

Father-inclusive practice guide



A tool to support the inclusion of fathers
in a holistic approach to service delivery

© Commonwealth of Australia 2009

ISBN: 978-1-921380-25-9

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Australian Government available from the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's Department. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Canberra ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>

This guide has been produced by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). Information in this publication is made available on the understanding that FaHCSIA is not providing professional advice. Views expressed in this publication are those of third parties, and do not necessarily reflect the views of FaHCSIA or the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. FaHCSIA accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of any material contained in this publication.

For additional copies please call 1800 050 009*

(*free call unless calling from a mobile or pay phone)

National Relay Service for users who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment

TTY: 1800 555 677

Speak and Listen: 1800 555 727

Internet relay: www.relayservice.com.au

www.fahcsia.gov.au

Foreword

The role of fathers in our society is changing with more fathers, step-fathers, uncles, pops and grandfathers taking active roles in the lives of their children. When fathers are involved with their children there are many benefits for themselves, their children, their families, and the wider community. There is now significant evidence to show that when fathers take a positive, active role in the lives of their children, less behavioural problems, improved social skills and better educational outcomes result.

Building on the strong community endorsement of fathers' involvement in their children's care and the growing evidence base supporting the inclusion of fathers in children's services, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs recognised the need to create a suite of tools to engender a more father friendly and father inclusive practice.

This guide was developed by a panel of practitioners from key community organisations and research institutions, and builds on years of Australian and international practice wisdom gained by practitioners and organisations working with families.

I encourage your organisation and staff to explore this guide and draw from it useful strategies and techniques provided so we can increase favourable outcomes for children and families through increased positive engagement of their fathers, step-fathers, uncles, pops and grandfathers.



Richard Fletcher
Convenor
Australian Fatherhood Research Network
11 March 2009

Contents

Introduction	7
Acknowledgements	7
1. Background	9
2. Using the Guide	11
3. The key elements of father-inclusive practice	13
Father-inclusive practice – What is it?	13
Father-inclusive practice – How will it help?	13
Father-inclusive practice – Barriers	16
4. A quick guide to approaching father-inclusive practice	19
5. Exploration–Where are you now?	23
Audits that are useful to the organisation	23
Male involvement audit	24
Cultural audit	25
Service delivery	32
6. The vision: Where do you want to be?	33
7. Goal setting: Breaking it down so it’s achievable and realistic	35
An example from the Early Childhood Sector	36
8. Strategies: What is needed to move forward?	39
Developing an action plan	39
Milestones	41
9. Targeting: Who is your audience?	43
10. Staffing: Knowledge, skills, values and attitudes	45
Knowledge	45
Skills	46
Values	46
Attitudes	47

11. Implementation: Some practical tips	49
Organisational environment	49
Client focus	50
Program models	51
Types of groups for fathers	53
Facilitation and referral	53
Program promotion	55
12. Action Learning: Let's do it!	57
13. Making mentoring relationships work	59
Developing a mentoring relationship	59
When there is more than one mentor	60
Supporting tools and resources	60
14. Information resources	61
15. Information and accreditation	63
Attachments	65
Attachment 1: Father-inclusive practice, an inspirational case study	65
Attachment 2: Service profiles – Participants in the pilot project	67
References	83

Introduction

Welcome to the *Father-inclusive practice guide*. This guide is a resource to support the inclusion of fathers in a holistic approach to service delivery. Part of the content of this guide has been adapted from the Canadian Good Practice Guide, Father Toolkit, which can be downloaded free from www.mydad.ca.

Acknowledgements

The Australian Government through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) has funded the development of this guide in partnership with Urbis Pty Ltd and the following experienced practitioners:

Andrew King	Mensline Australia, VIC
Eryn Webster	Ngala, WA
Graeme Russell	4Points Consulting Group, NSW
Lynne Slocombe	Centacare Broken Bay, NSW
Paul Prichard	Good Beginnings, TAS
Peter Llewellyn-Smith	4Points Consulting Group, NSW
Richard Fletcher	University of Newcastle Family Action Centre, NSW
Steve Martin	Stepfamily Association of Victoria
Stuart Tomlinson	CLAN WA, WA
Terry Melvin	Mensline Australia, VIC
Tony White	UnitingCare Burnside, NSW

Valuable contributions and comments have also been made by representatives of the Australian Government and the following organisations and service providers from the Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP) and Early Childhood Program (ECP) sectors:

Agencies for South West Accommodation (ASWA) Inc	Bunbury, WA
Anglican Community Care	Mount Gambier, SA
Centacare Broken Bay	Sydney, NSW
Centacare Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes	Forbes, NSW
Centacare Tasmania	Burnie, TAS
Children’s Protection Society	Heidelberg, VIC
City of Greater Dandenong	Dandenong, VIC
Communities@work	Canberra, ACT
Family Mediation Centre	Narre Warren, VIC
Family Relationships Centre	Traralgon, VIC
Good Beginnings Australia	Lewisham, NSW; Darwin, NT and Moe, VIC
Interrelate Family Centres	Baulkham Hills, NSW
Mundabbera Community Development Association	Mundaberra, QLD
Ngala Parenting with Confidence	Kensington, WA
Playgroup Association of Queensland	Enoggera, QLD
Relationships Australia, Northern Territory	Darwin, NT
University of South Australia	Whyalla Norrie, SA

1. Background

It is becoming more apparent that the role of fathers in families is changing. Fathers, whether they are the primary caregiver, separated from the family, step-fathers or grandfathers are increasingly playing a greater role and becoming more active in their children's lives. However many fathers are still reluctant to approach or utilise services because of the many and varied accessibility issues and barriers they face.

As a result, organisations need to be proactive in their efforts to engage fathers, reassess the way they plan, develop and deliver their programs, and address accessibility issues to align themselves with the increased need to provide services that meet and are responsive to the needs of fathers.

By including fathers in organisational activities, services, resources or programs the organisation becomes more equitable by not only appealing to the needs of mothers and children, but also being equally accessible to fathers. In turn this will result in more enriched and effective programs, with higher client participation and appreciation.

In essence, father-inclusive practice aims to value and support men in their role as fathers, actively encourage their participation in programs, and ensure they are appropriately and equally considered in all aspects of service delivery. This can include, but is not limited to, the introduction of father specific programs and resources, the way groups are facilitated, attitudes and skills of staff members, recruitment, language used in promotional materials, flexible opening hours and the physical environment.

Including fathers in this way can result in a greater understanding of their child's development and needs, a closer bond with their child, improved communication skills, more positive father-child interaction, increased confidence in parenting, decreased feelings of isolation, the development of a peer network with other fathers with similar life experiences, a greater sense of self-worth and commitment to their family, and greater likelihood of increased interaction and involvement with their community.

The participation and inclusion of fathers in services provided by organisations is not only beneficial for the fathers themselves but it also has positive implications for their current or ex-partners, and most importantly for their children.

Increased involvement of fathers in parenting can also result in increased opportunities for partners to balance parenting with other areas of their lives, such as work, education and social activities. Partners may also have a greater sense of self-worth due to the higher satisfaction in their relationship with their partner.

Perhaps the most important benefit of father-inclusive practice is the enormous rewards this has for children. Positive and consistent father-child interaction brings the support and protection needed to increase social, emotional and cognitive

development. Children often have an increased sense of wellbeing, a clearer sense of their identity and greater resilience to adversity.

Put simply, father-inclusive practice strengthens and supports families and is vitally important for the community as a whole.

The changing role of the father

Over the years, the role of the father has significantly changed from the provider and protector, to one where they must also address the other needs of their children.

Today, the role of the father can be expressed in six different categories:

- ▶ Being a **responsible father** means doing things like organising their child's doctor appointments, arranging for a babysitter, buying their back to school supplies, or making sure they clean their teeth.
- ▶ A **remembering father** will regularly be thinking about their child.
- ▶ A **nurturing father** will feed their child, give them a bath, buy clothes for them, and take them to the doctor's.
- ▶ An **affectionate father** will regularly give their child hugs and kisses and let them know they are loved.
- ▶ **Interactive fathers** play with their child, communicate with them and express ideas, positive emotions and free thoughts.
- ▶ The **provider/protector father** ensures they are providing for their family and that they are safe.

When asked how it would be different if fathers were fully engaged in every aspect of family-related services and activities, a woman with many years of experience in welfare and family support services beamed a huge smile as she said 'It would be just perfect'.

2. Using the Guide

The Guide was tested through a pilot project of service providers engaged in a mentoring relationship to enhance father-inclusive practice, and is suitable for use as a stand-alone document.

The pilot project which was conducted by Urbis Pty Ltd, commenced in May 2007 and ran until March 2008. The pilot project aimed to build on the knowledge and skills of Family Relationship Services Program and Early Childhood Program service providers. Participants in the pilot project have provided their service profiles, which can be found at Attachment 2. These are intended to assist organisations who use the guide in the future to develop a sense of what types of organisations were involved in the pilot project and how the father-inclusive practices can be applied in different locations, including the workplace.

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach in applying father-inclusive practice in your organisation. This is mainly due to the varying demographics and service types of each individual organisation. Therefore the Guide will not provide you with all the answers, but instead it is designed to stimulate your thinking to help you and your organisation become more father-inclusive.

The Guide:

- outlines the essential elements of engaging and working with fathers and their families
- is strengths-based
- is designed to be practical and easy to use
- provides references to more comprehensive information on key issues
- is intended for broad use.

You can use this Guide either by moving through each section sequentially, or familiarising yourself with the key elements of father-inclusive practice before referring to the more detailed content material as required.

As the Guide is intended to support practitioners, some tools and interactive activities have been included. These are highlighted as:

- **Skills toolboxes.** These summarise key father-inclusive practice skills. Experience has shown that practitioners find self-assessment against each of these skills useful (ie. whether they have a high, medium or low skill level).
- **Conversation boxes.** These are reflective tools prompting thought on important issues and on your own practice. They have been found to help clarify effective approaches to father-inclusive practices.
- **Tables.** These are useful when planning tasks that are suggested in the Guide.

It is recommended that when using the Guide your organisation should establish an Action Learning group comprising key stakeholders and program staff. This will ensure a higher profile and greater ownership of the father-inclusive project. As the Action

Learning group has key responsibility for the project it is more likely that optimum outcomes will be achieved.

If you choose to form an Action Learning group, the following questions need to be considered:

- ▶ How often will the Action Learning group meet?
 - ▶ Regular facilitated meetings maintain focus and momentum—every 3-4 weeks recommended over the course of the project.
- ▶ How and who will document the project learning?
 - ▶ Select a group member to document the process, issues, challenges and learning that emerges over the course of the project. Individual diaries and a record of meetings are important.
- ▶ Who is supporting this process—mentors, key stakeholders?
 - ▶ Have you identified supporters of the project both within and external to the organisation that you are able to access? Mentors are also an important resource.
- ▶ What resources are required and what do you already have?

Complementary Material

The *Introduction to working with men and family relationships guide* was developed in partnership with Crisis Support Services Inc and complements this resource. It is an interactive and user-friendly tool for practitioners who are new to working specifically with male clients. It provides information for engaging with men across a variety of disciplines and provides some insight into the skills, challenges and best practice models currently being utilised both nationally and internationally in working with men.

3. The key elements of father-inclusive practice

Father-inclusive practice – What is it?

Father-inclusive practice occurs when the needs of fathers (biological and social) are responded to through the planning, development and delivery of services. It recognises families as a system, and acknowledges a balance between the needs of fathers and the family as a whole.

Many family-based services have evolved to respond primarily to the needs of mothers and children, and therefore father-inclusive practice may require a process of planned change and managed learning. This involves building sustainable relationships between staff, family members and the community.

The father-inclusive practice model:

- recognises the diverse circumstances, strengths and interests of fathers
- takes a positive approach to the diversity of men, their needs and expectations
- encourages men and service providers to openly celebrate and value fathering.

Father-inclusive practice – How will it help?

Father-inclusive practice will help service providers to:

- improve workplace relations
- enrich programs as a result of inclusion of fathers in organisations
- meet performance indicators
- satisfy the requirements of funding bodies
- align with FaHCSIA's strategic directions.

Father-inclusive practice will help fathers to:

- enhance existing parenting skills
- develop a peer network with other fathers, who share similar like experiences
- encourage positive father-child interaction
- increase parenting information and confidence
- promote father involvement within the family unit
- reduce father isolation by networking with other fathers and professional support staff

- increase the amount of time father and child spend together
- increase the number of positive interactions between father and child.

