
It Can Be Done: Work With Young Fathers

Mat Crozier

One thing I want to get across today is related to the title of this conference - "It can be done" - which I like and would modify only slightly in relation to what I am going to talk about. What I want to get across is that:

YOUNG FATHERS WANT IT TO BE DONE!!!

This I know from my own experience as a young father, but also through the findings from the Young Fathers Project - a pilot project that was run within YouthAction Northern Ireland's Young Men's Unit.

Background to Young Fathers Programme

- This initiative was developed through work with three separate young men's projects in the Lisburn area. This programme had explored various issues such as violence, health and community leadership.
- Several young men expressed particular concern about issues facing young fathers.
- The Young Fathers Project was developed to support young fathers and to explore how youth services and projects can best respond to their needs.

Aims of Young Fathers Programme

- Explore how young men think and feel about fatherhood.
- Share experiences as fathers and of being fathered.
- Assess the issues facing young fathers.
- Explore ways to support young fathers.
- Identify key recommendations from young fathers.

Benefits/outcomes for young fathers

- Young fathers felt supported.
- Opportunity to talk about issues/explore feelings.
- Special focus on excluded fathers.
- Sense of having shared experiences.
- Young fathers felt less isolated.
- Increased awareness about issues such as ...
 - Sexual health
 - Parenting
 - Legal issues
 - Services
- Project provided a voice for young fathers and their issues.



Recommendations/considerations from young fathers

- **Greater awareness** for young fathers about support services.
- **More programmes** for young fathers.
- Programmes should be **fun, active, imaginative** AND provide opportunities for **reflection** and **discussion**.
- Projects should focus on a **wide variety of issues** that affect young men e.g. masculinity, pressure, mental health.
- Society undervalues the role of fathers and reinforces the role of financial provider.

Quotes from "Young Fathers Talking"

"This group has been really good for me. I usually avoid talking about these issues, but listening to others has made me feel that other people are worse off than I am. It's like counselling".

"This project has been like therapy. It's been good being able to talk and hear that other people are going through a hard time too".

"Having a child is both worrying and exciting - particularly health and financial worries. I hope to work and live for my family. I worry that they won't like me".

"I was a good Dad who cared for my kids. They were all that I worked and lived for. I feel that my family have been ripped away from me".

"I find having a dog very therapeutic. I can walk down the towpath with it and spill my beans out. I get the stress off my shoulders. The dog shakes his head and looks as if it's interested".

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