

---

# "Kick Start (2009)"

- an action learning project to support work with fathers

## The "Small Print" for Potential Participants

---

### Background

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 they play in family life.

Yet, 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. This vision has created a groundswell of interest in work with fathers.

### The Challenge

However, this presents a huge challenge to everyone who works in the field of family work, and raises fundamental questions such as ...

- Why should we invest energy in this area?
- What are the practical benefits of engaging with fathers?
- Where do we start?
- What is possible?
- Who can we look to for help and support?
- What has been tried in other places? ...



Feedback from local conferences and seminars on fatherhood has indicated a desire for a structured, in-depth, and longer-term opportunity for a range of groups to explore the practical implications of, and possibilities for, working with fathers.

### What is Kick Start?

"Kick Start" is an innovative hands-on project designed to meet this expressed need. This project is spearheaded by The Men's Project within Parents Advice Centre, and is sponsored by the Family Policy Unit within DHSSPS. The 2009 programme will build upon the learning from the 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 groups. Reports on these years can be viewed online at: [www.mensproject.org/kickstart.html](http://www.mensproject.org/kickstart.html)

### Aim

The Kick Start project seeks to increase both the quantity and quality of dedicated work with fathers in Northern Ireland, and to build a robust infrastructure in this area.

### Objectives

The core objectives of Kick Start are to ...

- Encourage agencies to see that work with fathers is necessary and can be done.
- Increase the capacity of organisations to initiate, consolidate and expand their work with fathers.
- Equip practitioners with the insight, knowledge, skills and ongoing support to make a tangible and sustainable difference in their own work environment.
- Translate ideas into practical action.
- Record and disseminate participants' learning to inform future practice.
- Maintain a longer-term peer support network for this field.

### Project Overview

Kick Start 2009 will ...

- Be coordinated by Colin Fowler from The Men's Project within Parents Advice Centre.
- Be facilitated by David Simpson - a local trainer in fathers' work.
- Begin in March 2009 and last until September 2009. However, telephone support, advice and signposting will continue to be offered until the end of February 2010.
- Involve a maximum of 15 participants.

- ❑ Include a mixture of organisational reflection, training input, support and review of practice.
- ❑ Provide an opportunity for participants to use their new learning to initiate a practical project/programme within their own workplace.

## Who Should Apply?

Workers and activists who are currently trying to, or wishing to, engage with fathers in Northern Ireland are invited to apply. Kick Start will be especially valuable to organisations such as Sure Starts, Home Starts, Life Starts, family centres, schools, youth services and child care providers. We aim to ensure that the training group has a diverse mix of participants. Therefore, although two or more people from the same agency or organisation may participate in the programme, they must not come from the same workplace or project. This initiative is open to both male and female workers.

## Methodology

Participants will ...

- ❑ Have an opportunity to form supportive relationships with fellow group members.
- ❑ Share their own experience of work with fathers, and use this as the basis for learning.
- ❑ Reflect on the role and place of fathers in their own organisation and community.
- ❑ Gain an insight into current research on fatherhood.
- ❑ Explore the added value of increased fathers' involvement.
- ❑ Learn about innovative projects which are supporting fathers.
- ❑ Identify practical actions which could make programmes more welcoming to fathers.
- ❑ Devise an action plan to ensure that their agency becomes more "father-friendly" in the future.
- ❑ Undertake a practical project with fathers in their own situation.
- ❑ Present the outcomes of/learning from their project to a group of peers.



## Benefits for Organisations

Organisations taking part in this project will benefit by ...

- ❑ Having a member of staff trained in working with fathers.
- ❑ Identifying opportunities within their organisation's work to become more father-friendly.
- ❑ Running an event for Fathers' Day 2009.
- ❑ Being part of a collective of peers interested in developing work with fathers.
- ❑ Contributing to local learning about effective work with fathers.
- ❑ Receiving a copy of the end-of-training report detailing the experiences of all project participants.
- ❑ Having access to a year-long period of support, advice, mentoring and signposting.

## Programme Timetable

### A. Briefing Session with Line Managers:

**Wednesday 18th March 2009, 9.45am - 2.15pm (including lunch), Otter Lodge, Cookstown**

All the line managers of participating staff are asked to attend a briefing session. The aims for this meeting are to:

- Provide a fuller description of the project.
- Outline the need for organisational support for work with fathers.
- Highlight the support needs of staff participating in this initiative.
- Clarify what participating agencies can expect from the programme and what is expected of them.
- Describe the "father-friendly organisational audit tool".

---

### B. Organisational Review:

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March to Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009**

Programme participants and their line managers are asked to undertake an initial audit of their own organisations to ascertain how prepared they are to undertake a project with fathers and how father-friendly they currently are. They will do this by using the pro forma of the audit tool.

### C. Training Days ...

[All training and support days include lunch and refreshments]

#### The "Why" of Working with Fathers:

**Wednesday 25th March 2009, 9.45am - 4.00pm, Otter Lodge, Cookstown**

- ❑ Introduction to the project's purpose, structure and format.
- ❑ Agreeing a group contract.
- ❑ Exploration of participants' hopes, fears and expectations for training.
- ❑ Sharing personal experience of work with fathers.
- ❑ Personal/organisational assets that we bring to this work.
- ❑ What is a dad? - agreeing our definition.
- ❑ "What Good are Dads?" - current research into fatherhood.