Father-inclusive practice – Positives

It is believed that when fathers are actively involved in their children's lives there can be many varied and positive outcomes for families, children, fathers and communities.

Why engage fathers?

- Fathers are committed to their children and are looking for ways to be involved in their lives.
- The relationship between fathers and mothers has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of children.
- Many fathers want to parent differently from the way in which they were parented.
- Fathers think differently to mothers.
- To increase the number of men engaging in services.
- More men are becoming primary caregivers and are expressing their needs as fathers.
- To reduce the parenting skills gap between mothers and fathers.
- To challenge traditional roles and workplace structures.
- To provide opportunities to promote team parenting through father-inclusive practice.

Richard Fletcher from the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle notes some comments in emerging literature on the importance of positive father involvement in the lives of their children:

- the 2003 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes found that most males (90 per cent) and females (91 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'a father should be as heavily involved in the care of his children as the mother'
- 'fathers are now seen as vitally important in the way children develop', with studies measuring father-child interactions at an early age and children's wellbeing some years later.

Research

Fletcher provides several examples of studies measuring the impact of father's involvement with their children and notes that 'studies such as these provide a powerful argument for supporting fathers to be directly involved in their children's lives'.

1. A 2004 study examining parental factors (parental sensitivity to a child's cues and support for autonomous activity) that predict school readiness for pre-school and first graders conducted by the American National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). The study used a cohort of above average income families with two residential parents.

The study suggests that:

- ▶ children with less behavioural problems and higher social skills have fathers who are sensitive and supportive of their child's autonomy
 - ▶ emotionally intimate marital relationships add to the positive impact of these factors.
2. A study of parental influence on children's cognitive development, using a cohort of low income families with two year old children published in the *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22 (2007). The study assessed parent-child interactions to examine the impact of both positive qualities (sensitivity, positive regard and cognitive stimulation) and negative qualities (detachment, hostility and intrusiveness).

A later assessment of children's maths and language levels showed that:

- ▶ children with two supportive parents achieved the highest scores in maths and language
 - ▶ children, both of whose parents were unsupportive, scored lowest, and if only one parent was supportive, the positive effect on cognitive ability was not dependent on which parent this was.
3. Data examined in 2005 from the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which used a nationally representative sample of young people to examine the effect of parent-child relationships on depression levels in young people found that the quality of the father-young person relationship was just as important to mental health as the mother-young person relationship.

Fletcher (2008) notes that this indicates the impact of father involvement on their child's wellbeing does not stop at childhood.

He also indicates that there are additional indirect benefits of positive father involvement with their children. For example, in families where the mother is depressed, positive father-infant relationships are linked with:

- ▶ improved treatment outcomes for mothers
- ▶ reduced behaviour problems for infants in later childhood.

Fathers however can also have a negative impact on their children's wellbeing where fathers are:

- ▶ engaged in high levels of antisocial behaviour (the more time they live with their children the more misconduct problems their children experience)
- ▶ violent family members and/or abusive towards their children.

Outlined in Attachment 1 is a case study that further supports the positive involvement of fathers in families.



Father-inclusive practices – Barriers

- Men generally have less experience in parenting and parenting programs.
- There is less social pressure to be involved in parenting programs.
- Fathers tend to be more socially isolated as parents.
- Men may find it difficult to participate in services that are held in the day during the work week.
- Fathers are often seen as less competent than mothers.
- Family arrangements and socio-economic realities can be serious barriers.
- Fathers are often open to support, however, there is little available to them in the community.
- Fathers may not be aware of services already in place or assume that those they know about are ‘for women’.

Fletcher (2008) also notes:

- many father’s have initial high expectations of involvement with their children which result in disappointment and even grief about limited contact
- there is little information on how couples decide ‘who does what’ when they start a family, although some research indicates couples tend to figure it out on the run, are often unaware of other options, and tend to operate from assumptions about men’s and women’s roles and expectations.

Some common false beliefs about men looking after children can also be barriers to father-inclusive practice. These include:

Only mothers can bond with babies.

Men can be super-sensitive to babies; their heart rates race as fast as a woman’s when they hear a baby cry. Fathers can recognise their infants by the feel of their baby’s hands after only 60 minutes touch, even when blindfolded.

Fathers don't make much difference.

Young children with involved fathers fit in better at day-care and school, learn better and have fewer behavioural problems. They make friends more easily and are better able to understand how other people feel. Later, they have more contented love lives, better mental health and are less likely to get into trouble with the police. All this is true for girls as much as for boys, whether or not they live with their fathers.

A father's main job is making the money.

Child care statistics show that fathers are increasingly prioritising their child care responsibilities. According to the 2002 ABS Child Care Survey, 30 per cent of employed fathers of children aged under 12 years made use of family friendly work arrangements to care for their children. This has increased from 24 per cent in 1993.

Only mothers really look after children.

Australian fathers are increasingly spending more time with their children. The 1997 ABS Time Use survey found that men are spending 20 minutes more a day playing with their children and 18 minutes more during weekend days teaching and helping their children, than they were in 1992.

(Adapted from 'Dad myths' card, www.fathersdirect.com and ABS data.)

Sources of additional information and useful links on father-inclusive practice can be found in Section 13 of the Guide.

We worked with a group of primary school teachers at a small rural school running events for fathers at the school. After almost a year of activities and meetings one of them commented ' You know, now when I see parents coming in the gate I don't just see parents, I see mums and dads' .

4. A quick guide to approaching father-inclusive practice

While using this Guide you may discover that you need to make only minor adjustments to your current practice, or you may want to consider more substantial changes. Whatever the case, the following steps will help you find ways to develop more father-inclusive services.

Note that this is a quick guide to approaching father-inclusive practice and a more comprehensive explanation of these steps can be found in the correlating sections which follow.

a) Exploration: Where are you now?

Having accepted the need for action, it is then useful to start gathering information by exploring all components of your service. This will help you obtain a clear picture of how well your service engages men and fathers. At this early exploration stage, consider the following:

- what is it that we do? This may involve an audit of:
 - your services' activities and programs
 - the current emphasis on father-inclusion
 - the type of training provided to staff
 - the organisation's effectiveness in engaging fathers
 - your service delivery environment.
- what is it that we currently do well (service strengths)?
- what is it that we could be doing better (potential)?
- what are the barriers you can't change that may impact on achieving your goals?

b) The Vision: Where do you want to be?

The clarity gained from the exploration stage will help you understand:

- what is currently being done
- what needs to change
- why these changes are needed
- how these changes may best come about.

It's important to have a vision of what you are trying to achieve, what changes you want to see in the organisation, its service delivery and for your clients.

c) Goal Setting: Breaking it down so it's achievable and realistic

Achieving clarity about the changes required to develop more father-inclusive practices allows a service to set one or more realistic goal(s). These may relate (but are not limited) to factors such as service delivery, the service delivery environment, philosophies, policies, staff skill and attitudes, staff gender ratios, awareness and application of relevant literature or business planning.

Clear goals are critical to success. They provide a foundation for the development of strategies to change practice and enable what appear to be insurmountable issues to be broken down into achievable outcomes. They will also help you measure the effectiveness of your efforts through monitoring and evaluation.

To ensure the goals can produce effective change, it is important to make sure they are:

- ▶ **Specific**
- ▶ **Measurable**
- ▶ **Achievable**
- ▶ **Realistic, explicit and agreed by all**
- ▶ **Time limited.**

d) Strategies: What is needed to move forward?

Having determined clearly achievable goals, it is now time to identify and plan strategies (i.e. actions) to achieve each goal. Strategies are small steps that include consideration of:

- ▶ what tasks are required to achieve each of your goals
- ▶ when strategies will be implemented or completed
- ▶ who is responsible for implementing each strategy
- ▶ who will oversee this process
- ▶ how they will be undertaken
- ▶ how you will know the strategies are implemented and goals are achieved.

e) Targeting: Who is your audience?

You should become aware of who you are targeting, exactly 'who' you want to reach with your services. It is useful to consider:

- ▶ who are your primary, secondary and other audiences?
- ▶ what are the characteristics of your primary audience?
- ▶ which of these characteristics can be used to help you engage with your target group?

f) Staffing: Knowledge, skills, values and attitudes

Your organisation's capacity to become more father-inclusive is dependant on the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of its staff. It is important for staff to critically reflect on these areas and identify skills gaps, areas of required learning, awareness of values and possible shifts in attitudes.

g) Implementation: Some practical tips

Having worked through the previous steps, you should now have a plan of clearly defined steps to progress each of your goals. Some areas to consider when implementing father-inclusive practice are:

- ▶ Organisational qualities that support best practice.
- ▶ How to engage fathers.
- ▶ Types of groups for fathers.
- ▶ Tips for facilitating groups for fathers, including for female facilitators.
- ▶ Making effective referrals.
- ▶ The physical environment.
- ▶ Promoting your services as father-inclusive.

h) Action Learning: Let's do it

Throughout every step of this process it will be necessary to critically reflect on, and review progress. For instance, considering the steps of the process, the following questions may be considered:

- ▶ Where have we come from?
- ▶ Where are we going?
- ▶ What is working well?
- ▶ What could be working better and how?
- ▶ What may be getting in the way that we can't change?
- ▶ What are alternate solutions?
- ▶ What have we learnt?
- ▶ Do we need to go back and explore a particular issue further?
- ▶ Given what we have discovered, do we need to change any goals or strategies?

Ongoing review beyond the father-inclusive practice implementation process will help you remain responsive to the changing needs of this target group.

5. Exploration: Where are you now?

This section provides you with some questions and a checklist to help you reflect on how responsive your organisation and its individual programs are to the needs of fathers. The check list is built around the seven practice principles articulated in the *Australian Public Service Commission's Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* (www.apsc.gov.au/foundations/charterpublicservice.htm) which are:

- access
- equity
- communication
- responsiveness
- effectiveness
- efficiency
- accountability.

Please take some time now to consider the questions in the conversation boxes below.

Conversation box 1

- What are the benefits for your organisation if more fathers were to access your services?
- What level of experience have you had in working with fathers?
- What has been your key learning(s) from this work?
- What programs are already provided in your organisation or locality that may be relevant to fathers? (e.g. antenatal classes, separated fathers' groups)
- What strengths do you or your service bring when working with fathers?

Audits that may be useful to the organisation

You might find the following two audits, the Male Involvement Audit and the Cultural Audit, useful in determining how well your organisation and its programs are placed to deliver quality father-inclusive services. They will help identify your target client groups, service demands and where you need to direct resources to deliver more accessible and responsive services.

If you are using an Action Learning group, it should first undertake the two audits to establish a benchmark for assessing any changes that occur over the course of this project as the organisation endeavours to become a more father-inclusive organisation / practitioner, or affirm the strengths of your current approach.

Male Involvement Audit

Using your service records and drawing from discussions with other staff members, complete the following audit. This should be an ongoing process, necessary to keep you up to date and informed about your service.

Current status

1. Exactly how many men use your service? _____
2. Exactly how many male staff do you have? _____
3. Exactly how many male volunteers do you have? _____
4. What roles do these men play in service planning and delivery?

5. Roughly how many men are indirectly involved in services provided by your organisation (for e.g. dropping off children, receive mail)? _____
6. Does your organisation have an analysis of the demographics of men in the community you service (e.g. ethnicity, age, needs, employment, etc)?

Yes No NA

If yes, what are the demographic characteristics?

7. How many of the fathers who access your service fit into the following groups?

Biological father	_____	Employed full-time	_____
Step father	_____	Employed part-time	_____
Separated father	_____	Stay at home father	_____
Young father	_____	Care for a disabled child	_____
CALD father	_____	Have special needs	_____
Indigenous father	_____	Father-figure	_____

Cultural Audit

Use the Quick Reference Checklist below to get an overview of your organisation's strengths and potential areas for improvement. Then identify two or three priority areas for your organisation to work on, including at least one that will give you a quick win. Once your organisation has made satisfactory progress, review the checklist and set new goals.

In preparation for this audit, talk to some of the current service users and stakeholders. Ask mothers, children, and fathers already using your service about what issues are relevant to local fathers and what services or activities they may be interested in. You may also want to ask questions such as what groups of fathers will attend. Will different groups of fathers require specific services? What scheduling issues would conflict with attendance? Also ask stakeholders if they are aware of any local men who can help plan events or bring other men into the service.

