sure Start Torquay's work and provision. At present the only service aimed specifically at fathers is Dad's Club.

Dad's Club has recently moved from a local community church to the new Sure Start Torquay building ZigZags. The sessions are held Saturday morning from 10:00 until 12:00. Two members of staff attend the sessions and bacon sandwiches, toast and drinks are supplied for all those that attend. Dad's Club is a very informal setting and deliberately so. One of the main problems that has been highlighted with traditional parenting services is that they can be very intimidating for a father to attend (see previous research conducted by Sure Start Torquay with fathers). Dad's Club aims to be as open and welcoming as possible with the added attraction of being able to get your breakfast there as well!

When originally set up, Dad's Club was aimed at two main Sure Start targets:

- Increase percent of male carers accessing
- Improved involvement of fathers in the Sure Start project

Additionally though, the service also contributes to work in the following targets:

- To reduce the proportion of children aged 0-3 years in the 600 Sure Start areas who are re-registered within the space of 12 months on the child protection register by 20 per cent by 2005\*
- To increase the opportunities for play and physical activity for children and parents.
- To promote and provide for family mental health.

\*Attendance at Dad's Club forms part of a number of Child Protection Plans.

This evaluation aimed to ascertain whether the service could be improved and what outcomes were being achieved for fathers and their children.

### Methodology

Evaluation work in the programme has been focussed on surveys via questionnaires. However these have increasingly been found to have a poor response rate, even when an incentive is offered. A new approach to running focus groups has been trialled in the programme and has been used with some success in evaluating the Special Needs group.

An informal focus group was held during one session of Sure Start Torquay's Dad's Club which is held regularly, in a central location.

The three fathers present at the session were asked to discuss certain topic areas. Rather than the traditional approach of recording and transcribing the discussion, which is both time-consuming and can be intimidating, an open discussion was had around the topic and notes recorded on flipchart paper. Concurrence with the recorded notes was asked for frequently, to ensure what was being written accurately reflected the fathers' feelings. These notes were then written up and are discussed below.

## Results

Below is a verbatim transcription of the notes taken and agreed during the focus group. The italicised comments are the headings posed to the group by the PIW. The following comments are those made by the parents attending the focus group.

### *Expectations*

Bacon sandwich

Place for the children to play – improved since St Luke's

A place to come to give mothers a break – brownie points!

### *Problems*

Can become cramped

Snagging

Not practical to attend every week

Access to building – not clear

Difficult to get in while session is running

Parking is a potential issue

### *Good things*

Better at ZigZags

### *Benefits*

Bacon sandwich, coffee and brownie points

Good toys for children

Good to get out with children in a different place

Better access to toys

Books are accessible

Good for children to mix with other children "and learn to play nicely"

Can be good to spend quality time – especially if working all week

Staff playing with children gives break

### *Developments*

More space

Babysitting service – monthly social time for parents

## Reach

From 01/06/2004 to 31/05/2005 Dad's Club has seen 18 different fathers and twenty-five different children from within the area and four dads and five children from outside the area. On average each session has seen 2.3 fathers and 2.8 children. Although this seems a low figure if you reduce the period of time and take the most recent three months the average attendance rises to 3.8 fathers and 4.8 children. This reflects the slow start to attracting fathers the service has had, but that its reach has noticeably grown.

## Discussion

Fathers identified a number of difficulties, some of which will be resolved when the ZigZags building is complete. Firstly, there is the issue of 'snagging', where faults in a new building are identified and noted for resolution. One of the fathers commented that he had brought one particular issue with the radiator covers in the crèche to the attention of a number of members of staff and as of the date of the focus group nothing had been done. This shows there needs to be clarification in the communication of actions following the reporting of a fault. The fault had been noted and is due for repair by the builders but the father had not been informed of this.

Secondly the fathers noted the need for more space. The plan at present is that when the nursery on the top floor of the ZigZags building is complete, Dad's Club will be held on that floor where there is a great deal more space. The fathers felt that in its present setting in the crèche, it was ideal for two to three fathers but five to six fathers attending with children could become very cramped.

The final two points that are due to be resolved shortly or have been resolved are the access to the building and getting into a session when it is already running. At the time of the research the only way to access the first or second floor of ZigZags was by pressing the 'buzzer' for the first floor which is linked to the office. Unfortunately the session is run from the crèche and there was no way of communicating with that room at the moment. This means that if a father arrived after other fathers and the session is already running, he would have had to wait until somebody noticed him on the CCTV monitor which is situated in the office (there is a window from the crèche to the office). This has now been resolved by the introduction of a door chime linked directly to the crèche.

