



**Working With Fathers:  
Promoting the Positive Involvement of  
Fathers in Vulnerable Families**

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## 1. Introduction

While there is a broadening acceptance of the positive role that fathers can play, there is a need to better understand what makes a father positively involved and the role support services can play.

This report is interested in this strengths based perspective of the role fathers can take in the upbringing of children in vulnerable families. It is more specifically interested in what makes a service effective in supporting these fathers. There is considerable research which highlights the positive outcomes achieved where fathers are positively involved in children's lives and 'toolkits' to help services and practitioners work with fathers. However, there are still ongoing concerns that services are not effectively engaging fathers especially those who may be harder to reach or resistant to social work intervention.

In 2012 Circle published, 'Listening to Fathers' (Smithers 2012) under the auspices of a Knowledge Exchange Fellowship at the University of Edinburgh. This sought to record the experiences and the views of fathers involved in the child protection system. The report highlighted concerns that fathers were not being engaged effectively by social services when vulnerable families were subject to statutory intervention. This lack of engagement suggested that there was a dismissive view of fathers amongst childcare professionals, they were not generally seen as a positive part of the upbringing of children. This research resonated with some existing literature which has focussed on the obstacles faced by fathers.

To inform this report we conducted a second study, this time with 20 fathers involved with three services based in North Edinburgh. To protect the anonymity of participants no names or identifiable initials are used in this report but I would like to acknowledge the support of these services and the contributions of the men who agreed to be interviewed or take part in the group sessions. We also surveyed 74 practitioners working across the central belt of Scotland (both summarised and included as appendices to this report). These practitioners work with families because they are vulnerable in a range of ways e.g. parental drug misuse, families affected by imprisonment, the children are 'in need' or 'looked after'. The primary purpose of this research was to explore and understand positive involvement of fathers in these vulnerable families with a particular focus on what helped in terms of support from services.

The fathers and practitioners were asked similar questions. Comments from fathers are indicated by ascribed initials and those of practitioners are referenced to the number of the survey response.

This report presents findings and considers the implications for practice. It will help Circle ensure that our services, continue to focus on achieving best outcomes for children and young people, are evidence based and responsive to the articulated needs of families. However, we would expect that our findings will be of interest to all agencies working with fathers in vulnerable families.

### 2. Research Methods

The strive to increase understanding through discussion and using existing experiences is seen as characteristic of the 'case study' method (Gomm et al, 2000). This research is a collective case study exploring the perspectives of fathers in vulnerable families who are positively involved in the upbringing of children. Of specific interest was the part played by services in supporting positive involvement.

The individual fathers, from vulnerable families, selected for the interviews and focus groups were identified as being positively involved in the upbringing of their children – this was 'purposeful sampling' with the intention of exploring 'information rich' cases. (Patton 1990) A qualitative approach to interviews and focus groups was chosen, because of the benefits of qualitative methods in promoting depth of understanding of the issues involved (ibid). However, the responses from practitioners to the survey did allow us to gather some quantitative data.

Practitioners working for three organisations working with vulnerable families in North Edinburgh were asked to identify fathers they would describe as 'positively involved' and willing to take part in the research. I also asked for an opportunity to speak with existing fathers groups run by the organisations involved. We conducted 9 individual interviews and 3 focus groups involving a total of 20 fathers. We used an online survey to gather the perspective of 74 practitioners working with vulnerable families, for a range of statutory and voluntary agencies.

The individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule which was designed to explore perspectives on 'positive involvement' of fathers and what supports this involvement. The focus groups were run using the same open questions used in the interview. The practitioner survey involved a number of multiple selection and scaled questions with an opportunity to make further comment at the end of every question. The questions were designed to gather perspectives similar to those asked in the interviews with fathers allowing for some triangulation of data. The practitioner survey was posted online for a period of eight weeks and was sent out to all Circle staff and forwarded as appropriate to other practitioners.

Interviews and focus groups were recorded (by consent) and partially transcribed with attention paid to anonymity of those involved. Consent forms were collected from all fathers involved and these were securely stored. The data analysis from the interviews and focus groups involved organising the transcriptions into documents which were coded and categorised to help identify themes presented in this report.

The scale and the qualitative approach of this study means that it cannot be seen as a strong base for generalising to a larger population (Stake 1995), i.e. what we learn about these fathers doesn't necessarily transfer to all fathers. However we would expect that the study will allow the reader to make 'naturalistic generalizations' which allows those with experience of working with fathers to use the findings to inform the work they do. (ibid)

### 3. What are the benefits of positively involved fathers?

Allen and Daly (2007) collated and presented research evidence on the effects of father involvement and this section largely summarises their findings and another more recent review of research (Clapton 2012). Other references are added where appropriate.

To put it simply, positively engaged fathers benefit children, families, mothers and fathers themselves.