Quick reference checklist

Yes – meets needs

Limited – room for improvement

No – does not meet needs and/or requires immediate attention

N/A – not applicable

	Yes	Limited	No	N/A
Access				
Is your organisation, centre, service or program easily accessible for fathers accessing your services?				
Does your organisation have strategies to increase men/fathers' access to services?				
Does your organisation provide effective outreach services (e.g. services at different locations) to fathers?				
Do you provide information and services to the specific groups of fathers that access your service (e.g. information sessions on caring for a newborn to new fathers)?				
Equity				
Are fathers reflected proportionally to mothers and children in your client base?				
Communication				
Does your staff receive training about how to engage and work with men/fathers?				

	Yes	Limited	No	N/A
Is this supported by a policy document and orientation process in your organisation?				
Do you think that your staff demonstrate an awareness of the diversity of men and the importance of fathers in the lives of their children, and is this knowledge applied to service delivery?				
Does your organisation currently inform fathers about its services effectively?				
Do you think your promotional material is appropriate for men/fathers?				
Does your organisation or service have the names of local programs that are inclusive of men/fathers?				
Responsiveness				
Is the décor of your organisation inviting to fathers/men?				
Is there appropriate reading material available for men?				
Do the hours of operation cater to the needs of men?				
Does your organisation have a working relationship with other men's/father services in your locality?				
Can you identify key stakeholders and champions in your community and/or the sector?				
Do you recruit male staff into your organisation?				
Effectiveness				
Have you talked with men/fathers in your community about your services and programs?				
Does your organisation periodically review its practice and how it aligns with community needs, including those of fathers?				

	Yes	Limited	No	N/A
Do you believe working with fathers is one of your organisation's strengths?				
Efficiency				
Does your organisation set Key Performance Indicators relating to men/fathers and incorporate these into individual work plans?				
Does your organisation budget for father-specific and father-inclusive initiatives?				
Accountability				
Does your organisation provide an analysis of your father-inclusive statistics in your annual report?				
Does your Board seek members with a strong interest in fathering issues?				
Do you have genuine acceptance from your Board and/or senior management on the importance of father-inclusiveness?				

What are the areas that require the greatest intervention?

Once you have identified your priorities consider the questions that relate to them on the next few pages to help you determine how you can promote change.

What local issues do you think could get in the way of fathers accessing your services (e.g. location of service, available transport, financial restraints, cultural barriers, or your services' opening hours)?

What strategies could be put in place to increase access to your services by men in your area? Who could oversee this? How long will these strategies take? When will they be reviewed?

Could any of your services or clients benefit from an outreach service? If so, how could this be put in place?

Consider the groups of fathers that access your service. What information do they already receive? What information may they require? How best could they receive this information?

Equity assessment

If fathers are not reflected proportionally to mothers and children in your client base, what could be the reasons for this?

Communication assessment

What knowledge and/or skills are required by your staff (male and female) to work more effectively with men? Where can you access training for your staff?

How is your organisation currently informing fathers about your services? Could there be a more effective medium?

What services in your area work with men? Are they included in your referral list? What other organisations or services in your area can you inform of your services for men (e.g. churches, schools, neighbourhood centres)?

Are there any opportunities to work collaboratively with these services to improve outcomes for fathers and their families?

Responsiveness assessment

What improvements could you make to the décor, reading material and hours of operation that would be more inviting and inclusive of men?

What are some services in your locality that you could build a working relationship with? Who are the people with a strong passion and interest in your services that could be identified as champions?

What are the barriers to recruiting male staff into your organisation?

Effectiveness assessment

What are some ways to increase your awareness of how effective your services are?
How could you incorporate consultation with men/fathers in your community?

Do you incorporate evaluations into your programs? Does this go beyond client feedback at the conclusion of service delivery?

What strengths do you or your organisation have in working with fathers? What areas can you improve on?

Efficiency assessment

What are some Key Performance Indicators relating to men/fathers that could be incorporated into individual work plans?

Is there any funding that you could divert or seek for father specific and father-inclusive initiatives?

Accountability assessment

How do you currently gather your data and how can you increase the accuracy of your statistics?

In what ways could you increase support from the Board and/or senior management on the importance of father-inclusiveness?

It's also a good idea to set periodic review dates to check progress and maintain momentum.

Date of review _____

Service delivery

The next conversation box is designed to prompt some further thinking. Think broadly about the questions (e.g. you could consider them from a practice and/or a program perspective).

Conversation box 2

How do you support fathers to value their roles in their children's lives and increase or affirm their engagement with their children?

To do this, consider how you:

- ▶ enable fathers to understand their *roles and impact as fathers* and partners in their children/s lives
- ▶ enable fathers to recognise their aspirations for their children's wellbeing and the *experience, knowledge and skills* that they can contribute to this wellbeing
- ▶ work with fathers to develop their capacity to positively engage with their children.

How do you develop and use father-inclusive practice, policies, processes, services and programs? To do this, consider how you:

- ▶ recognise *elements of your own practice* including communication styles which are father-inclusive, and those which are not father-inclusive
- ▶ identify and promote opportunities for improving father-inclusive aspects of the organisation, its policies, processes, services and programs
- ▶ deliver services where the structure, content, format and language are appropriate to fathers as participants.

6. The vision: Where do you want to be?

How do you develop and define a vision for your service? You are invited to work through the following process and consider the questions along the way:

Ask the miracle question!

Let's imagine...you go to bed tonight and while you are asleep a miracle happens. When you wake up, your service is father-inclusive. When you turn up at work, what changes do you notice in terms of fathers' involvement in your service?

Take a moment to read through the following scenario. Once you have read through it, go back and, using the spaces available, answer each of the questions. This exercise should take approximately 20 minutes.

Let's imagine...

It is 2017 and your organisation has just been nominated for an international award for excellence in father-inclusive practice.

You are in the car on the way to the airport to collect the dignitary presenting you with the award at the gala event at Parliament House later that day. On the way your phone rings, it's a journalist asking you why you won the award.

She asks, 'Who helped you build your organisation into an award winning one?'

Then she asks you:

'What do the fathers using your service say?'

'What do the mothers say?'

'How does it feel hearing these comments from parents using the service?'

Once you get off the phone you think about all the other things that have happened over the past decade. You and your colleagues took quite a few risks, some of them worked, others didn't. However, some of the more creative ideas really helped.

Can you remember some of the more creative ideas that really helped improve accessibility for fathers and provide them with what they wanted?

When I look back over the last ten years, three things stand out.... (write these down)

1:

2:

3:

Conversation box 3

Imagining that *working with men is all about the relationship...*

What would you do more of?

The following reflection highlights what many men think about as parents when they have a child with a disability, and may rarely express to other people:

'The single greatest challenge I faced as a father to a child with a disability was trying to accept the reality that I cannot 'fix' the 'problem'. All parents wish to shield their children from all harm in the world, but parents (and particularly fathers) feel like they have 'failed' to live up to this. The feeling is: 'Not only does my child have a disability, but I'm useless, helpless, etc because I could not stop it and now I can't do anything to fix it either.'

'There was nothing more painful in my life than watching my child have seizures in my arms and being completely helpless to do anything at all about them. It was not until I had professional counselling that I could focus on something other than blaming myself and acknowledge that my daughter wasn't blaming me either, nor holding it against me, that these things were happening to her.'

Andrew

7. Goal setting: Breaking it down so it's achievable and realistic

The staff development exercise below has been provided to help you and your organisation set goals for enhancing service accessibility and responsiveness to fathers. It is reproduced from Fletcher (2004), with permission of the author.

The exercise focusses on achieving consensus on what your service would expect and like to see in developing father-inclusive services. It builds a greater commitment to father-inclusive practice and is a starting point for getting fathers involved in the service. It is suggested you follow the process below at a staff meeting. To assist you in this process a practical example of this exercise is illustrated on the following page. Start by drawing four columns (Goals, Expect, Like and Love) on a whiteboard.

1. In the first column, brainstorm a list of activities where fathers are currently involved. Add other areas of possible involvement and underline areas that the group consider are a priority.
2. In the next columns, write the words EXPECT, LIKE and LOVE. This will describe the three levels of goals for father involvement over 12 months.
 - a. The first level is titled 'Expect'. 'Expect' is defined as follows: *Suppose you really try to involve fathers over the next year, what would you expect to see happen, given what you know about your service and the fathers?* Gently insist that this first goal be numerical. How many fathers per month, per week or per year? Write up the group's collective answers under the 'Expect' column.
 - b. The second level, 'Like' is introduced as: *Suppose things went really well with fathers here, what would you like to see happen?* Discuss and record these answers under the 'Like' column.
 - c. Instructions for the final level, 'Love' are: *Suppose you had a magic wand, and this project went fantastically well, what would you love to see happening with fathers?* Emphasise that the goal at this level could be qualitative and encourage participants to 'think wild' and to 'go for it'.

To ensure the goals can produce effective change, it is important to make sure they are:

- a. **S**pecific
- b. **M**easurable
- c. **A**chievable
- d. **R**ealistic, explicit and agreed by all, and
- e. **T**ime limited.

Now consider how you can make these goals **SMART** in the conversation box below.

Conversation box 4

Write down 3-4 SMART goals for your project

- ▶ **S**pecific
- ▶ **M**easurable
- ▶ **A**chievable
- ▶ **R**ealistic, explicit and agreed by all
- ▶ **T**imely

How can these goals be achieved and used in father-inclusive practice?

Tip: Look at the resources at the end of this guide for more ideas.

An example from the Early Childhood sector

Staff meetings were held in each of the project centres to set father involvement goals for that centre. These meetings were intended to build a commitment among the staff to the project, but the discussions were also a starting point for making ‘the problem’ the lack of father involvement in centre activities rather than ‘problem fathers’.

We commenced with the basic list of activities where fathers were already involved. Other areas of possible involvement were added and priority areas were identified. We then described three levels of goals for father involvement over a 12 month period.

The ‘Expect’ goals were frequently modest improvements on the existing pattern of involvement while those under the ‘Love’ heading pictured fathers as more competent, willing and able to take responsibility for their children’s wellbeing. Even though these ‘Love’ goals were offered with humour and asides that ‘pigs might fly’, they also suggested a view of fathers which made their involvement possible. This process tended to call up an alternative view of fathers’ motivations and abilities; it promoted an identification of ‘the problem’ as fathers’ lack of involvement, rather than ‘the problem’ being the nature of fathers.

The possibilities for action following from these viewpoints are distinctly different. If the problem is lack of involvement then the task is to get the fathers involved. However, if the problem is the nature of fathers, then the appropriate action is to wonder (or complain) about the causes of this unfortunate state of affairs.

Examples of Goals – EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Goals	Expect	Like	Love
Service A: Community Based Pre-school			
More informal visits, fathers to 'stay and play'	1 father per week	1 per week in each room	1 per day in each room
Sharing own skills.	4 fathers to respond	10 to volunteer 1 hour per year	Roster – 1 hour per year
Men on committee	1 dad to come to a meeting per month	2 per meeting	2 on executive committee
Goals	Expect	Like	Love
Service B: Community Based Long Day Care			
Attend committee meetings	2 fathers	5 fathers	Group of fathers to be responsible
Playing with children	1 father a week	1 father a day	Roster of fathers
Settling in new children	Father attends in first month	Father attends orientation and on first day	Every father attends orientation, drop off and pick up
Handymen	A volunteer to ring	To also interact with children	Fathers volunteer to do jobs with children
Attend social events	10 fathers to attend	50 fathers to attend	All attend
Skill sharing	1 father in morning	1 father in morning and afternoon	A variety of skills and a roster
Service C: Privately Owned Pre-school			
Sharing own skills	2 fathers one visit per term	1 father per week	1 father per day
Story reading	1 father per term with own child and others	3 fathers per term	Father to bring a book from home to read
Staying for playtime	2 fathers per week, for 5+ minutes	1 father per day, for 5+ minutes	Every father to stay for 5+ minutes
Fundraising / Social events	2 fathers involved per event	5 fathers per event	50/50 mums and dads per event to volunteer

8. Strategies: What is needed to move forward?

Strategies are solutions to the issues you identified during your exploratory research (i.e. solutions to ‘what you want to change’). If you were to consider a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, the things you want to change are your identified weaknesses and opportunities. There is no point in developing solutions to things that already work (e.g. your service and business strengths) nor solutions to things you can’t change (e.g. threats).

Developing an Action Plan

A separate action plan for each SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) goal should be completed in Table 1 and shared with everyone involved. This will help others know how their work fits in and develop a shared understanding of the common goals.

To start each action plan write down the related SMART goal, any previously identified structural constraints and strengths you can draw upon to help achieve the goal.

