

Male Inclusion Worker Project - Project Evaluation

Background

In response to the apparent lack of support and services for young Dads and using Section 64 grant monies from the Department of Health, the Community Education Development Centre (CEDC), Coventry, set up two pilot programmes in different parts of the country. One of these is Dearne Valley Dads (DVD), delivered through Rotherham YMCA. The focus of this evaluation is the additional Sure Start funding supporting a project worker managed by Rotherham YMCA, linked to the Dearne Valley Dads initiative and based in Denaby Main and Conisbrough Sure Start.

The post holder is based within the Family Support Team, in the Old Library building at Denaby Main. The Family Support Team aims to facilitate team work with parents, parents-to-be and children to provide information, advice and support to promote independence, confidence and improving parenting skills.

Project objectives

As the project has no formal documentation, it is difficult to identify specific objectives for it, other than in relation to the overarching objectives of the national Sure Start Programme and in relation to the overall remit of each team.

The aim of the overall CEDC pilot was to find out how new services can be designed and existing services re-modelled better to suit the needs of young fathers, aged 16-25 years, and their children. Roles are no longer obvious and many men are not clear about how they fit in as a father, for example, their traditional expectation of the role may have been to bring in money and resources for their family. Now with high unemployment, this is often not the case and men often feel directionless as to how to be a parent.

The Male Inclusion Worker in Denaby Main and Conisbrough is responsible for engaging directly with fathers in the area and encouraging them to engage with their children in play and in care. Unlike the CEDC pilot, he is responsible for encouraging all fathers, including those aged 16-25. There is a focus on getting Dads more involved on a day to

day basis, as well as with holiday activities, for example, by organising gardening, football and barbecues.

Contribution to Sure Start Delivery Plan

The Male Inclusion Worker project provides cross-cutting support to all four Sure Start Objectives, although most specifically Objective 2 ‘*Improving Health*’ and Objective 4 ‘*Strengthening Families and Communities*’. The Delivery Plan incorporates a range of Public Service Agreement (PSA) and Sure Start Delivery Agreement (SDA) targets attached to each broader objective, several of which have relevance for the Male Inclusion Worker Project (see Table below).

Sure Start Programme Objective	Performance Target
Objective 2: Improving health, In particular, by supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth.	SDA Target: Parenting support and information available for all parents in Sure Start areas.
Objective 4: Strengthening families and communities. In particular, by involving families in building the communities capacity to sustain the programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty.	SDA Target: 75% of families report personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of services providing family support.

Source: Sure Start Delivery Plan: Denaby Main & Conisbrough 2001

Linkages with partners and other Sure Start projects

There are a growing number of father-related initiatives. Other than Dearne Valley Dads, the project has links with Father Figures (based in Sheffield) and Fathers Direct (national). Additional organisations with which linkages and advice may be shared

include DIY Dads (based in London), Lads 'n' Dads (based in Leicestershire), Families Need Fathers, DadsUK.co.uk and HomeDad.org.uk (all national). The post holder has also been asked to join the Board of the local Youth Inclusion Project. Attempts are being made to feed into every community action group; Sure Start generally but advertising specifically for dads too.

The post holder has close working links with the Sure Start Mexbrough Male Inclusion Worker. They work independently, as there are different needs in each of the areas however, attend training courses together and liaise closely. Recently, a one-day conference was attended, *Y Fatherhood*, held at the Earth Centre.

There is no formal male inclusion network across the Sure Start Regional area however a recent Sure Start Co-ordinators network meeting included a half day session on working with fathers. The key issues raised at this session included:

- The need to overtly employ male workers within Sure Start;
- The best way to get more fathers involved is by some fathers already been involved in projects and activities;
- The need to tailor activities and sessions specifically at men (e.g. Time Out for Dadz in Middleton Sure Start, Leeds);
- The need to ensure activities are accessible for the days / times men are more willing to attend (e.g. evenings and weekends)

These are all pertinent lessons for the Male Inclusion Project within Denaby Main and Conisbrough and continued networking with other Sure Start Programmes both regionally and nationally can enable the project to benefit from innovative practice and evidence-based practice already undertaken.

Project operation

The Male Inclusion Worker at Sure Start Denaby Main and Conisbrough has only been in post for approximately 6 months. The work so far has predominantly been quite tentative and focused on raising awareness where possible and encouraging contacts with fathers. The work began with a database of names and addresses of local men

interested in getting involved with activities for fathers in the area. Additionally, attempts have been made to attend families with health visitors and nursery nurses.