#### *Benefits for children*

Children researchers point to improvements in cognitive development and research from both the US and the UK reports that father involvement with schools correlates both with better engagement and achievement. (Lipscomb 2011; Clark 2009; Goldman 2005)

Children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure, be confident to explore their surroundings, and, as they grow older, have better social connections with peers. These children also are less likely to get in trouble at home, school, or in the community.

While there is evidence that the relationship children have with their mothers as primary caregivers is more important for healthy development in the younger years - one example of the specific advantage of father involvement comes in a study which found children's developmental progress was delayed when their mothers returned to work before they were 18 months old, but not when fathers were highly involved in child care.

#### *Benefits for families*

Better communication between fathers and family members and a greater sense of commitment to the family. There is less troubling conflict with teenage children. Being involved in caring can bring greater harmony and fewer arguments and the family tends to enjoy their time together more

#### *Benefits for mothers*

When fathers function as a source of practical and emotional support for mothers, they enhance the quality of the mother-child relationship. Mothers are then less likely to develop parenting stress and experience more competence as a parent. Mothers have a more positive outlook as regards their children's behaviour and increased emotional availability for children.

#### *Benefits for fathers*

Improved self-confidence and effectiveness as parent and a better understanding and accepting of children. Fathers are more engaged in the community and have better personal relationships. They enjoy a secure attachment relationship with their children and cope well with stressful situations and everyday hassles. Fathers feel as if they can depend on others more. They will feel more comfortable in their occupation and feel that they can do their job well. Positively involved fathers also feel confident they have a lot to offer others in terms of their job skills, parenting skills, and social relationships.

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When fathers build strong relationships with their children and others in the family, they also receive support and caring in return. Healthy family relationships provide the strongest and most important support network a person can have, whether that person is a child or an adult.

This resonates with the fathers spoken to in the preparation of this report – giving care to your children clearly elicits support from family and friends and creates a significant network of support – if they see the efforts made to be positively involved they are more inclined to help.

### 4. What does a positively involved father do?

Research emphasises the importance of ‘warm, authoritative and responsive parenting’ as crucial for ‘building resilience’ (JRF 2007). In the survey respondents were asked to identify the words which best described positively involved fathers they were working with. The relationships were most consistently described as close and supportive (over 50% of those surveyed chose these words). Other popular words were ‘warm, friendly and nurturing (all used by over 40%). They were least likely to use intimate (9 respondents) as the descriptor and it is perhaps interesting that only 26 of the 74 respondents felt that authoritative best described the relationship.

This report does not attempt to measure the involvement of any of the fathers. In the survey this was left to the subjective opinion of the respondents. In the interviews and focus groups fathers articulated a consistent message about being positively involved; it was making best use of the time you had with your children – it needed to be ‘quality time’. A qualification used similarly by researchers.

“children’s well-being is tied less to fathers’ general behaviours (spending time or money) and more to the affective climate created by the quality of those behaviours. Fathers matter not when they just spend time with their children, but when they spend time being involved in activities with their children and nurturing the father child relationship” (Adamsons and Johnson 2013)

Research has emphasised the time that the father spends on their own with the child as important in determining ‘involvement’ (Shaw and Lohan 2012). the use of the specific term ‘sole care’ as a measure of father involvement appears regularly. ‘Sole care’ means that the father is on their own with the children. For researchers ‘sole care’ does not include time in activities while another carer is available or being present while the other carer takes a lead role.

Fathers in our research spoke of the things they felt they needed to do to show they were positively involved and there was largely an agreement that they must: Establish and be involved in day to day routines and setting boundaries; provide a loving and stable environment where they would spend quality time with their children; and be interested and involved in their children’s activities.

“to be a better parent is to be there more, it needs to be quality time, parents can be wrapped up in their work – they are providing but they are not spending quality time with them” SF

“be interested in what they are doing, whatever it is – playing a game, reading a book, watching tv ... you have to be interested in what they are doing, even if it is embarrassing just spending time with them doing what they want to do.” JP

Overarching all of the actions was the positive perspective of fathers on their role as a father.

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The measurement of father involvement has variously been considered by researchers in a 'uni-dimensional' way (using one measure e.g. time spent together, quality of father child relationship, investment in parenting role (Allen and Daly 2007)) and increasingly using a 'multi-dimensional' conceptualisation. Palkowitz (1997) defined fifteen 'Categories of paternal involvement' ranging from – communication, teaching, monitoring, cognitive processes, Errands, Caregiving, Shared interests, Availability, Planning, Shared activities, Providing, Affection, Protection and Supporting emotionality. Other writers have also emphasised the need to consider involvement in the context of other variables: the stage and development of the children, the impact of class, culture etc. and employment circumstances of parents (Allen and Daly 2007).

In the practitioner survey, 45% of the vulnerable families the respondents were working with were described as having 'positively involved' fathers. Those surveyed felt that the main factors in identifying the positive involvement of fathers were:

- Frequency of contact
- Total time spent with children and
- Participation in routines

There were some strong views from individual practitioners on the role played by fathers both positive and negative however there was also signs some ambivalence among respondents about the role and engagement of fathers being little different to that of the mother.