Then, using a whiteboard or large piece of paper, list all the things that will need to happen in order to achieve each of your goals. You may wish to try brainstorming in a small group, looking at what, where, when, who, and how.

Once you have a good list of required strategies, list them in sequential order. Following this you need to name the person responsible for making each one happen and any resources (such as posters, training or a budget) they will need. To help you keep on track, also enter a due date for each action.

For each goal you will need to:

- identify who will be responsible for each action
- identify strengths and constraints in achieving the goal
- identify strategies that will achieve the goal
- identify possible tools and resources
- identify any training needs that may exist
- develop an achievable budget
- develop clear milestones for celebration.

Table 1: Action Plan

E X A M P L E S	The SMART goal is:
	The structural constraints are:
	Our strengths are:
	Strategies: <i>Change the decor of the reception area</i>
	Person Responsible: <i>Jo Smith</i>
	Resources Required (e.g. budget, training, or equipment): <i>Budget of \$300 to buy new frames and paint</i>
	Due Date: <i>March 2009</i>
	Notes: <i>Ask volunteers to assist with painting</i>

Milestones

During the project there may be some milestones you notice that give you an indication that things are going well. For example, a father might request your service for the first time, or you may get your first bit of positive feedback from a father accessing your service. It is important to recognise these events and celebrate appropriately. Take some time to think about what you may see, or would like to see during this project on your way to achieving the SMART targets.

Make a note of them in Table 2 (below) and choose a celebration for each. How to celebrate is up to you and your team. Whenever possible celebrate together as a team and as soon as possible after the milestone has been achieved. You may choose to have a lunch together at the local café, take a photo and send it out in an email to your colleagues, or just shout out, yippee!

Table 2 Milestones to Celebrate

Milestone	Celebration Activity
A father volunteers to read the kids a story	Take a picture of the fathers with kids

9. Targeting: Who is your audience?

You should become aware of everyone who is either directly or indirectly connected to your service. You will also need to have a good idea of your target groups, exactly who you want to reach to trial and reuse your services, and who you want to help you deliver services which are more accessible and responsive to the needs of fathers.

It is useful to think of your target audiences in three groups – your:

- ▶ Primary audience (i.e. actual users of the services, such as men/fathers)
- ▶ Secondary audience (i.e. influencers of men/fathers, such as partners, children, parents, peer groups, religious groups, friends, etc), and
- ▶ Other audience (i.e. mentor practitioners or other services who you want involved in the integration and delivery of services).

It is useful to describe each of these audience groups in as much detail as possible. The conversation boxes below are designed to help you to define each group's personality and psychological characteristics.

When considering issues raised in these conversation boxes, be as specific as you can. For example, using broad descriptors such as 'men' won't help you focus on issues specific to fathers, and may therefore limit your capacity to achieve your goals. The more thoroughly you understand your audience(s), the higher your chances for success!

Conversation box 5

- ▶ Who are your target groups (Primary, Secondary and Other)?
- ▶ What are the key characteristics of your primary audience?
- ▶ Which of these key characteristics can be used to help you engage your target groups? Consider promotional opportunities, service accessibility, and the appropriateness of the service delivery venue, format and timing.

10. Staffing: Knowledge, skills, values and attitudes

Your organisation's capacity to target father-inclusive services is dependent on the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of its staff.

Knowledge

Critical knowledge (required to make services accessible and responsive to the needs of fathers) includes an understanding of:

- ▶ fathers and stepfathers, drawn from experience with a wide range of people from different socio-economic backgrounds
- ▶ the similarities and differences in the experiences that a range of people face
- ▶ issues faced by fathers, parents, children and families
- ▶ the importance of fathers in children's lives
- ▶ the range of fathering roles (both conceptually and in practice)
- ▶ the importance of a 'team' approach to parenting and the benefits for children
- ▶ the potential positive impact on couple relationships and the wellbeing of mothers and fathers when fathers are included in practice
- ▶ child development (including physical, emotional, psychological, social and cognitive developmental needs), and how it is impacted by fathers, mothers and family life
- ▶ a range of theoretical frameworks to understand men's roles, and their inherent assumptions, strengths and weaknesses
- ▶ the difficulties experienced by children living with step parents and in step families
- ▶ other local services that work with fathers.

It is also imperative to acknowledge that parenting is a practice rather than a biological function, and that fathers may be:

- ▶ birth fathers
- ▶ step fathers
- ▶ foster fathers
- ▶ non-biological fathers
- ▶ uncles
- ▶ grandfathers
- ▶ carers
- ▶ resident or non-resident fathers.

Skills

Critical skills (required to make services accessible and responsive to the needs of fathers) includes the ability to:

- ▶ critically reflect on your own practice
- ▶ critically examine your organisation's structures and processes to identify areas where a more father-inclusive approach can be adopted
- ▶ promote father-inclusive practice within your own and other agencies
- ▶ promote the benefits of a 'team' approach to parenting within your own and other agencies
- ▶ model effective, respectful and inclusive communication (including verbal and non-verbal communication, listening, empathic responding, non-judgemental paraphrasing, summarising, questioning, effective conflict resolution, assertiveness, use of humour, tact and sensitivity) when working with fathers
- ▶ value and work inclusively with the client whilst considering the full range of possible influences in their lives (including personality, culture, language, religion, age, gender, family of origin, education levels, learning abilities, economic situation, social context, health, disabilities and related issues) and the impact of how these interrelate.

Values

Values underlie the ability to apply the required knowledge and skills when working with fathers. Consider how values operate in your practice and organisation. Do you and your organisation:

- ▶ have a genuine and expressed belief in the value and importance of;
 - ▶ the role of fathers and mothers in their children's lives
 - ▶ a team approach to parenting
- ▶ recognise the responsibility of mothers and fathers to adopt child focussed viewpoints
- ▶ value the experience, skills and knowledge fathers bring to fathering
- ▶ reflect on how language and other communication media can be (more) inclusive of fathers
- ▶ recognise the importance of establishing credibility as a reliable source of information regarding children.

Attitudes

At an individual level, a practitioner's experience with, and assumptions about, men and fathers will impact on their capacity to work with them from a strengths based perspective. Having a healthy view of the capabilities of men to build relationships is fundamental. Recognising that men have the ability to:

- commit to the physical and ongoing support that a father provides and their involvement with their children throughout their lives
- make day to day decisions that meet the needs of their children
- work as an active and effective member of a 'parenting team'
- care about and attend to the important transitions in a child's life, and work to provide the optimal conditions to maximise their growth
- create resources for material wellbeing and resolve problems in ways that promote emotional wellbeing
- form lasting and healthy attachments with their children and learn to adapt and change as their children grow
- relate with children by sharing meaningfully with them, both verbally and non-verbally.



It is quite important for practitioners in any service to recognise that assumptions and prejudices they may hold towards any groups or individuals, may be unhelpful in their professional role of working with parents and families. It is important for us all to recognise that our world is full of an array of cultural and sub-cultural groups that hold shared values, beliefs and attitudes that are not universal. These values, beliefs and attitudes are more difficult to recognise within ourselves and, left unchecked, can ultimately get in the way of achieving the most effective outcome with and for the parent.

The practitioner must always work towards coming to a better understanding of the parents' worldview and therefore the potential for a more effective outcome. In doing this, the worker is challenged professionally to be aware of their own prejudices and biases and ensure they do not get in the way of what it may be that a client needs or wants to do.

11. Implementation:

Some practical tips

There is no one accepted or correct way to include fathers in service delivery. Every practitioner will need to find their own starting point and pathway to make their services more accessible and responsive to the needs of the fathers and families in their catchment; however an ‘Engaging Fathers Policy’ would be a good start. Once you have done this invite your co-workers to be part of the picture. It is important to ensure that everyone is aware and supports the father-inclusive goal.

This section will provide you with some ideas to help you become more accessible and responsive to the needs of fathers in the context of your existing services.

Organisational environment

- ▶ **A clear conceptual framework.** Adding something to an existing program may not be helpful or effective. Taking the time to put together a strategic plan before implementing an initiative is important.
- ▶ **Strong and respectful leadership.** This needs to be modelled at all levels within the organisation.
- ▶ **A range of activities to meet needs.** Activities should encompass both prevention and intervention. Programs designed just to support divorced or separated fathers are necessary but so are projects that provide on-going support and information on healthy child development.
- ▶ **Provide opportunities for fathers to participate at every stage ranging from planning to evaluation.** Including fathers in the planning process is imperative in making sure they buy into the program. This will ensure participation and provide the impetus in creating positive outcomes that will lead to a positive evaluation of the project.
- ▶ **The ability to strengthen public opinion.** Organisational support is critical to the ongoing sustainability of fathering initiatives and to raise awareness of the many issues facing fathers.
- ▶ **Provide a support network for project workers and volunteers.** Many project and program staff or volunteers work in isolation and need to feel connected to other organisational staff.
- ▶ **Quality partnerships.** Choosing appropriate and committed partners in the beginning may lead to quality relationships and buy-in at a later time.
- ▶ **Stable and diverse funding.** Financial security is a perpetual challenge and having a variety of sources may be useful in helping to provide program consistency. If there is only one source and this source is withdrawn then the program is often in danger of not continuing.

- ▶ **Evaluation processes.** Evaluation must be ongoing, effective and based on an organisations' strategic goals and objectives.
- ▶ **Processes to ensure sustainability.** Having only one committed staff member may help your organisation progress father-inclusive practice related goals but this commitment may not be sustained by your organisation if that person leaves. You can help ground father-inclusive practice in your organisation as an important aspect of holistic service delivery by ensuring you have written policies supported by staff training and orientation processes.
- ▶ **Physical Environment.** Is your environment one where fathers feel comfortable? Men can be quick to tune into suspicion, feelings of threat or safety and even just others who are obviously comfortable with them around. The immediate environment or openness of staff towards them will influence their level of trust and decision to trial your services. You will need to create a safe environment for men to engage and talk openly. First impressions are lasting and if negative, increase the likelihood of negative word of mouth among their friends and peers within your community. Some tips to create a father friendly environment are:
 - ▶ positive poster images of fathers and children on the walls
 - ▶ reading material appropriate to men while they wait, perhaps magazines on themes such as cars, fishing, sport, current affairs or the day's newspaper
 - ▶ neutral tones in the reception area rather than pinks and pastels
 - ▶ have male staff who could greet new male clients
 - ▶ easy access to and from the car park and public transport
 - ▶ have events, activities or groups that can be held outdoors.

Perceived equality is an important issue when working with men. This is the reason why the centre's environment is important as men will assess if it feels welcoming or not. However, one certainty is that most men will not talk about it, but it will influence their actions. They are less likely to go in!

Andrew

Client focus

Meeting a new client

On arrival, greet the service user promptly and with a smile and a handshake if appropriate or culturally acceptable. The simple act of shaking hands, for many men, can symbolise a higher level of respect. Use open, strong and confident body language; this indicates a sense of equality. A useful strategy is to practice approaches to greeting fathers in your staff meetings and constructively critique each other's attempts. In addition, be prepared to outreach to fathers in their community environment rather than expecting them to generally come to your service.

Talking to a new client

- ▶ Use appropriate language to show a respect for the importance of family relationships in men's lives.
- ▶ Be child focussed when talking to fathers. Fathers are motivated by their children, so directing your interest to the parent-child relationship is a good way of getting fathers involved in your organisation.
- ▶ Let the father know about services or programs he may be interested in and use specific names of people he can chat to.
- ▶ Always remember, the language you use when talking to fathers must be relevant, honest, and direct. Use language that is clear and concise, avoiding jargon.
- ▶ Be aware of the father's body language and need for personal space.

Go slowly (and build contact)

Maybe you have been thinking about all the things that fathers could get involved in if they really wanted to. For fathers, however, just turning up may be a big step. The stronger the informal contacts, the more natural it will seem to fathers to get involved. Just having the workers say 'hello' as they pass, or addressing the fathers by name as they come to pick up kids can make a difference.

Program models

Types of programs for fathers and their families

Services for fathers can be delivered in many ways; either in men only groups or mixed. Some examples of what others have found successful include:

Group discussions and support groups for fathers

Fathers meet together to discuss issues around fatherhood and their relationships. This helps create an environment of support for fathers in their role; fathers talk about their childhood and about their role model(s) and fathers feel free to discuss their views and ideas on fatherhood in a friendly, supportive environment.

Group discussions for new fathers and fathers to be

These groups provide an opportunity for fathers to discuss their partner's pregnancy, meet with other new fathers and explore their own feelings on fatherhood. Design the sessions to allow for discussion of issues and expectations and to explore fears and myths surrounding pregnancy, childbirth, caring for a newborn, breastfeeding, the father's role and so on.