A photo session for families was held on Father's Day 2003 – there were 12 initial expressions of interest in this. A questionnaire was also designed and distributed to ask what fathers would like from a potential 'dads group'. A group has been established in Denaby Main within the last two months, however, attendance is currently very poor. It has been found that many fathers cannot attend certain times / days because of work commitments. Suggestions have been made to have a drop in evening. Weekend work would also be of value. There are constraints, however, as although the Male Inclusion Worker can be very flexible in terms of hours, the building cannot be accessed at weekends because of fire regulations. The post holder is keen for the work to become more structured, with a mixture of activities provided for fathers alone and other provided for fathers with their children.

Outreach work is also done in schools – the post holder teaches elements of the Personal, Social and Health Education course particularly about fatherhood / parenthood at local comprehensive schools. The post holder is also a mentor; this was originally going to be a drop in service but now comprises actual referrals. There is an argument to suggest, however, that Sure Start resources are paying for a service already offered by an existing mentoring scheme. It is equally the case, though, that such a role affords Sure Start the opportunity to work in partnership with schools, link to young people and their parents.

It is hoped that an Education Action Zone-linked reading scheme may be initiated in an after school format with fathers in primary schools. Both the Denaby Main and Conisbrough Worker and the Mexborough Worker spent some time waiting outside schools at morning and afternoon pickup times to try and talk to fathers. However, despite having NHS identification someone reported them to the police. This was very frustrating for the post holder and it was commented that *"it wouldn't have happened had we been female"*.

Project targeting

As mentioned previously, a database of names and addresses is central to the targeting of the work of the post holder. Posters have been put up, invitations have been sent out and fliers have been distributed at clinics and through other workers. There are two people carriers available for transport, so pickups are offered. Other contact is made through other existing sessions, for example, health visitors, community nursery nurses, midwives.

There is perhaps scope for other projects within Sure Start to more proactively encourage contact with the post holder, for example, fathers picking up their children from the Day Nursery and mothers attending projects could be encouraged to advertise the service to their child's father. The post holder could also visit sessions himself and introduce his support by chatting to fathers and mothers. This is likely to need to be done over a prolonged period, particularly given the evidence that employing male workers is a critical factor in the required change of culture and image of the services¹.

This is a key issue for the Sure Start programme when engaging with men across the Denaby Main and Conisbrough area. Working with fathers / men is not simply an activity that one project can take forward on behalf of the Sure Start programme but is a much broader organisational issue that needs to be taken on by all Sure Start funded projects and staff. Crucially the Male Inclusion Worker has a role in not only developing particular activities and initiatives for men across the area but in re-shaping the Sure Start Programme to ensure that all activities and services are '*male friendly*'. This is vital to ensure that men feel comfortable in accessing all elements of the Sure Start Programme and not simply working with the Male Inclusion worker.

There is little evidence to date that the Male Inclusion worker has been involved in re-shaping service delivery or advising other projects on particular techniques to encourage involvement and attendance of men. However this function is crucial if the project is to have a longer-term impact on the delivery of Sure Start services and also sustain male inclusion activity over the longer-term. This may involve more detailed discussion with

¹ DFEE 'Early Excellence Centre Annual Evaluation Report 2000'
http://www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/0-C16E88.doc

fathers / men currently accessing particular projects across the Sure Start programme and not simply those engaging with the Male Inclusion project. This will ensure that the project can facilitate the identification of real barriers to male involvement across the whole programme.

Beneficiary and partner feedback

It was not possible to contact any dads directly, given the lack of attendance at the 'Dads Group'. Other professionals interviewed were positive about the project, although felt that the post holder faces a *"hard task to get them [dads] involved"*. It was also commented that *"they are only on a 12 month contract and so don't think that they can do the amount of work that is needed to make any sort of difference."* Another commented more positively that such a worker does, however, make *"small beginnings"*. It was said that health visitors have been trying to encourage fathers' involvement in the course of their contact with families but that it is not easy because *"there are other issues that come before looking after the children, for example, bringing in a wage"*.

Recent evaluation indicates the following barriers to fathers' involvement in Sure Start:

1. predominantly female environment/lack of male presence;
2. Sure Start opening hours and fathers' employment hours;
3. traditional, gendered attitude towards childcare and male-female roles: 'mother knows best';
4. female-centred orientation of services;
5. lack of knowledge about Sure Start².