The final comments in this section are provided as a message from fathers to fathers. The collective message from those involved in the interviews and focus groups can be summarised as follows:

To be positively involved fathers need to:

**Be there** – spending 'quality' time with their children;

**Be active and interested** – take an interest in what they like to do and take part; and

**Be positive** – it is 'the most difficult job' and needs a positive outlook.



### 5. What helps and hinders fathers' positive involvement?

As positive involvement is multi-faceted so are the things which have an impact on this involvement. We know that the following are important influential factors:

- own experience of being parented
  - personal characteristics and perspectives
  - co-parental relationship
  - work/life balance
  - external support
- (JRF 2004; Kershaw 2014; Gaunt and Scott 2014)

Our interviews with fathers and the practitioner survey echoed most of these and the co-parental relationship in particular was identified as impacting most. Fathers specifically pointed out the supportive influence of their partners:

“if I’m on a downer then she brings me out of it” MP

“(she) picks me up when I am down” PL

They also articulated a sense of the impact the relationship could have on the home environment:

“if you’ve not got a good relationship with your partner it is not a good environment for the children” SF

The fathers involved in this research considered themselves positively involved in the upbringing of their children but there were few who didn’t comment on a time when they were unable to fulfil this responsibility due to a number of reasons e.g. imprisonment, child protection concerns, alcohol or drug issues. They have accepted the support of services (and other fathers) to take an active part in the upbringing of their children. They have more often than not done this without a positive experience of being parented but there is invariably someone in their family who believes in their role as a father.

Existing research suggests that the involvement of fathers is dependent on a respectful relationship with a partner who values the part the fathers play in the care of their children. The literature highlights the importance of the mother’s perception of the father and how this affects his commitment to the fathering role – “in the absence of this verification men may find it difficult to remain committed to being a father”(Goldberg 2013). More than just verification it is suggested that fathers actually need to feel that mothers have confidence in their competence and their motivation (Bouchard et al 2007).

The impact of the co-parental relationship on the motivation of the father, highlighted above, suggests that these two elements are difficult to separate. Similar to other research the *attitude* (Holmes and Huston 2010) and *motivation* (Lewis and Lamb 2007) of fathers was identified by practitioners responding to the survey as two of the main reasons for the lack of positive involvement.

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An attitude which sees the father 'identifying' with the fathering role and holding this as a central part of who he is has been found to correlate with spending more time in the sole care of children. The same study also found that the 'salience' and 'centrality' of the mother's identity equally affected both the identity and the involvement of the father (Goldberg 2013).

Similar to other studies (Smith 2008), all of the fathers were positive about their role, most appear to have reflected on their life experiences and have an insight into their own behaviours and life choices which have in turn enabled them to develop an understanding of the positive part fathers play in the upbringing of children.

Fathers involved in the research spoke coherently about their experience of being parented and how this had affected them as adults and parents. They understood that to be positively involved with their children requires an ability to reflect on your own experience of being parented and an awareness of your own personality and temperament. The fathers we spoke with didn't want to repeat the mistakes of their parents and they also knew that they had to change their own behaviours and attitudes:

"My dad used to hit me all the time and get me in trouble all the time so I used to go out and cause trouble to get that wee bit of kick, take drugs and that – I didnae want to be like that so that was my main focus" OP

"if you are angry all the time it doesn't help – if you have depression, when you're having a bad day, it rubs off on everybody – I know when I am feeling depressed or angry then I am better taking five minutes away than sitting their boiling in front of the kids it can ruin the day– I have had my son say to me 'It's scary when you shout daddy' and that hurts." JP

"I was never angry towards my children but I am angry towards workers – I've had to change this – it's natural to be angry, it's what you do when you're angry" JF

The practitioners involved in the survey reported working with 872 families and noted that over 400 of these did not have fathers who were positively involved in the upbringing of their children. The survey respondents were asked about the reasons for this lack of involvement and as stated above the key findings were that this was linked to the personal attitude or motivation of the father and the relationship he has with the mother of the children. The survey responses also highlighted the impact of life experience on fathers and the ongoing impact of behaviour and lifestyle choices:

"often they have had difficult relationships with extended family members and have not experienced continuity and so were not aware of how essential it is" SR25

"lifestyle choices such as substance misuse have a huge impact on father's ability to parent and be accessible / present in their child's life" SR34

The top ten reasons for non-involvement (with % of respondents) were as follows:

1. Poor relationship with mother of children (91%)
2. Drug/alcohol misuse (82%)

3. Negative attitude of father (73%)
4. Low motivation of father (71%)
5. Offending behaviour (70%)
6. Mental health (66%)
7. Engagement with support services (59%)
8. Temperament of father (55%)
9. Relationship with extended family (50%)
10. Accommodation/housing (36%)

This question, focussed on non-involved fathers, elicited the most comments from those completing the survey. The comments are dominated by reference to the impact of drug and alcohol use on the role of fathers. This must be viewed in the context of the survey circulation which included workers in projects where the criteria for service is related to parental drug misuse or offending behaviour. However, it reiterated the links between drug and alcohol misuse, negative parental relationships and quality of contact with children.