*[Homework: Compile a list entitled: "Reasons why our organisation needs to engage with fathers"]*

#### The "How" of Working with Fathers

**Wednesday 1st April 2009, 9.45am - 4.00pm, Otter Lodge, Cookstown**

- ❑ Homework feedback, and exploration of the added value of increasing the level of father involvement.
- ❑ Defining a vision for fathers' work.
- ❑ "Our Organisation" - look at the structures, policies, resources, initiatives ... within own organisations which either support fathers' work or prevent men from becoming involved.
- ❑ Principles of effective practice.
- ❑ Examples of effective practice.
- ❑ External resources and support available for this work.

*[Homework: Agree a realistic practical project with line manager which will increase fathers' involvement and/or level of satisfaction in organisation's work. This initiative should coincide with Father's Day 2009]*

#### The "What" of Working with Fathers

**Wednesday 8th April 2009, 9.45am - 4.00pm, Otter Lodge, Cookstown**

- ❑ Homework feedback - presentation of project ideas.
- ❑ Engagement Jigsaw - practical steps to help encourage fathers to join programmes.
- ❑ Cooperative working to prepare an action plan to realise each project's goals including identification of stages and resources needed.

*[Homework: Go off and operationalise project plan]*

---

### D. Interim Support Day:

**Wednesday 13th May 2009, 9.45am - 4.00pm, Otter Lodge, Cookstown**

Trainees and managers will have a joint meeting with the facilitators to review progress on the Father's Day projects. The aim of this day is to offer mentoring, support and assistance to organisations to help them achieve their project goal. This will be in addition to the ongoing provision of telephone support from The Men's Project and on-site visits (during late May).

---

### E. Project Implementation:

**In participants' own workplaces around the date of Father's Day (Sunday 21st June 2009)**

Participants are asked to ensure that the implementation of their practical project takes place around the time of Father's Day 2009. They will also be asked to seek publicity for this event/programme, which will have the effect of increasing the regional profile of Father's Day specifically, and fathers' work generally. Organisations that have fully completed the preceding elements of Kick Start will be eligible to apply for a bursary of £100 each to help to meet the cost of their Father's Day event.

---

### F. Project De-Briefing and Presentation Planning Day:

**Friday 26th June 2009, 9.45am - 4.00pm, Otter Lodge, Cookstown**

Trainees will come together to share their experience of their Father's Day projects, look at how they will record this, and plan an event which presents this work to external organisations. Managers are also invited to attend and contribute.

## **G. Evaluation and Feedback: July and August 2009**

Participants are asked to review their time on the programme, and to give feedback to the organisers via a questionnaire. They are also asked to write-up their Father's Day project using a standardised set of headings. This information will form the basis of the final report that will be shared with other agencies.

---

## **H. Presentation Morning: Wednesday 16th September 2009, Belfast (venue to be confirmed)**

The aim of this event is to present some of the learning and achievements from Kick Start 2009 to a wider forum of people interested in fathers' work.

---

## **I. Telephone Support:**

The Men's Project will offer ongoing advice, support and signposting to participants until February 2010.

---

## **J. Kick Start Report and Dissemination: December 2009**

Written feedback from Kick Start participants will form the basis of a report on the project. The report will be collated and edited by The Men's Project (TMP) and will be produced in hard copy (for organisations who participated in Kick Start) as well as being made available for free downloading on TMP's website.

---

## **Line Manager and Trainee Commitment**

Trainees will be asked to ...

- attend all the training / support sessions;
- undertake "homework" between meetings;
- keep their own organisation updated;
- plan, implement and review a practical project with / for fathers in their own work setting;
- submit a short report on their project;
- contribute to the presentation event.

Line managers will be asked to ...

- attend the briefing session at the outset, the support day and the final presentation event;
- support and encourage their worker;
- look at internal organisational issues in relation to working with fathers;
- ensure that their organisation submits an end-of-training feedback form.

## **Organisers' Commitment**

Colin Fowler and Trisha McQueen (The Men's Project within Parents Advice Centre) will coordinate this project and will be responsible for: all queries and administration tasks relating to this initiative; booking venues; providing ongoing contact with and support for participants; collating, editing, producing and disseminating the final report on the project (both hard copy and web version).

David Simpson (independent trainer) will be employed by The Men's Project on a consultancy basis to facilitate the Kick Start training. He will be responsible for delivering quality training, providing guidance, advice and support to participants, and coordinating the Presentation Morning programme.

## **Cost and Booking a Place**

All participants are asked to contribute a non-refundable registration fee of £70.00 to book a place on the Kick Start project. Applications will only be accepted on the official registration form - further copies can be obtained by contacting The Men's Project (see below) and are available as a Portable Document Format (PDF) file on the Internet at: [www.mensproject.org/kickstart/kickstartform.pdf](http://www.mensproject.org/kickstart/kickstartform.pdf)



While the organisers are keen to ensure that the training group has a range of organisations and groups represented within it, places will, primarily, be prioritised on a first-come-first-served basis.

---



The father and baby logo is taken from the book "More Secrets of Happy Children" by Steve Biddulph with Shaaron Biddulph, published by Thorsons (ISBN 0-7225-3670-4). We are very grateful for Steve's permission to use this image.