In this respect and as outlined in the previous sector, the post holder can contribute to minimising 1, 4 and 5 of these barriers. There needs to be overall commitment from Sure Start to them all, however, in order to support him in his approaches.

² 'Fathers in Sure Start' Sept 03 www.surestart.gov.uk

Project Management

Other than Dearne Valley Dads, there was no support in the local area specifically for fathers prior to the recruitment of the post holder. The post holder is employed by Rotherham YMCA (as overall manager of Dearne Valley Dads) and seconded to Sure Start.

It was commented that without the support of Dearne Valley Dads, the post holder would have found it very difficult to do the job. Although Sure Start are described as “*great*”, it was felt that they would not have been able to provide enough support; it is the links with Dearne Valley Dads that show what can be achieved. They have, however, been established for 2 years and maintain a weekly session for Dads. At present, the Sure Start registration form only records details for the child’s mother – this is being addressed with new forms to include details of the child’s father (as appropriate), which should enable the post holder to approach them with invites.

Milestones and Outputs (as per appraisal/actual/variance/unexpected)

As there is no formal project documentation for the Male Inclusion project it is not possible to compare the project against any specific project milestones or outputs. Whilst it is clear that the project supports a number of PSA and SDA targets, it is more difficult to quantify the contribution of the projects to broader outcome objectives.

Appropriate targets and milestones could be established for the project to enable the Sure Start programme to monitor progress and review the activity of the project in the future.

Value for money (with appropriate comparisons if available)

It is apparent that the relationships with Rotherham YMCA as managers of Dearne Valley Dads and the CEDC as initiators of the pilot have been of great benefit to Sure Start. This is particularly in terms of maximising resources and experience to give the project the best chance of success.

Summary and recommendations

Although the achievements of this project so far are few, it is of value that small steps are being taken to encourage father involvement. Given the success of Dearne Valley Dads, the partnership allows expansion of services into other areas of need.

Given the overall commitment of Sure Start nationally towards encouraging fathers, this project is an example of good practice. Key findings from the 'Fathers in Sure Start Programmes' (www.surestart.gov.uk) indicates that an important encouragement for fathers is the presence of a staff member dedicated to involving them. Such workers can help Sure Start local programmes discover and respond to issues that affect fathers. *"Agencies that treat support for fathers as an essential aspect of their work, and not an optional extra, are far more likely to inspire commitment in staff and confidence in fathers"*³.

The main hindrance to the project at present is the immense amount of time, energy and overall persistence required to make inroads into the community of fathers in Denaby Main and Conisbrough. This needs to be also considered alongside recent research that has indicated many fathers are comfortable 'earning their place' through their role as provider, compared with the challenges of trying to become an 'involved' father⁴. Dearne Valley Dads has been operating for 2 years and is now a success, however, much effort has been invested in order to achieve this.

Sure Start therefore have to be prepared to accept a lack of visible results in a short timescale. Additionally, the post holder has to be able to accept the frustrations

³ Upstart Issue 2 October 2000

that come with this. It is understood that a new Sure Start building is being developed in Conisbrough; this will afford the post holder the opportunity to have a base and a visible presence there. There is potentially a lot of demand not accessing the buildings at Denaby Main, given that at funday held in the summer at the Ivanhoe Centre, Conisbrough, was attended by approximately 700-800 people.

Advice from an organisation working closely with fathers⁵ suggests that there are four clear elements to be aware of in order to succeed with such a project, as follows.

1. Work needs to be done with the whole Sure Start team to recognise that engaging fathers is both safe and valuable. The team may be **saying** 'OK we support you' but it has to be **evidenced** throughout all work. This stage alone can take around 6 months, particularly as many in the team may be saying 'dads are not my problem, they're his'. A clear **strategy** needs to be produced.
2. The main Sure Start user group is mothers. Efforts need to be made to make the environment '**father friendly**'. In Sure Start areas it is often found that there has been a high incidence of domestic violence and mothers may see Sure Start as a place of safety. As such, there is a chance initially that **some mothers 'move out' as fathers 'move in'**.
3. Only once the first two points have been addressed can work be done to convince fathers that Sure Start has something to offer them. It also is the case that Sure Start has to be willing to support dads needs for **provision on Saturdays, evenings and Sundays**.
4. At this point, **Sure Start targets can begin to be met**.

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation "Fathers, Work and Family Life" 1999 from <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/659.asp>

⁵ Fathers Plus, Children North East