Although it did not attract much comment from the fathers and practitioners involved in the research, the work/life balance has been associated with the positive involvement of fathers. A study done of parental involvement in the UK, USA, Norway and Germany (Hook and Wolfe 2010) linked involvement to working patterns and found combinations of parents working schedules had an effect on fathers' involvement (specifically time spent in sole charge of the children - which was viewed as important as the mother's presence often limited their direct care of the children). The research found that in particular, evening work for fathers facilitates more time in sole charge of children (an hour more than other arrangements) but in Britain this was only apparent when their partners are employed part time. This research therefore suggests that in certain contexts under certain employment conditions, fathers commit as much time to the sole care of children as mothers.

### 6. What do support services do to help fathers be positively involved in the upbringing of their children?

“I find it hard to take on support from outside – I’ve just got a new drugs worker and she’s sound but I can’t work with her. You know it’s there but you find it hard to ask for it.” JF

The Equal Opportunities Committee from the Scottish Government recently published a report on Fathers and Parenting, taking evidence widely. Their findings outlined a number of issues for fathers but a recurring theme was about the access to support services (especially groups) and in particular the promotion of these services through information resources and publicity materials. The observation that one of the fathers made: “he struggles to access support because he sees most networks as being for mothers” resonates across the evidence from this report but is less evident in our research. This is somewhat understandable as we were largely speaking to fathers who were engaged with services.

The messages that services give to fathers in the promotional materials they use (e.g. leaflets, posters, websites etc) have been exposed as perpetuating negative images and connotations in relation to the role of fathers. This has included the use of case studies or case examples in staff training exercises which, when used in these contexts, often “repeat the message that fathers are dispensable and mothers are to be regarded as the sole carers” (Clapton 2013). Interestingly the fathers involved in this research spoke of groups developing more through word of mouth than the use of any ‘communications’ systems.

All of the respondents in the practitioner survey agreed with the statement ‘engaging fathers should be an integral part of all services working with families’ and over 90% felt they were in a team which was ‘effectively engaging with fathers’. However only 24% agreed that ‘front line workers in all agencies work in way which ensures they effectively engage fathers’. This suggests that there is a general perception that front line practitioners across services are failing to effectively engage fathers but most will not recognise this failing in their own organisation. In addition to this, some comments (reduced and summarised below) articulate what could be seen as a lack of empathy specifically between social work services and fathers, resonating with findings from other research (Smith 2008; Smithers 2012):

“social services are not always there to help” SR71, “fathers are dismissed” SR48, “fathers feel isolated when children’s services are involved” SR7, “(the father) was unhappy with the service.....which led to a complaint process which further exasperated the relationship between father and the support service” SR57, “a cycle of authoritative service and ignorant or stubborn fathers spiral up and out of control.....services assess aggression in a father and intervene with aggression” SR73.

#### **The worker**

The fathers involved in the research spoke very positively of the family support services they were receiving and while they spoke of the practical support and advice provided

the consistent factor of importance throughout the interviews and groups was the personality and actions of the worker involved. Where fathers spoke positively about services it was about individual workers – the traits which appeared to be emphasised by them were motivation, commitment and perseverance:

“Some support you get imposed on you – this (X(Family Support Worker)) is wanted....other support networks don't feel genuine. (Support) needs to be genuine... a worker who has their heart in it not just for the money.” JF

“X (FSW) has got ma back ....he is willing to put belief in you – willing to listen. He will actively fight on your side (even when you're no up to it), Pulled me through the worst parts. He is someone you can trust” SF

“I haven't had much contact with family, Z (Family Worker) at the school has been a great help to me and my missus, she's been a big influence, my kids look up to her, she's like a family member, like a mother figure, my mum and dad died a couple of years ago, Z stepped in like a family member, close family – amazing can call her up for anything. She is always in touch, contact by phone, if we are not in at the morning school she will call up to make sure everything is alright, she will give you everything even money, she will make sure you're not doing without anything. Dependable – never lets you down – don't get support from family so I have had Z to fall back on.” MP

“Z is a loving parenting kind of person, not judgemental, understanding.... looks after everybody – she goes that extra mile” JP

To summarise findings from both the practitioner survey and the research with fathers it is clear that positively engaged fathers benefit from support from services where the individual worker:

- is motivated – ‘a worker who has their heart in it’ ‘wants to help’ ‘took us by the scruff of the neck’
- dependable and trustworthy – ‘never lets you down’ ‘has got ma back’ ‘He's been my rock’
- and perseveres – ‘willing to put belief in you’ ‘She is always in touch’ ‘Pulled me through the worst parts’

As well as employing individuals with these traits there are writers who emphasise the need for all organisations working with families to actively challenge the negative assumptions about fathers and the role they can play in the upbringing of children (Barnardos 2012; Clapton 2013; Action for Children 2009).