Workshops on development of specific abilities

Workshops on individual or parenting abilities, on conflict resolution, time management, communication skills or classes on house maintenance, safety, set-up for children, family work division and so on.



Information session or conferences (one-time programs)

A social worker could present some information on the importance of fathering to the group. Information sharing for separated or divorced fathers on child custody, fathers' rights and more.

Press conferences, panel discussions, meetings, newsletters, celebrating and informing the public and organisations about the importance of fatherhood.

Father-child activities

Activities for fathers and their children; e.g. bowling, museum visit, park day.

Socialisation workshops for fathers and children.

Fathers and children build something together; e.g. a simple construction / carpentry project like a push car or bird feeder.

Recreation / social opportunities

Being active is a great way to deal with life's stressors and open the mind to new ideas and learnings. These types of activities also allow fathers the opportunity to develop rapport with other fathers. Recreational activities such as children versus fathers contact games such as no-contact oz-tag or soccer.

One of the key moments in the antenatal class for expectant fathers is when I ask 'So where, exactly, was your father at the moment when you came into the world?' Even those who say 'Wouldn't have a clue' have a look that also says 'Gee that's worth finding out.... I might ask about that'.

Richard

Types of groups for fathers

There are three basic types of groups that can be offered to men or fathers:

Learning groups are set up for participants to gain a new set of tools/skills for parenting or enhance existing parenting abilities. They may include presentations, role-plays, and practical exercises.

Support groups are where participants face common experiences such as prenatal, separation, divorce, children with disabilities. The groups can be run on a weekly or on a less frequent basis.

The open discussion group provides support and learning through sharing common needs, experiences and knowledge. This can lead to the building of networks and relationships between the fathers and various service providers and raise awareness of issues.

Remember – the choice of programs or services will depend on:

- ▶ the target population of fathers that are being served
- ▶ the strengths of your organisation
- ▶ unique qualities of your community.

The focus should be on programs for fathers that are organised, open-ended and on-going. (Beauregard & Brown 2000).

Facilitation and referral

General tips for facilitating groups for fathers and men

When working with groups of men in general:

- ▶ programs need to be located where fathers and children live, play, work or use child care. You will need to be strategic when determining the best place to hold groups
- ▶ sometimes it is good to open each group with a physical ice breaker as physical activities can assist in alleviating some initial discomfort and nervousness. Sitting still and having to rely on language is not as comfortable for men, so even if the motion is as little as drawing or bouncing a ball, it takes the focus away from talking
- ▶ make tasks clear (avoid setting them up to look stupid). Have written instructions setting out the task and someone to explain the informal rules (e.g. ‘We leave the paints over here’).
- ▶ hear men out: find out their interests

- ▶ play down occupations when making introductions. This can lead to some men being more self-conscious because of their occupation and may lead to men shutting down and not participating or sharing in the group. In groups, men can often create an unspoken hierarchy based on ‘who does what job’. This hierarchy can become an un-useful dynamic in later facilitating discussion
- ▶ ask men: what do you *think* instead of what do you *feel*? Keep discussions in general very solution focussed
- ▶ make the group activity based, not just information based
- ▶ be prepared to be tested over and over again; and be prepared to prove yourself over and over
- ▶ have a sense of humour
- ▶ assume that all men can be reached no matter what their background, attitude or age
- ▶ look for opportunities to meet specific needs. Once a man knows you are there to help him, you begin to build trust
- ▶ follow up – if you have invited a man to come to an event and he doesn’t show up, call or visit to find out why
- ▶ be flexible – hours of classes need to change with the seasons to accommodate overtime work schedules and seasonal work
- ▶ hire staff who are sensitive to the needs of the fathers and can relate to them verbally and culturally
- ▶ hold classes in the community. Consider providing transportation, food and childcare (especially for young parents).

Tips for female facilitators of men’s groups

Both women and men can do excellent work with fathers. Not every position needs a male worker (or a man who is a father). Female group facilitators can utilise the following tips for successful group work with men:

- ▶ Prepare staff for a male environment. The majority of social service and family resource staff are female and will not initially be used to an all-male environment
- ▶ Be convinced yourself before you try to convince others about involving more men. If you are not convinced, you won’t be able to convince others
- ▶ Engage with the fathers’ strengths, their values and their style of communication and listen carefully to the unique stories that men bring to parenting
- ▶ Go slowly. Try a few ‘fathers only’ events before plunging in
- ▶ Let men know you are the facilitator, not the expert
- ▶ Be patient and don’t give up!

Making effective referrals for men

- It is often useful to make the first phone call together.
- When providing referral details to men, use specific names of who to contact rather than centralised numbers. This will make them feel more comfortable and supported and they will also be more likely to make contact.
- Sometimes it is useful to coach the client so they know what parts of their story it is important to divulge to referral services and what is unnecessary.
- Be sure that the sector jargon you use is understandable to fathers and avoid using abbreviations.

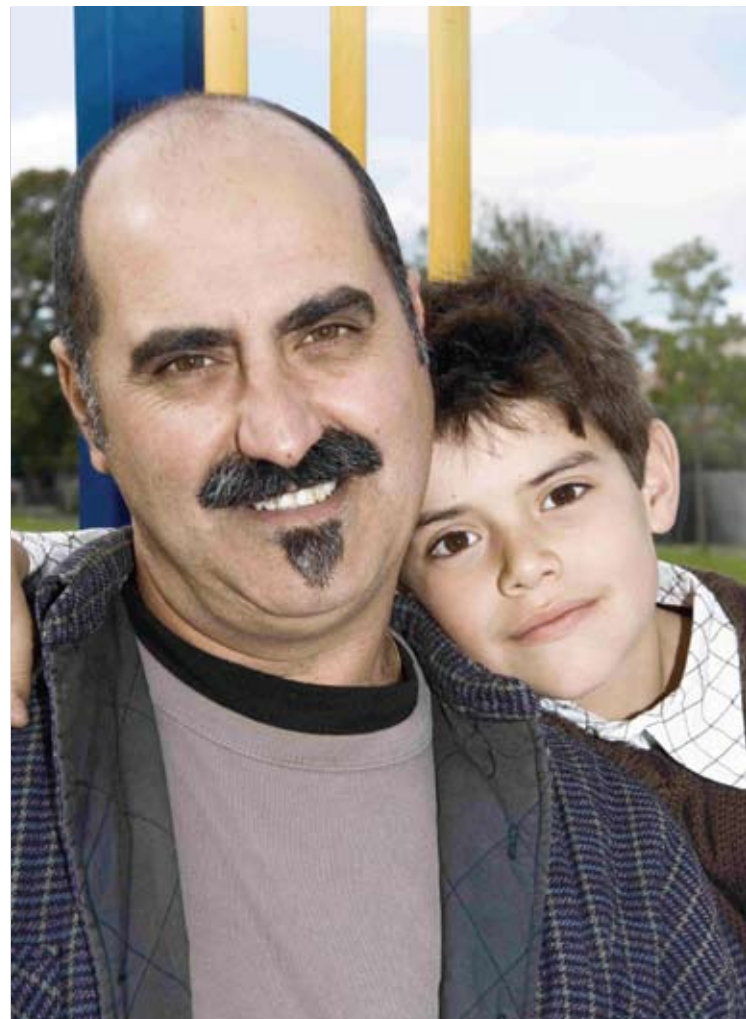
It is important to use language that identifies this event or program 'is for fathers'. One father reflected at a fathers and kids evening in a school one evening, 'If you had said it was for parents and kids, I would not have come. However since it was for fathers and kids, I made sure I was here'. An Early Childhood Centre can do this by saying in their promotion—'We work with mothers and fathers who have children aged 0-5 years'.

Andrew

Program promotion

If you haven't taken the time to discuss recruitment then you may have a program with no participants. You will also need to be patient as developing a group takes time and energy when dealing with this hard to reach client group. When promoting your service to fathers, consider these handy hints:

- Don't just wait for fathers to come to you. Be active and seek out fathers in places such as schools, religious organisations, sporting events, fetes and market days. Stand out and surprise them with father-oriented activities (e.g. ask them about their wants and needs, get their address/ phone number, invite them to a father's meeting, or arrange a BBQ as a setting for discussion, etc). Waiting for fathers to come to you is often an access barrier and presents additional service delivery issues.



- ▶ Think about where fathers are already involved in your service. They might be dropping children off or waiting outside the fence or reading the mail-outs sent to mothers. Many services have been surprised at how many small points of contact can be found where fathers already have ‘some’ connection with the service. By conducting a small audit of all contacts your service and its staff has with fathers you will find that there is great potential for engagement already.
- ▶ Programs for parents need to have a strong branding about including the male parent. Unless the word ‘*father(s)*’ is used in the program title or promotion, men assume that the program is not relevant to them. For non-biological fathers, the phrase *father* or *father figure* is widely understood to mean step fathers, uncles, etc. Indigenous publicity often spells it out as *Dads, Uncles* and *Pops*.
- ▶ Rename activities to be more father-inclusive, i.e. mother’s group to parent’s group. Emphasise in your promotional material that the group is for mothers, fathers and other care givers.
- ▶ Revamp your website to reflect your organisation’s father-inclusive attitude and advertise father programs.
- ▶ Contact the local media or newspaper to do a short story on the services you offer to fathers. Doing this around Father’s Day will gain the most media interest
- ▶ Take advantage of Father’s Day and do a fathers’ BBQ or big breakfast.
- ▶ use a child inclusive approach by asking children at a school to design an invitation that invites their fathers to a special father oriented event, like a BBQ or a father/ child play day.
- ▶ Revise existing brochures, pamphlets, parenting handouts, event schedules, calendars, and communication tools to reflect the fathering role, (e.g. father/child photo on the brochure) and distribute them at some of the following community access locations:
 - ▶ hospitals
 - ▶ medical centres
 - ▶ child care centres
 - ▶ early learning centres
 - ▶ community centres
 - ▶ religious organisations
 - ▶ schools/ pre-schools
 - ▶ family planning/resource centres
 - ▶ community service agencies
 - ▶ shopping centres
 - ▶ drop-in centres

12. Action Learning: Let's do it!

Now that the organisation has an understanding of the key elements of father-inclusive practice and a plan to enhance service delivery, it's time to implement the plan and make adjustments as and where necessary.

Action Learning is the approach that links the world of action with the world of learning through a reflective process within small cooperative learning groups' (McGill & Beatty 1995). Action Learning can occur when a group of people with varied levels of skills and experience meet regularly to work on individual members' real-life issues with the aim of learning with, and from each other. It is a form of learning by doing.

Action Learning was developed by Professor Reg Revans in the coal industry in England and Wales in the 1940s. It has become widely used as a strategy to promote learning and facilitate organisational change. Action Learning can be applied in situations to:

- address issues that are complex and not easily resolved
- find solutions for underlying causes of problems
- maximise new opportunities
- generate creative ideas.

The key steps in the Action Learning process include:

- clarify the objective
- form a group
- analyse the issues
- reframe the problem
- determine goals
- develop action strategies
- take action
- repeat the cycle
- capture learning.

More about Action Learning can be found at:

www.12manage.com/methods_revans_action_learning.html

Skills Toolbox 2 will help you begin considering some of the Action Learning process.

Skills Toolbox 2

- ▶ How do you evaluate centres/services and reflect on your own practice from a father-inclusive perspective?
- ▶ Seek feedback from colleagues and clients (including fathers), regarding the appropriateness of services and your own practice.
- ▶ Identify aspects of the service/centre and your own practice where father-inclusive practice could be strengthened.
- ▶ Incorporate father-inclusive practice into the design, development and delivery of future services and your own practice.

13. Making mentoring relationships work

Mentoring is a mutually beneficial relationship which involves a more experienced person helping a less experienced person to achieve their goals (National Mentoring Association of Australia Inc www.dsf.org.au/mentor).

Developing a mentoring relationship

A mentoring relationship can add significant value to the organisation's effort to further develop and refine service delivery.

Effective mentoring is defined on the Mentoring Australia website (www.dsf.org.au) as:

- a relationship that focusses on the needs of the mentee
- fostering a caring and supportive relationship
- encouraging all mentees to develop to their full potential
- a strategy to develop active community partnerships.

