
Foreword

We live in a world of confused and mixed messages about fatherhood. On the one hand, we rarely pay much attention to fathers until they are seen as a problem. On the other, we are in the middle of a process of re-discovering the important role that fathers play in families.

There is powerful evidence to suggest that involved fathers can help to improve many aspects of their children's lives such as health, well-being, confidence, self-esteem, educational achievement ... and can reduce the chances of their children turning to crime. At the same time, there is a growing recognition that parenting is a shared task.

However, for some professionals there is still a sense of: "Why should I invest energy in this area?" "Where do I start?" "What is possible?" This is why we felt there was a need for the "It Can Be Done" conference.

The aim of this full-day, cross-Border event was to target individuals and organisations (statutory, voluntary and community-based) who currently work with fathers or who wish to in the future. Ninety people participated and were encouraged to:

- reflect on the important role and place of fathers in our community;
- listen to and understand fathers' experience as parents;
- explore the added value of increased fathers' involvement;
- hear about innovative projects which are currently supporting fathers in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties;
- share practical guidelines which could make programmes more welcoming to fathers;
- suggest what is needed to support fathers in the future.

This report gives an overview of the:

- conference programme;
- speakers;
- content of speeches;
- outcomes of workshop;
- participants;
- feedback received from delegates.

We hope that it is of use to you and your work with fathers.



Colin Fowler and David Simpson
Summer 2002

This event was organised by ...

The Men's Project within Parents Advice Centre which seeks to increase awareness of the issues facing men and boys and to promote their social inclusion by: creating networks and promoting cooperation; researching needs; collating resources; initiating practical action; lobbying decision-makers. PAC also offers a free, confidential helpline service to parents.

The Fathers' Project within Fás le Chéile (the North Western Health Board Health Promotion Service's Parenting Education Programme). This initiative aims to increase fathers' access to support and education. It currently supports two fathers' groups, and has trained nine fathers to deliver talks on "Raising Boys" to fathers in Primary Schools.