Fathers credited individual workers for having an impact on their role and described close relationships with these individual workers. The importance of relationship in social work is a central theme of writing on social work through the decades. The relationship is underpinned by principles of ‘acceptance’, ‘the non judgemental attitude’ and ‘self-determination’ (Biestek 1961). Howe (1998) considered that social work could not be practised without the skill to make and maintain relationships. More recently focussed

research has explored the worker-client dyad in child welfare (De Boer and Coady 2006) and the notion of friendship between worker and client in palliative care (Beresford et al 2008) - both commenting on the effective workers who 'go the extra mile' or 'beyond the call of duty'.

There were a long list of the little things that workers did but special mention was made to examples of practice which fathers viewed as workers 'going the extra mile' or 'doing stuff they didn't need to' – for one this included early morning phone calls to make sure they were up and coming in to group, for others it was 'dealing with housing' where they felt they were getting nowhere.

Another recurring theme from the fathers was the importance of significant moments – one father referred to the worker supporting him at court, for another it was the worker welcoming him back into the group when he had previously turned up under the influence of alcohol. One of the fathers described the worker giving him advice about his relationship with a teenage stepson – that for him appeared to be a pivotal moment, where respect and trust was earned.

### **The 'fathers worker'**

The practitioners mentioned in the quotes throughout this report are not specifically 'fathers workers' and the survey asked practitioners their views on this role. Among the respondents there appeared to be an overwhelming respect for what they do (80% agreeing that a fathers worker improves services' ability to engage with fathers) and of the current need for specific 'fathers workers' (74%). Four of the respondents were not supportive of the 'fathers worker' per se, one of them raising the concern that the existence of 'fathers workers' may suggest to others that engagement of fathers was someone else's task – concluding that 'all workers should be fathers workers'.

Those comments more supportive of the fathers worker role emphasised their importance in engaging and involving fathers. There was also an emphasis on the advocacy role and the support a specific worker can give to ensure fathers have their voice heard – the specific example of this was related to a father who was not living with his children and the significant part played by the father's worker in supporting the father in this circumstance, representing him only at meetings.

### **The role of groups**

Considering that the research involved speaking with fathers groups, there was some comment on the value of groups specifically for fathers:

"I've learned from... this group is that you are not alone – your no the only parent in the world that's got a child with problems – that's a big realisation and that helps you a lot" JP

"there is often things going on in (another father's) life which is going on in mine. I've made good friends but not necessarily friends I would see after school. Had opportunities to learn stuff – 'raising kids with confidence' (done it 3 times), parenting skills. If I have a problem I can speak to someone in the group and be able to go

home and sort it out – with a bit of advice from another dad even if they are not going through the same thing. Z introduces new people to the group and we have same faces - I always thought it was only mothers who came to school. It is a big part for your kids to see you in school” MP

“your no by yersel... other fathers in similar situation – can come here and talk about things with people in similar situations – good to get different views. It is rewarding to give a bit of advice. Z is a big help and dads are getting something out of it, that’s why they come back. It’s like a learning counselling group – we learn stuff, have a laugh and counsel each other – all schools should have one” JP

There were some less positive responses to this and those interviewed individually did not necessarily have experience of groups nor did they consider this to be something they would be interested in.

Groups were viewed very positively by the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee which received substantial evidence of their effective use. They made a couple of suggestions regarding the development of groups having concluded that “attending groups can be a great benefit to fathers, both in bonding with their children and in helping them to connect with other fathers” (Scottish Government 2014).

The fathers involved in the research spoke positively of the role of their peers, especially those engaged in groups, in advising and guiding each other. For some this was received from close friends but for others it was from group members they didn’t necessarily see socially. The creation of these mutually supportive and open relationships, individually or collectively, appeared to provide some nurture.



### 7. Conclusion

There is plenty of evidence that getting it right for children in vulnerable families is helped by having positively involved fathers, this will improve outcomes for families.

From this research we can summarise as follows: A positively involved father is likely to - have a positive perspective on the role of a father, a mutually respectful relationship with the mother of his children, spend 'quality time' with them, take an active role in his child's interests, and receive support from his extended family. Perhaps of more significance for those working with vulnerable families are the findings related to the services who work directly with vulnerable families.

In the interviews and group sessions with fathers the relationship with the individual practitioner was repeatedly identified as a significant factor in both engagement with support services and achieving change. They made particular reference to the qualities these individuals have; they are motivated, dependable and will persevere.