Effective mentoring relationships need:

- the visible support and endorsement of senior management
- to be underpinned by the mentor's skills, knowledge, wisdom and an evidence base
- clearly articulated expectations and goals (of both parties), and an agreement about which has priority in particular situations
- clearly articulated roles and tasks (of both parties) and timelines which are flexible enough to accommodate changing needs
- scope for creative discussion
- to be voluntary
- to be consistent
- to be supported by relevant training
- to maintain a clear distinction between supervision and mentoring (i.e. an immediate supervisor cannot operate effectively as a mentor)
- to acknowledge the impact of gender on the project.

When there is more than one mentor

Generally mentoring occurs on a one-to-one basis. In situations where more than one mentor is engaged, consider:

- ▶ identifying one mentor as the primary contact, and the second as a support to the primary mentor
- ▶ engaging the secondary mentor (e.g. to provide information) when the primary mentor is not available.

Supporting tools and resources

There are many tools available to help the organisation develop and manage an effective mentoring relationship. Some are listed below:

- ▶ Dusseldorp Skills Forum – www.dsf.org.au
- ▶ Mentoring Australia – Benchmarks for Effective and Responsible Mentoring Programmes – www.dsf.org.au/mentor
- ▶ National Training Information Service – PMCSUP382A–Provide Coaching/Mentoring in the Workplace – www.ntis.gov.au
- ▶ NRGize Workshops – Module 4 Forming and Maintaining Partnerships – www.youthmentoring.org.au/nrgize.php
- ▶ UNSW Mentoring Toolkit – www.hr.unsw.edu.au/osds/leadership/mentoring.html

14. Information resources

Other useful information that may assist you in your exploratory research follows:

Resource	Useful web sites or contacts
Community builders	www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au
Australian Camp Connect Association	www.campconnect.org.au/resources_intl
Mensline Australia	www.menslineaus.org.au/cms/index
Kids' Health	www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth
Men's Health and Wellbeing Association Online articles	menshealth.uws.edu.au
Men's Health Information and Resource Centre contains online articles	menshealth.uws.edu.au/
Early Childhood issues	www.swsahs.nsw.gov.au/karitane
Training – working with men	www.burnside.org.au
Working with Men Kit (Fathering programs, CDs, posters and booklets)	info@ifp.nsw.edu.au
Parenting and Indigenous Men Posters	www.snaicc.asn.au/srs/projects/parentingandmenposters.html
National Father-Inclusive Practice Framework Website	www.newcastle.edu.au/includingfathers
Indigenous Fathers Posters, DVD and Research	www.newcastle.edu.au/includingfathers
Training for health, education and welfare staff to work with fathers	www.newcastle.edu.au/includingfathers
Hey, Dad! Program and resources (Fathering programs, DVDs and Photo language)	hey.dad@brokenbay.catholic.org.au
Unitingcare Burnside	www.burnside.org.au

European Fatherhood	www.european-fatherhood.com
Fatherhood Institute	www.fatherhoodinstitute.org
Canadian Father	www.cfi.ca
Involvement Initiative Group work programs, ideas and resources	www.groupworksolutions.com.au

A must-read for organisations developing and implementing father-inclusive practice is the Canadian Good Practice Guide, ***Father Toolkit*** which provides more detailed information and can be downloaded free from www.mydad.ca

Further reading resources are listed in the reference list at the end of this document.

15. Information and accreditation

The Guide has been mapped against the Unit of Competency *CHCFAM411A Engage fathers into family based programs* which forms part of the National Community Services Training Package CHCo2 and provides an industry benchmark for training and assessment against essential skills and knowledge required for engaging fathers into family based programs.

Through completing this work-based project, practitioners may use this Guide as a workplace template for collecting evidence to meet the requirements of the proposed Competency. Accrual of specified Statements of Attainment can eventually lead to a student meeting all the requirements of a proposed qualification—Certificate IV or Diploma in Relationship Education. These qualifications, like the Competency, rely on successful endorsement by all States in Australia. A local Registered Training Officer (RTO) will be able to answer questions about this process.

To obtain a Statement of Attainment, practitioners are required to:

- provide evidence of specified essential knowledge, as well as skills in the application of working effectively with fathers and engaging them into specific programs and existing programs
- complete the conversation boxes in this Guide and collect evidence of this over a period of time (evidence may include promotional material, record of brainstorming sessions, evaluation reports)
- authenticate the evidence by having it supported and signed by colleagues, supervisors, clients or other appropriate people.
- submit the completed guide to a RTO for assessment.

Attachments

Attachment 1:

Father-inclusive practice, an inspirational case study

DEVELOPMENT OF A FATHER'S GROUP IN A NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT (NICU)

Richard Fletcher *Father's Role in Family Services: The Engaging Father's Project [online]. In: Focus on Fathering; pages: 125-141. Sullivan, Robin (Editor). Camberwell, Vic.: ACER Press, 2003.*

The idea of the fathers' group had arisen from an incident in the unit where a father of a long-stay baby reacted angrily to a perceived variation in the baby's care and exploded into an angry outburst. The police were called and staff were understandably upset, especially since many had come to know (and like) the father concerned. In the following weeks, discussion of the situation of fathers in the unit led to the Engaging Fathers Project being contacted. After some discussion, a NICU Fathers' Group was established.

The group was advertised (with an emphasis on the benefits to their baby) with three core information/skills topics: Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training, Home Safety and Baby Positioning. A letter from the Director explaining why the group was being established was given to all mothers in the Unit. The first group started with a 30 minute CPR demonstration and then practice on an infant dummy conducted by male nursing staff. The discussion of fathering issues was facilitated by the male nurses and the father worker (Richard Fletcher). Fathers did attend, but only in small numbers. On many nights when the group was scheduled, there were only three or four fathers in the unit so that the potential pool of fathers was small.

Once the discussion of fathers' experiences commenced, most participants were willing to contribute and on several evenings the facilitators had to insist on finishing the sessions after two hours of discussion. Topics ranged from recounting stories of birth and entry to the NICU to discussion of coping strategies and relationship difficulties. In general, the men were complimentary about the medical and nursing staff and appreciated the chance to learn skills such as CPR. We directed the discussion from 'safe' to 'challenging' topics. For example Home Safety flowed from door clips and hot water settings to 'Shaken Baby Syndrome' and anger management. For all the men attending the experience of arriving at the unit was disorienting and stressful. While they could see that their partners made numerous contacts with other mothers at the unit, they did not approach other fathers (other fathers, if asked 'how is it going?' might be emotionally upset).

Comments from the fathers as they left indicated that they appreciated the chance to talk about their experiences and feedback from nursing staff confirmed fathers' appreciation of the group. Nursing staff also reported that young fathers seemed

more involved and more confident after the groups. Staff were willing to recommend the group to parents who they encountered in the unit.

An important factor in the senior nursing staff commitment to fathers' involvement came through the documentation of fathers' lack of involvement. The Partnerships in Care sheets used in the unit to record parents' intention to visit and participate were reviewed. Only two instances were found where fathers' intention to come in to the unit was recorded. Since many fathers were known to attend, it was clear that the current recording system did not provide an accurate record of fathers' attendance and needed to be modified. The relevant column on the form was split into two and changed from 'Parent' to Mother and Father/Partner.

The numbers of mothers and fathers attending educational sessions was also tallied. For the 'Handling Your Baby' educational sessions delivered by a physiotherapist attendance was recorded as:

June – December 2001		January – August 2002	
Female	Male	Female	Male
29	9	85	23

For the CPR sessions conducted by nursing staff the attendance was recorded as:

September – December 2001		January – August 2002	
Female	Male	Female	Male
34	11	99	29

Although not surprising, the presentation of these results provided additional impetus for the staff to address fathers' participation in the care of their babies and provoked discussion of alternative arrangements for delivering these sessions.

Attachment 2: Evaluation of the father-inclusive practice guide pilot project– participant’s service profiles

Urbis Pty Ltd, June 2008

A pilot project of the father-inclusive practice guide, which was conducted by Urbis Pty Ltd, commenced in May 2007 and ran until March 2008. The pilot aimed to build on the knowledge and skills of Family Relationship Services Program and Early Childhood Program service providers. Participants in the pilot project have provided the following service profiles. These are intended to assist organisations who use the guide in the future to develop a sense of what types of organisations were involved in the pilot project and how father-inclusive practices can be applied in the workplace.

Sing & Grow, Playgroup Association of QLD, Enoggera, QLD

Sing & Grow is an early intervention project, funded to provide disadvantaged communities with free access to short-term music therapy in a community setting. Australian Government funding from their ‘Invest to Grow’ initiative enabled the program to expand nationally in 2005. Since then more than 320 programs have been conducted around Australia.

Programs involve weekly music sessions (usually 10 weeks) that allow families to participate in hands-on activities designed to assist children with developmental skills and encourage parents to learn new and different ways to use music as a way of interacting and playing with their children. Music is also used as a way to stimulate, develop and nurture family relationships.

Programs are run in conjunction with community organisations. Families with children aged up to 3 years are eligible to participate, with an emphasis on families experiencing pressures that impact upon the resources and confidence of parents. Families can be referred to Sing & Grow through an organisation that is supporting them in their community.

Prior to participating in the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs father-inclusive practice program, 94 per cent of carers who attended Sing & Grow sessions with their children were women. Sing & Grow managers were keen to increase the participation of fathers. It was felt that the structure of the program had good potential to appeal to fathers as it involves active and ‘hands-on’ activities that enable men to engage with their children and has the capacity for some flexibility in terms of when sessions are run so working fathers can attend.

Working with their mentor assigned through the father-inclusive practice pilot, Sing & Grow managers developed several goals for increasing the involvement of fathers. It was decided to work toward these goals in NSW, with a view to expanding father-inclusive practice nationally in the future. The goals were:

Initially

- increase father attendance rates at Sing & Grow programs in NSW
- successfully engage fathers in sessions in NSW

Then

- increase awareness of and skills for father-inclusive practice by Sing & Grow staff nationally
- implement strategies nationally
- complete internal evaluation of father-inclusive pilot.

The success of the program would be measured by: an increase in the number of fathers attending; fathers' satisfaction; observable engagement of fathers in sessions; and positive responses by community organisations. Project level changes would be measured by: updated protocols for management team; session leaders all participate in training; and Sing and Grow literature updated to be more father-inclusive.

Strategies to achieve these goals included:

- talk to referring/collaborating community agencies about increasing referrals of fathers and assist workers to foster interest of fathers
- create a checklist for engaging fathers in each program
- review existing literature and in-service material to make them more father-inclusive
- create a flyer for fathers
- invitations sent to families whose father was not already attending the program. The invitation was written in the name of the child inviting their dad, grandad, uncle and so forth to attend Sing & Grow with them
- edit existing forms to collect details about fathers
- target men's services to be collaborating organisations
- encourage father-only programs
- ask mothers about fathers' reactions to their experiences of Sing & Grow
- survey of fathers' satisfaction and interest in the program
- compile father feedback survey responses to guide session leader skill development, and invite staff to complete the survey as a reflection exercise
- train session leaders in father-inclusive practice.

There was an 85 per cent increase in men's participation in Sing & Grow in NSW for the sessions during which the program was trialled. There was also a 400 per cent increase in the number of men attending who identified as their child's primary carer. The fathers' feedback survey indicated that they were satisfied with both the program and the session leader and valued the benefits of the program to their child. Some fathers reported that the program assisted them with various aspects of their child's development such as teaching their child to count and encouraging language development.

Training in father-inclusive practice for Sing & Grow session leaders was held in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Training focussed on the rationale for father-inclusive practice, reviewing father feedback and discussing the experiences and expectations of staff in involving more fathers in the program. Father-inclusive practice is now a regular topic for discussion at in-serves and program set-up. The materials developed, such as the checklist, invitations, flyers and father surveys, will be re-used and refined through subsequent programs.

The response to the father-inclusive practice pilot from community organisations working with Sing & Grow was overwhelmingly positive. Organisations recognised the value of involving fathers and actively participated in recruitment.

Some strategies did not work, or did not go ahead. Initially administrative forms were adapted to collect personal information about fathers required for the invitations. This was found to be ineffective and difficult to complete. Personal approaches to mothers were found to be the best way to engage with fathers. The father-only groups were also not run as fathers clearly indicated they preferred mixed-gender groups.

Centacare Broken Bay, Sydney, NSW

Centacare Broken Bay provides services to children from newborns to primary school-aged, including:

- long day care
- before and after school care
- family day care
- vacation care
- in-home care.

As with all early childhood centres, the staff at Centacare Broken Bay, in the Northern suburbs of Sydney, are extremely busy. So a major challenge for the father-inclusive practice pilot involved identifying strategies to increase the participation of fathers that could be easily integrated into the existing workload of staff. A program which required extra time or work for staff would probably not get off the ground.