One difficulty that will remain though is parking and unfortunately it is something Sure Start can do very little about. There is a council run multi-storey car park across the road from the centre but it needs to be paid for and parents and their children need to make their way from there to the building.

Finally, while discussed in the "Problems" section of the focus group, attendance is less a problem and more an observation. Many of the fathers that attend Dad's Club work full time as well and the weekend is their only time off. Two of the fathers at the focus group, felt simply that they would not want to attend every week because it was the only quality time they got to spend with their families.

The fathers that attended this focus group session seemed quite adamant that all they wanted from the session was a place to bring their children to give mothers a break and earn themselves "brownie points". The implications of this are potentially that Dad's Club as it stands is providing everything that is needed and to try and develop it further may alienate a number of the fathers accessing it at present. The feeling amongst the fathers talked to at this focus group was that Dad's Club offered them a break; they could spend time with their children but with staff present there was less pressure on them to entertain and so afforded them the opportunity to relax and build a social network.

The reach figures bode well for the development of Dad's Club. While attendance figures change from week to week it is encouraging to see that the average attendance has increased over the past year. Additionally now the service is being run from the new children's centre, ZigZags, there is more scope to expand the numbers turning up, especially when it moves to the larger room.

The fathers involved in this focus group noted the importance of the opportunity for children to mix “and learn to play nicely”. Playing with older children is very important for the growth and development of younger ones and Dad’s Club is allowing a good opportunity for the younger children attending to learn for their older peers.

Rather than altering Dad’s Club, other services for fathers should be developed at and trialled. Hopefully this would allow Dad’s Club to become a feeder for other services while still retaining its informality for those not wishing for anymore from the service. Additionally as many of the fathers attending work full time it is possible an opportunity to engage non-working fathers is being missed and this may be a focus for future research with fathers.

### Conclusions and recommendations

Needless to say, as the sole service aimed exclusively at fathers within the Sure Start Torquay programme, Dad’s Club needs to continue. Until more fathers are attending regularly it will remain difficult to effectively evaluate the service. This evaluation obtained feedback from three fathers, who may or may not be representative. However the move to a new room offers the opportunity to expand the service and increase the attendance.

#### *Recommendations*

- When the larger room is ready, start a large promotional campaign to increase the numbers attending Dad’s Club.
- Re-evaluate Dad’s Club on a larger scale when there is a larger regular attendance and more opportunity to get representative feedback.

As it stands Dad’s Club can be seen as a success because it is engaging fathers in the programme and actively promoting their role as fathers. However the programme may be missing an opportunity to increase the involvement of fathers by only offering this service. Many fathers are unable to attend Dad’s Club regularly, or even at all, because of weekend work commitments.

#### *Recommendations*

- When involvement in Dad’s Club has increased, investigate other services that would attract and interest male carers.

To increase and develop attendance at Dad’s Club, a number of excursions are being organised to take place over the summer. It is hoped these will attract more fathers to become involved in Dad’s Club which will then enable a wider range of input and opinions into service development and delivery. For a timetable of these activities please see Appendix A.

#### *Recommendations*

- Heavily promote summer excursion timetable, not only with fathers but also with mothers who will hopefully encourage fathers that have not been seen by the programme to attend activities.

Appendix A

**Dad's Club Activities**

25th June	Visit to fire station	10.30 start
2nd July	Play session at Zig Zags (Music Rhythm & Rhyme)	10.00-12.00
9th July	Play session at Zig Zags (Sun safety information)	10.00-12.00
16th July	Fun in the sun	11.00-2.00
23rd July	Play session at Zig Zags	10.00-12.00
30th July	Play session at Zig Zags	10.00-12.00
6th August	Decoy Country Park	10.30-12.30
13th August	Picnic at Cockington	11.00-1.30
20th August	Play session at Zig Zags	10.00-12.00
27th August	Play session at Zig Zags	10.00-12.00
3rd September	Farm trip	TBA
10th September	Play session at Zig Zags	10.00-12.00
17th September	Play session at Zig Zags	10.00-12.00
24th September	Play session at Zig Zags	10.00-12.00