
Workshop: It Will Be Done - What We Need To Ensure Practical Action In The Future

All delegates were asked to discuss two questions with the other people at their table, and to provide written feedback. This session recognised the vast amount of experience held by participants, and sought to allow a formal opportunity to share with and learn from each other. The following is a composite summary of the deliberations:

Q1. What practical actions could be taken to provide a more positive welcome for fathers in centres, programmes and activities?

Design of the service ...

- Flexible opening times - evenings and weekends.
- Male-friendly environment e.g. décor, posters, father-friendly reading materials, front of house staff.
- Male images on information leaflets and organisations' publicity.
- Good practice to invite males and females by name and mention both on correspondence materials. Redesign materials in order to target men.
- Involve fathers, and consult them in designing services, the environment and programmes.

Staffing ...

- More male staff - male role models may encourage men.
- Men-only services work better.
- One stop shop - male contact person.
- Appropriate attitude among staff - change our own attitudes and approaches and be open to new ways of working.
- Provide training on working with men.

The approach ...

- Start small and keep the approach simple.
- Build relationships with individual fathers and encourage them.
- Actively seek-out men and invite them into projects.
- Accept all fathers - warts and all. There's no such thing as a "perfect father".
- Bend practical rules to allow fathers to attend easily.
- Engage fathers in practical ways.
- Go to where men are already comfortable - pub/leisure centre/sports club/community groups/churches etc.
- Look at issues that prevent men from coming - literacy skills, having to talk in front of people, groups.
- Organise courses to support, promote and encourage this work.



Q2. What structures, resources, systems, networks etc. are needed if work with fathers is to be increased and strengthened in the future?

Supporting the work ...

- Establish networks to:
 - ✓ share experiences;
 - ✓ spread good practice;
 - ✓ build support for the work;
 - ✓ develop partnerships.
- Create a safe forum; build relationships with men; make it a personal space.

Doing the work ...

- Start early:
 - ✓ do not discourage boys from “feminine” play;
 - ✓ address boys' fertility issues in schools, with health care workers and parents;
 - ✓ introduce childcare into the school curriculum - preferably at primary school level;
 - ✓ work with pre-fathers from as early as twelve years old upwards;
 - ✓ youth policy to include fatherhood issues, personal development and self-esteem;
 - ✓ look at other models e.g. Danish model of holistic education of the whole self from an early age to develop a good basis for fatherhood and other areas of life.
- Services around childcare/raising families provision should always give messages that men matter and are accepted.
- Actively engage men in these services.
- More recognition for fathers' role in the area of post-natal depression.
- Engage with, and actively target, grandfathers and older men.
- Reduce isolation for rural men and rural fathers - establish an outreach service.
- Seize windows of opportunity - when men show an interest, nurture and develop that interest immediately. Don't wait for a second chance (it won't come).
- Access to people experienced in fathers' work to help less experienced projects.
- Aim services at early intervention.

Creating the right climate ...

- De-stigmatise men's needs.
- Re-education programme for health care providers and educators to address the lack of awareness of the fathers' role and needs.
- Challenge stereotypes in language and service provision.
- Changes in working practices:
 - ✓ flexible working hours - allow days off for sports days, school shows, caring for sick children;
 - ✓ paternity leave and pay;
 - ✓ career breaks;
 - ✓ male-friendly environments;
 - ✓ acceptance that men need/want these;
 - ✓ bring all these issues to the fore.
- Change in imagery (currently negative) e.g. newspapers, TV, advertising, magazines.
- More male involvement in non-traditional work e.g. nursing/childcare/primary education - campaign to achieve this and increase salaries in these professions.
- Lobby TDs/MLAs/local councillors.
- Change at Health Department level - provision of funding and development of new approaches and services appropriate to men and fathers.
- Strategic recognition of men e.g. planning team for men. Men's voices need to be raised at a higher strategic level.