Working within these parameters, staff at Centacare Broken Bay developed a model of father-inclusive practice that was simple and easily manageable. Strategies included:

- creating a noticeboard for fathers in the centre in which articles related to fathers and information about men's services and activities could be displayed
- initiating regular discussions about father-inclusive practice at staff meetings
- holding a father's day picnic and brunch.

Achievements

- Staff have become more aware of how they interact with men and more focussed on engaging with men as well as women, and encouraging them to be involved with service activities.

- ▶ The service is focussed on being inclusive of families as a whole – fathers, mothers and children. Father-inclusive practice has become central to the service’s philosophy of inclusion.
- ▶ The noticeboard has become a rallying point for staff around father-inclusive practice, so staff are more aware of and engaged with the father-inclusive practice process.
- ▶ The services father-inclusive practice pilot mentor attended the family brunch and spoke to staff and families.

City of Greater Dandenong, VIC

The City of Greater Dandenong provides a range of services to support the needs of families and children within the municipality. Services range from Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services to playgroups, child care, education and crisis support.

Dandenong is an outer-metropolitan area of Melbourne. It is a relatively low socio-economic area with a large number of refugees and newly arrived migrants residing in the region, high rental compared to owner-occupied housing rates and large numbers of public housing. The area can be quite isolating for many people, with a number of areas poorly serviced by public transport.



Being a local government service provided unique opportunities for the City of Greater Dandenong to develop a multi-service approach to father-inclusive practice.

A working group was established involving: community health dads’ workers; playgroup development officer; the library; immunisation (environmental health) workers; youth services; and MCH workers. The group met eight times during the father-inclusive practice pilot and was facilitated by the father-inclusive practice mentor. The group will continue to operate as a network and meet regularly after the pilot program has finished. The group also met with the Children’s Protection Society, another agency involved in the father-inclusive practice pilot.

The working group put a lot of effort into reflecting on practice and planning strategies to become more father-inclusive. This involved in-depth discussion about what it means to be father-inclusive and ways that cultural

change can be implemented in organisations to make them more father-inclusive. The group also became an avenue for planning collaborative practice in a number of areas. Group members will continue to build on this work into the future.

Other strategies implemented include:

- two workshops were held for staff. These were facilitated by the father-inclusive practice mentor
A practitioner with experience working with men and fathers, presented information about father-inclusive practice. Up to 50 people attended each workshop, one of which was held in the morning, the other in the evening to accommodate a range of people. A highlight of the workshop was a DVD in which men told their stories as well as accounts of individual men's stories given by the practitioner. The link between theory about father-inclusive practice and these personal stories was very powerful for participants and encouraged people to reflect critically on their own practice
- following the workshop, MCH services established fathers' noticeboards in centres and implemented a new system of asking fathers to attend the first MCH home visit (after a child is born)
- a father playgroup – 'the Tumble Club' – was established. This runs at the local Oasis swimming pool venue
- cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training classes for fathers are being run at local Bunnings hardware stores. This supports and is supported by other programs. For example, fathers from the Tumble Club are referred to the CPR course and recruitment for the Tumble Club occurs through the CPR course.

Communities@Work, Canberra, ACT

Communities@Work is a community organisation with a broad range of services and programs that support families and individuals with a diverse and complex range of issues. These services include a number of early childhood services, school-aged care, family support, community education, community development programs, parenting courses and a Behaviour Guidance Program.

Communities@Work have a number of strategies in place to support father-inclusive practice. This includes:

- men deliver sessions as part of the community parent education program. To achieve this, Communities@Work have developed partnerships with other agencies who have men on staff who are able to deliver the sessions
- the playgroup had a 'father's day'. Following this, one of the fathers began to attend more regularly and staff encouraged him to continue his involvement as a role-model to other fathers and as a way to increase the presence of fathers at the playgroup
- fathering is a focus of a new pilot for children aged 8-12 years. Again, partnerships have been established with other agencies who have men on staff who are able to participate in the program and deliver sessions

- reviewing brochures to ensure they are inclusive of fathers.

While this is just the beginning for father-inclusive practice at Communities@Work, the program has already achieved an increased awareness within the agency of whether programs are father-inclusive. Previously, there was little consciousness of this and no critical assessment of whether programs or services implicitly excluded men.

Good Beginnings, Darwin, NT

Good Beginnings is a national organisation providing early childhood services. Across the country Good Beginnings has a strong history working with fathers, but in Darwin they had to start at the beginning. A number of strategies were trialled to begin with including:

- brochures and newsletters were reviewed to ensure they were explicitly welcoming fathers into the service
- discussions within the staff team encouraged critical reflection of current practice. Staff came to see that while they were accepting of father's involvement, more active encouragement was required to overcome external barriers to fathers' involvement in children's services
- a 'dads, pops, uncles and brothers' computer training course was offered. Although there was some interest no-one attended. There may have been a number of reasons for this including the timing (during the day on a Friday). However, the key reasons seemed to be that the service didn't have a relationship with the fathers in the community. More needed to be done to build a presence in the local community, including building links with services and clubs that are attended by men
- strategies to build the profile of the service among fathers included giving out information packs to fathers at ante-natal classes and at the kids' swimming classes and creating a separate newsletter for fathers. The service is also looking into running training courses at the local rugby club rather than childcare centres
- a father's breakfast at the local school will be trialled in the future.

The program has been a big learning curve for staff and has revealed a lot about the way in which service staff can think it is being father-inclusive when it is actually not. However, the service has achieved a lot in terms of increasing staff awareness about how to engage with fathers and starting to build connections with men in the local community. Over time consciousness of father-inclusive practice has filtered across the service as a whole and has become an integral part of practice, ensuring that a focus on father-inclusive practice will be sustained long-term.

Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes, Forbes NSW

Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes provides a range of child and family services and has funding to run programs for men under the Men and Family Relationships Program. Services offered under this program include:

- collaborating with health services to engage with expectant fathers at the time they are attending ante-natal classes. Centacare then continues to meet with these fathers before and after the birth
- running a successful Dads and Kids (DaKs) program in which fathers and their children are involved in a ‘fun day’ every month. The fathers also meet together once a month to reflect on their role as fathers and plan future activities
- running regular gatherings for young Indigenous fathers
- delivering information evenings on raising teenage boys based on the ‘Pathways to Manhood program’
- running an annual fatherhood festival, which is a large community event held on Father’s Day. The event receives support from a wide range of local business and community services and involves information stalls and ‘old-fashioned’ festival activities such as egg and spoon and sack races. Last year the event was attended by over 700 people
- events are held annually in recognition of Men’s Health Week. This may include public forums, activities such as lawn bowling and other activities held in conjunction with local health services
- a ‘Father Figure’ photo and caption competition is held annually to promote and celebrate the role of men in children’s lives
- a father’s playgroup is held every fortnight for fathers with children up to 3 years old.

The father-inclusive practice pilot supported all these activities by focussing on enhancing the profile of the men’s work within the organisation. This ensured all staff were more supportive of activities being run with men and fathers and more likely to refer men to services and encourage female clients to talk to their male partners. Strategies to achieve this included:

- Conducting a ‘cultural audit’ of father-inclusive practice across the whole organisation and presenting the findings back to staff at a father-inclusive practice workshop



- ▶ Run a father-inclusive practice workshop for all staff, which involved talking about the importance of father-inclusive practice, explaining what range of activities are currently being run by services as part of the men’s program, feeding back the results of the cultural audit and discussing ways the service can become more father-inclusive.

Produce a flyer advertising the range of men’s activities that all staff can hand to clients.

Producing the flyer was a positive activity for the men’s workers as it presented an opportunity to articulate and reflect on the scope and quality of activities they have established. It also reinforced the important role of the men’s program to other staff within the organisation.

Good Beginnings, Moe, VIC

Good Beginnings La Trobe is located in Moe in regional Victoria. It runs early childhood programs for vulnerable and at risk families and is accessed by people from a range of small towns across the area. Good Beginnings La Trobe implemented a number of strategies as part of the father-inclusive practice pilot including:

- ▶ reviewing the physical environment of the service to ensure it was male friendly. This involved putting up posters of fathers and placing magazines of interest to men in the waiting areas
- ▶ inviting fathers to the services’ 10th birthday celebrations, which were held on a weekend so working fathers could attend
- ▶ reviewing the wording on service flyers and other material to explicitly include fathers
- ▶ running a barbeque for Sudanese men
- ▶ three staff attended training run by the City of Casey to promote father-inclusive practice
- ▶ when the service has exposure in newspaper, an effort is made to ensure fathers are in the pictures
- ▶ ran a forum on the ‘nuts and bolts of fathering’ which was well attended by non-custodial as well as custodial fathers
- ▶ set up a noticeboard for fathers and are planning a father’s newsletter
- ▶ involved fathers in helping the service in practical ways, such as building a vegetable patch.

One of the challenges involved with introducing father-inclusive practice in this service has come from the need to prioritise services. The playgroups are only small and fathers who are coping well should be moved on to mainstream services to allow space for other parents (fathers or mothers) with higher needs. The need to maintain and encourage the involvement of fathers has to be considered in the context of the broader objectives of the service.

The service has also had to develop strategies for working with men from other cultures, in particular the Sudanese community of which there is a large population

in the local area. This has been challenging as attitudes toward parenting differ quite substantially between Sudanese and Australian cultures. Newly arrived migrants are also dealing with a range of other issues related to adjusting to a new culture.

In a rural area it is difficult to get fathers together from a number of towns as the travelling time is so great. There are three separate playgroups in different towns, but to achieve sufficient numbers the fathers' groups would need to combine towns.

Family Relationships Centre, Traralgon, VIC

The Traralgon Family Relationships Centre provides a number of services including individual and relationship counselling, family dispute resolution and community advice, support and education. Traralgon is a regional centre in the Gippsland region of Victoria, with a population of around 21,000 people.

Working with fathers is an inherent part of the work of the Family Relationship Centre as fathers become engaged with the service through family dispute resolution work and other counselling services. However, the nature of the service also means men are most likely to access it when they are in crisis or at a difficult point in their lives. Father-inclusive practice in this context, therefore, is about ensuring the service environment is welcoming for men and that staff are comfortable and skilled in working with fathers, while also developing specific programs to support fathers.

There are some particular challenges to introducing father-inclusive practice initiatives in regional areas such as Traralgon. Staff of the Family Relationship Centre have observed a fairly traditional view of the role of fathers among the community. Fathers are more inclined to see themselves as the 'bread-winner' and are reluctant to become involved in support groups or children's activities. Distance and geographic isolation are barriers when it comes to organising groups or sessions for men. Men who work full time are often reluctant to spend a long time driving to attend a group session. A lot of men in the Traralgon region also work shift-work, so it is difficult to organise times when a number of men can regularly attend a service or group session. Additionally, in small towns where people are more likely to know other people attending the service, confidentiality can be a concern for some people, discouraging them from participating in support groups.

A major challenge for the father-inclusive practice pilot at the Traralgon Family Relationships Centre was finding ways to recruit fathers to programs, particularly those fathers who are most vulnerable or marginalised. Attempts were made to recruit fathers to a support group through a local children's contact centre, a strategy that was intended to reach fathers who would not be likely to access services or support in other ways. It was hoped a group could be established that involved fathers at different points in their life – some more stable, some in a more difficult time – so that the group could support each other. A group comprised only of men in crisis would not offer this level of support and the range of perspectives within the group would be limited.

However, recruitment to this group proved difficult. On reflection, it was decided that the creation of men's support groups would need to be a longer-term objective which introduced the idea to the community gradually. The reputation of the groups would



need to be built over time, with a conscious focus on promoting the groups to the community. Once a few men are involved, they can then become mentors and local representatives to help build the profile of the group and encourage more involvement.

Other father-inclusive practice pilot strategies introduced by the Traralgon Family Relationships Centre were to work with Relationship Australia to run a ‘Fathers Using Networks’ (FUN) for kids program, which is a course for fathers run in local schools.

Traralgon Family Relationships Centre also made an effort to ensure the reception area of the service was inclusive of men and included posters of fathers on the walls.

All these strategies, whether or not they were successful in terms of involving men, have increased awareness of father-inclusive practice among staff across the services as well as in partner agencies.

Relationships Australia, Darwin, NT

Relationships Australia Northern Territory (RANT) is a counselling and family relationships agency that offers counselling for individuals, couples and families, family dispute resolution, relationships education courses, professional supervision and a range of other services.