The recent research on the importance of 'identifying' with the father role, seeing this as 'who you are' suggests the need for workers who also believe in the importance of fathers. The fathers involved in the research spoke very highly of individual practitioners who had 'believed' in them. Where the father is not viewed positively in his fathering role by the mother, the worker can provide the reassurance and validation which enables and empowers the father. The effective worker will motivate fathers to see themselves positively in their parenting role, valued and valuable in the upbringing of their children.

The worker's efforts also need to be focussed in the right areas. When working with vulnerable families where fathers are not positively involved in the upbringing of their children, the focus of our efforts should be:

- To establish and maintain a positive relationship between parents;
- To promote the 'salience' and 'centrality' of the 'father' identity – this will involve helping fathers to make sense of his experiences, how this influences the way he acts now and the impact his actions have on his children;
- To encourage and support the development of shared interests increasing the opportunities for 'sole care' of the children.
- To provide individual and group opportunities for peer support

The importance of relationship between worker and client is the golden thread through social work practice – this is reiterated in our research. The relationship between the father and the practitioner is key, the worker and the father should have a shared belief in the value and importance of the father. Without exception the fathers in this research described a close relationship with an individual worker. Through discussion it was apparent that these relationships were sealed in significant moments and included a perception, on the part of the fathers, that the practitioner was willing to go the extra mile when necessary.



The findings from this study suggest that services working with vulnerable families need to consider the following questions:

Is your service effectively engaging fathers?

Contradictory responses in the practitioner survey may suggest the need for some independent scrutiny or at least an attempt to 'father-proof' (Clapton 2013) the promotion and provision of services.

Do your practitioners have an up to date knowledge of the importance of fathers in the lives of children?

Subsequent to completion of the research and following further discussion with practitioners who have successfully engaged fathers, I would hypothesise that the motivation on the part of the practitioner is fundamentally based on a personal and positive philosophy of fatherhood – a coherent understanding of the positive role that fathers can have – that they are a valuable asset to their children and their families. They are not 'optional extras' or 'not worth the effort'.

Do you recruit, develop and support workers who are motivated, dependable and resilient – willing to go the extra mile and prepared to form enduring relationships?

This is most important as it is evident that front line staff can provide an alternative source of reassurance and validation which enables and empowers fathers in their upbringing role.

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## Appendix A

### Research with Fathers

#### Interviews and Groups – Summary of Findings

This involved 9 individual interviews and three group sessions involving a total of 20 fathers, all currently receiving support from three services working with vulnerable families. The fathers involved were asked a number of questions focussed on their positive involvement in the upbringing of children.

#### Interview Questions (also used as prompts in groups)

- I. Please think of people who have had a positive influence in your life – what words would you use to describe them?
- II. How did they show you they were\_\_\_\_\_?
- III. What do you think a father needs to do to be called ‘positively involved’ in the upbringing of his children?
- IV. How would other people know you were positively involved in bringing up your children?
- V. What is it about the people supporting you and your family which helps you?
- VI. What is it about your family which helps you?
- VII. What is it about you which makes you positively involved in the upbringing of your children?
- VIII. Where fathers are not positively involved what do you think are the reasons for this?

Interviews and group sessions were recorded and then partially transcribed. These were then studied and identified three main themes – action, support and influence.

#### **1. Action – Fathers describing what it is they do to show they are positively involved in the upbringing of their children.**

##### ***Establish and be involved in day to day routines and setting boundaries***

“They (children) need to have a.....structured routine – the kids need to have their school time. I need to be there every day, at feeding times and sleeping times. I make sure that S is at her dancing, C goes to his clubs, they are always at school, they are clean....any contact arranged they have done it....they have diaries of the things they have done” GH

“do their homework with them – routines, taking them for a bath, making their tea and stuff like that – sit and talk to them – dinnae just say tae them there’s your tea and sit and watch TV” MP

“Be there and do everything, make up bottles....up every morning to get them to school, come back down to nursery, housework and ready for getting kids back, meet with the teachers, find out how they are getting on” SL

“I try to be both (mother and father figure) - the father figure is the hard and the strict one” JP

“Discipline is a massive thing – it’s got to be a softly softly discipline thing – I cannae go into raising my voice and shouting at them cause that’s when they go into themselves and disappear but when I sit them down and say listen I’m going to explain things and what you can do and that’s when I realised that raising my voice wasn’t the right thing to do – having

to hand back I've had to learn to do that – needing to listen to them and their views and react positively and leave the negatives. I need to explain that any discipline I am doing is for a reason. I never raise my voice and say I'm going to leather them I never raise my hands but they know when they are here that there are rules and boundaries” GH

### ***Providing a loving and stable environment and spending 'quality' time with children***

“I would hope people would see that I have them in a stable environment and people can see the positives from the children.” GH

“I.....have a little extra bond than my father had with me – when I was really young and I hurt myself I would go to either my mum or my dad but as I got older if I needed to go to one it was always my mum - but I want my kids to come to me, to either of us” JP

“to be a better parent is to be there more, it needs to be quality time, parents can be wrapped up in their work – they are providing but they are not spending quality time with them” SF

“spending quality time – I've heard other folk who say they've spent time with their kids and you say what were you doing and they are watching the telly while the kids are playing a game – that's just being in the same room – it is about quality time and building a loving bond” JP

“just sitting with them, comfortable in the surroundings, whereas you can be wrapped up in the housework, it's got to be quality time, not quantity” JF

“spending quality time, patience, listening to them, being there for them” GF

“dad's need to show love and affection” JP

“I am an emotional person, I've been through a lot in my life, and I would like to think my kids would come to me rather than my wife. I used to think that now they are older they don't need me much but they do. I have a 17 year old and I didn't used to reach out to him but I realise that they all need a bit of love and attention...he's my step-laddie but he's still my son.” MP

### ***Being involved and interested in children's activities***

“they still want to do things even when they get older, I've got a big back green and I'm always out there with them – we are digging up, planting flowers, we're doing watering flowers every day. A big part of it (being a father) is me being there – I'm unemployed, I'm constantly there, constantly being told that I'm a good father – if I was working I think I would still want to be there – we are rarely in the house I think being there for them not matter what they want to do, embarrassing or no” MP

“Sociable things as well getting them to the park for a couple of hours every week, taking them swimming” GH

“take them to the park, be interested in what they are doing, whatever it is – playing a game, reading a book, watching TV – it's like what we are doing with Z (Family Worker) at the moment 'raising confidence in parents' you have to be interested in what they are doing, even if it is embarrassing just spending time with them doing what they want to do.” JP

“Going out to park, pictures, football to different ages – with A and M.....now draw with her and play with them” PL

“Show an interest in what they are doing” PL

“Take an interest in their activities” OP

“Taking them to the football and stuff like that.” JS

“doing things with them you remember that time you had with your gran doing stuff it’s all memories – adventure walks and stuff like that, you can’t buy that – being able to talk with them” JF

“You will see me taking them out, playing with my kids” ED

### **2. Support – Fathers outlined the things which help them be positively involved**

#### ***The relationship you have with the mother of your children***

“It can be murder sometimes.....she wasn’t opening up and neither was I how I felt, bottling up and then like fireworks going off, learned to communicate, started off with a trigger word if we were getting too stressed (coffee), if you’ve not got a good relationship with your partner it is not a good environment for the children, my grandparents used to fall out...didn’t want that for my children” SF

“if I’m on a downer then she brings me out of it ‘you can’t be like this in front of the kids’ and if she is unhappy I will get her out of it.....no matter what happens between me and their mum they still want us to be together. You have to be positive in front of the kids – it’s no your kids fault” MP

“D (mother) picks me up when I am down” PL

“when you’re having a bad day, it rubs off on everybody – I know when I am feeling depressed or angry then I am better taking five minutes away than sitting their boiling in front of the kids it can ruin the day– I have had my son say to me ‘It’s scary when you shout daddy’ and that hurts. When we do argue it is normally about one of the kids. I know couples who hate each other’s guts but are great in front of the kids but I know others who aren’t and it’s not great – it’s confusing for the kids.” JP

“(being a dad) can be stressed out with 4 weans so need time out, she lets me out and I let her get out to see pals” SL

“I would put it (relationship with mother) at the back of my mind to see the kids – if we broke up there would be nothing that would stop us from seeing them. I wouldnae burden her with me no turning up.” JP

“the relationship doesn’t affect how able you are to be a dad, it does affect the children, the way I see it if we split up then I still want to be there with the weans and be part of the family.” SF

“I think it does affect the children more than the parents and they pick up on the vibe – don’t shout in front of the kids – that’s the stuff they are going to remember” JF

“relationship with other parent is key, get on better now we live apart, more respect for each other” ED

### ***The support you get from extended ‘family’***

“I get support from my girlfriend and her family” OP

“I have family and friends I will speak to them about different things – good listeners.” MP

“ (my sister) provides emotional support when I need and financial sometimes.....she cares a lot about my kids, she looks after my kids and her kids mix with mine. My mum also massively helps preparing for social work meetings; it is always handy to have someone else there. She chums me to meetings to help me rationalise why the SW are doing what they are doing – that is a massive help for me emotionally. I would have had an emotional breakdown by now if I didn’t have my mum and sister helping me out.” GH

“I have good neighbours who the kids can go for and I give them the right to speak to my kids (tell them to stop doing things) I trust her to take them in to her house – like a family member.” MP

“(extended family provide) recognition of what I’m doing, to know that they are there for you no matter what happens, they are going to back you up – they will say ‘you’re wrong but I’m still going to support you” JF

“My step father came into my life and showed me how to be a dad showed me how to treat the weans – he does everything with my wee lassie, takes her to places, to the shops – I couldn’t say anything bad about him, he showed me the right way to be a dad – showed me to sit down and play with my daughter” GF