RANT concentrated on three key activities to make the service more father-inclusive:

- ▶ A fathers-after-separation group was reinvigorated. One course was run for six weeks in February–March 2008 and had six fathers attending. Recruitment occurred through other RANT services, advertising in the local paper and community service announcements on radio
- ▶ The waiting rooms were redesigned to make them more father-friendly. A series of photographs were purchased from the ‘Thanks Dad’ organisation that runs photograph competitions. Pictures of fathers from a range of different cultures

were purchased. A celebratory launch of the new pictures was held in the waiting room. Newspapers subscriptions for the local newspaper NT News were also purchased as reception staff noticed men tended to prefer to read the paper over magazines

- Staff training was held in Darwin and Alice Springs on working with men. This was facilitated by Andrew King, who is a father-inclusive practice pilot mentor and an experienced practitioner and facilitator. All staff attended the training.

The success of the above strategies was related to:

- enthusiastic staff who were committed to father-inclusive practice and willing to explore areas where strategies could be implemented within existing funds (for example, the budget for infrastructure could contribute to things like the purchase of pictures for the waiting room)
- the Chief Executive Officer is very supportive of the program
- a range of staff were involved in the training, from administrative and reception staff who have first contact with clients through to counsellors and program staff. This meant that there was a general increase in awareness about father-inclusive practice and commitment to the process across the whole staff team
- the father-inclusive practice pilot key practitioner encouraged celebrating milestones such as the launch of the photographs which, as well as acknowledging achievements, supports the process of cultural change within the organisation.

Centacare, North West Tasmania, Burnie, TAS

Centacare North West Tasmania delivers a broad range of support and counselling services for adults, children and families, including Family Dispute Resolution. Centacare North West Tasmania also have funding to run men's programs under the FaHCSIA Men and Family Relationships program.

The service has developed a range of initiatives to become more father-inclusive, some of which link directly into their existing men's programs while others are simple strategies aimed at making the service more father-inclusive as a whole.

Some strategies at the organisation are:

- the answering machine was re-recorded with a male voice so that the first voice men hear when calling is male
- the waiting room was made more father-friendly through the use of posters picturing fathers, information for fathers and male-friendly magazines
- a staff training day was held with the father-inclusive practice pilot mentor facilitating a whole-of-staff discussion about engaging men in the service
- more explicitly introducing discussions about working with fathers into case meetings and general staff meetings.

At the program level, some strategies included:

- developing one-day workshop for separated fathers
- developed partnership with local mining company which employs over 100 male staff. This included running a survey and holding meetings with staff to determine men's needs and plan activities
- established a Men's Network Forum for workers across North-West, West and Northern regions of Tasmania
- held meetings with Women Tasmania to discuss ways to work together to promote a 'whole of family approach'
- produced a Dad's Cookbook and run cooking classes for men
- run ante-natal classes for new fathers
- organised a men's social outing once a month.

Centacare North West Tasmania has also achieved a profile in the local community around the work they have done with men. This has resulted in a number of speaking engagements in the local community and media articles highlighting the men's programs or where Centacare staff have been consulted about men's issues. This has the dual impact of both promoting the service and the groups and helping to 'normalise' men's involvement in support services and father's activities.

Other achievements include:

- the program has helped to foster a more positive approach to men's services and programs. Rather than being focussed on abuse or anger-management as men's programs have often been, the focus is on positive aspects of men's lives such as their role as fathers and interest in engaging with their children
- the father-inclusive practice program also gave formal space to air ideas about father inclusivity that had been circulating informally in the agency for some time. It was both a catalyst for change and enhanced things that were already happening
- increased staff awareness and skills around working with fathers has increased. This is important as working with men is core business in Family Dispute Resolution. A focus on father-inclusive practice supports this area of work by ensuring staff are more comfortable working with men, men are more comfortable accessing the service and there are supporting programs to which men can be referred.

Mundubbera Community Development Association, Mundubbera, QLD

Mundubbera Community Development Association (the Association) provides a broad range of services relating to health and social issues including childcare services, welfare and disability support.

The Association is keen to increase the attendance of fathers at the playgroup for children aged 0-5 years (Pips playgroup). However, the service is limited to running the playgroup in business hours which excludes most working fathers and is a major limitation for father-inclusive practice in this area. Out-of-hours events may be a

possibility, but distance is a barrier when it comes to evening or weekend events. Mundubbera is 2.5 hours drive from a major town. This often means that Saturdays are taken up by families travelling to town for shopping leaving only Sundays free.

The local area has been severely affected by drought which has the potential to impact on men's mental health and wellbeing. A drought focussed group—'Local Blokes, Local Answers'—has been established. The program will be taken to six local towns and has already been attended by in excess of 150 men. The Association has also launched a 'mature males' group. Interestingly, the programs appear to have attracted fathers with older children rather than younger.

The Association is keen to establish more programs for fathers that engage them in practical activities and involve partnering with local agencies. For example, the local Bluelight Association runs an annual billycart race each year, which has the potential to be a great event for fathers and kids to be involved in together. There may also be options for involving fathers in groups or courses that have a practical focus such as mechanics.

Children's Protection Society, Heidelberg, VIC

The Children's Protection Society (CPS) provides child and family services and has a specialist therapeutic counselling program for children who have been sexually abused, children with sexualised behaviours and children with sexually abusive behaviours. The service also has funding to run programs for men under the Men and Family Relationships Program. Services offered under this program include:

- counselling and group work for men to assist in resolving relationship difficulties and improving relationship skills
- groups for men who want to strengthen their relationship with their children (Embracing Fatherhood Group which began in August 2008 and By Your Side Father's Group for men with infant children commenced in August 2008)
- support, education and skills development for fathers and step-fathers
- information and links to other community groups and services.

The following specialist services are also offered by the Men and Fathers Support Program

- social support for first time fathers through the 'I'm A Dad' program in partnership with maternity hospitals
- 'I'm an Aboriginal Dad' (at the Mercy Hospital) as a support and counselling program for Aboriginal men and their partners
- 'I'm a Young Somali Dad' with a focus on refugee, settlement and fathering issues.

Father-inclusive practice work linked in with the above programs, but was also focussed on making the service as a whole more father-inclusive. Strategies included:

- conducting an internal staff survey, which looked at the way staff perceive father-inclusive practice, feel the service is inclusive of fathers and other men and current practice examples of father-inclusive practice in their area of work

- men and family relationships program has been renamed ‘Men and Fathers Support Program’ to emphasise to both staff and clients that the fathers’ program is there
- including a focus on father-inclusive practice in case meetings by ensuring that the role of the father is considered in all cases and, if safe and feasible, contacting the family both at the point of initial engagement and in ongoing work with the family.

Agencies for South West Accommodation, Bunbury, WA

Agencies for South West Accommodation (ASWA) provides a range of services including housing support, crisis and supported accommodation, family and parenting programs, youth services and an employment program. ASWA also run programs funded under the Family Relationship Services Program Men and Family Relationships services initiative. ASWA sees a relatively high proportion of male clients. Just over 26 per cent of all clients seen in the parenting program over the past year were men, including a proportion of single or separated fathers.

ASWA’s father-inclusive practice work has included:

- training staff in father-inclusive practice using a number of strategies including sending staff to external training, running internal in-service sessions with invited presenters and providing one-on-one mentoring and training (co-work) with new staff
- reviewing the office environment to ensure it is inclusive of men, including purchasing male-oriented magazines for the waiting areas
- promoting men’s services using a number of methods, including speaking to other agencies about referrals to the men’s program (such as the mental health program) and sending flyers to workplaces
- running lunchtime information sessions for men at local workplaces to promote men’s services and gain feedback on the sort of programs men would like to see (NB: this was on hold when Men and Family Relationships program was not staffed, but staff have begun an intensive promotions strategy to re-establish and expand these sessions)
- putting staff time and resources into researching father-inclusive practice
- redesigning men’s program pamphlets to reflect the message/promotion of ‘men in families’ rather than men on their own
- looking at internal agency policies and practices, including policies and practices relating to staff and ensuring single fathers employed by the service are supported
- promoting out of hours services that can be attended by men who are working full-time (this was arranged with consideration of where other agencies provide out of hours service to maximise the number of days men in the local area can access these services)

- ▶ running a program for men in prison that focusses on preparing men to be reconnect with their families post-release and connecting them with services they can access to support them in their role as a father.

Anglican Community Care, Mount Gambier, SA

Anglican Community Care (ACC) provides a broad range of family relationship services including: Men and Family Relationship Services; Family Relationship Education and Skills Training; parenting groups; Specialised Family Violence Services; the Children's Contact Centre, and most recently was awarded a Family Relationship Centre and Post Separation Cooperative Parenting Program. ACC has its head office in Mount Gambier in South Australia's South East. Whilst having other regional offices in Berri and Murray Bridge. ACC also operates smaller offices in Naracoorte, Millicent, Bordertown and Waikerie. ACC describes itself as having a father-inclusive focus in place, which has been strengthened by the father-inclusive practice pilot.

Specific activities have included:

- ▶ site audits of the main and smaller office locations
- ▶ an action plan to improve the external appearance of sites e.g. the father's entry to the Children's Contact Centre was improved in response to the audit and comments by fathers, with positive comments reported from fathers following the works
- ▶ internal strategies, including workshops, father-focussed notice boards and changes to practice systems
- ▶ practice guide used as a prompt for discussion and reflection amongst staff
- ▶ being inclusive of fathers in the case planning
- ▶ values and principles of inclusion explored in recruitment processes.

Upcoming plans will focus on marketing the service to men, including through a business card product for men, replacing the traditional pamphlet with carpentry pencils with telephone numbers to distribute through the timber mill industry. Other marketing ideas to be explored include a 'sample bag' of resources for fathers and a newsletter targeting fathers.

In the long term it would be fabulous to obtain funding for a men's shed program, providing an activity-focussed space to attract isolated men, including fathers, where access to supports can be promoted and a sense of community can be maintained. Partners in such a venture are likely to include service clubs and sporting associations, particularly where they have stated support for men's health and well being.

Ngala Parenting with Confidence, Kensington, WA

Ngala is a large service offering multiple programs across several sites in inner, outer and regional areas of Perth. The appointment of a men's worker some years ago had been a key resource in strengthening father-inclusive practice, for example, the '*Hey Dad*' program run by Ngala. The father-inclusive practice pilot presented an opportunity to build on this work. Initially the intention had been to focus the project on a specific program area, but the cultural audit tool provided the chance to broaden the effort to a whole of service strategy.

The cultural audit tool was divided into the questions addressing the leadership group and those relevant to program staff, and circulated as a survey across the organisation. 129 staff responded from across nine sites, including managers, full-time and many part-time program staff. As predicted, managers displayed a stronger level of awareness and greater knowledge about father-inclusive practice, and where a program had a father-inclusive 'champion', the results for that program area were also stronger.

The survey results also revealed the risk that father-inclusive practice becomes 'yet another thing' for staff to 'do', rather than being seen as a way of strengthening practice. This fatigue was identified by Ngala as a key barrier to achieving a high standard of father-inclusive practice. Other barriers include the absence of identified workers to generate change at local program levels, and the lack of internal training resources or a training unit to drive the agenda. Without dedicated resources it is easy for father-inclusive practice to be overrun by other more immediate pressures on workers and management.

Ngala is responding to these challenges at two key levels: firstly a tailored training strategy is being developed in response to the gaps revealed through the survey, and secondly, at a whole of service level, father-inclusive practice is being built into the Service Delivery Framework, which is the platform for all the work of the organisation, giving it a status beyond the 'one more thing to do' position, and making it central to the way all services are delivered.

References

- Beauregard, B & Brown, F, 2000, *Supporting Fathers*, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, Ottawa.
- Fletcher, R, 2003, Fathers' Role in Family Services: The Engaging Fathers Project [online] in *Focus on Fathering*, pp 125-141, Sullivan, Robin Editor, Camberwell, Vic, ACER Press Melbourne.
- Fletcher, R, 2004, *Bringing men in: how to engage with men for the benefit of everyone in the family*, University of Newcastle, Newcastle.
- Fletcher, R, 2008, *Father-inclusive Practice and Associated Professional Competencies*, AFRC Briefing No 9 Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- McGill, I and Beatty, L 1995, *Action Learning: a guide for professional management and educational development*, 2nd edn, Kogan Page, London.
- King, A, 2005, 'The 'quiet revolution' amongst men. Developing the practice of working with men in family relationships'. *Children Australia 2005* Vol 30 No 2, pp.1-8.