### ***The role that can be played by support services***

“My mum supported me but feel I can speak more with X (Family Support Worker)” JF

“X (FSW) has got ma back ....he is willing to put belief in you – willing to listen. He will actively fight on your side (even when you’re no up to it), Pulled me through the worst parts. He is someone you can trust” SF

“I don’t really trust a lot of people – X (FSW) is totally there for me. Where I am today to where I was a year ago is testament to him. Prior to working with X I was not getting to see my daughter purely because of my relationship with social work” GF

“I find it hard to take on support from outside – I’ve just got a new drugs worker and she’s sound but I can’t work with her. You know it’s there but you find it hard to ask for it. Some support you get imposed on you – this (X(FSW)) is wanted....other support networks don’t feel genuine. (Support) needs to be genuine... a worker who has their heart in it not just for the money.” JF

“I didn’t know what support was – X (FSW) is just a normal guy who just wants to help people” GF

“He’s been my rock – I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for him – they were going to throw the key away – everyone gave up on me – my family, I was homeless – I had absolutely nothing



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and he was the only \*\*\*\* who came to court. I just needed someone to take a bit of an interest.” SF

“I haven’t had much contact with family, Z (Family Worker) at the school has been a great help to me and my missus, she’s been a big influence, my kids look up to her, she’s like a family member, like a mother figure, my mum and dad died a couple of years ago, Z stepped in like a family member, close family – amazing can call her up for anything. She is always in touch, contact by phone, if we are not in at the morning school she will call up to make sure everything is alright, she will give you everything even money, she will make sure you’re not doing without anything. Dependable – never lets you down – don’t get support from family so I have had Z to fall back on.” MP

“Z (Family Worker) is a loving parenting kind of person, not judgemental, understanding... looks after everybody – she goes that extra mile” JP

“Y (FSW) helps me to get funds to do things around the house. Y has had a massive impact on the smooth running of the house has dealt with council in relation to housing issues – no central heating for years, hitting brick walls, inspectors out but nothing happened - Y called council and they contacted me to sort things out. Y also helped with financial issues where I wasn’t getting child benefit and not surviving just on benefits – Y helped me by speaking to DWP and Inland Revenue on my behalf.” GH

“He (FSW) is like a safety net when I’m not sure about what is happening with the bureaucracies I have to deal with. Advice when I need it” GH

“Helped a lot with DSS, helped me to get into a mainstream school, couldnae be any better, took us by the scruff of the neck, determined, sorted out appointments with specialists” JS

“X(FSW) – help with housing (problems with heating), every two weeks need to chase them up, gives us help if we need it, first time I met him I could tell he was alright good vibe of him, knew it would be alright” SL

“Can talk to her (FSW) about anything, nice woman; allow me to support myself more an ‘ear’ someone to talk to.” PL

### *Support groups*

“I had a lot of problems with my oldest child, he’s very anxious and we had to go to CAMHS and one of the main things I’ve learned from that experience and this group is that you are not alone – your no the only parent in the world that’s got a child with problems – that’s a big realisation and that helps you a lot” JP

“Here to get someone to talk to” YD

“I am someone they can come to, opportunity to meet other dads” HD

“you’re no by yersel... other fathers in similar situation – can come here and talk about things with people in similar situations – good to get different views. It is rewarding to give a bit of advice. Z (Family Worker) is a big help and dads are getting something out of it, that’s why they come back. It’s like a learning counselling group – we learn stuff, have a laugh and counsel each other – all schools should have one” JP



“there is often things going on in (another father’s) life which is going on in mine. I’ve made good friends but not necessarily friends I would see after school. Had opportunities to learn stuff – ‘raising kids with confidence’ (done it 3 times), parenting skills. If I have a problem I can speak to someone in the group and be able to go home and sort it out – with a bit of advice from another dad even if they are not going through the same thing. Z (Family Worker) introduces new people to the group and we have same faces - I always thought it was only mothers who came to school. It is a big part for your kids to see you in school” MP

“Some fathers don’t know the rules, benefit from the experience of others, never had nothing when younger had to learn for myself, my dad was always there for me, we know how to support each other, if I need the help I know it is there” HD

“Z (family worker) sees the good in you” (JP to MP)

“Made me feel a better person – everyone listens” GF

### **3. Influence – fathers spoke of other factors which effect how they are as parents**

#### ***Own upbringing***

“My mum brought me up - erratic contact with my father which makes me so certain about getting the children stable – I do want them to see their mum, I do want them to know when they are seeing their mum and I sometimes think I over compensate because I remember what it was like for me and I don’t want that for my kids. I don’t know if it was due to my dad not being there or my mum being determined to work twice as hard.” GH

“My dad was quite positive when I was younger and my gran. (Dad) was influential when I was younger, taught me a lot about discipline / self-discipline, I was a daddy’s boy – back in the eighties it was different then. My Gran was a brilliant woman..... (she was) wise, listened to you” PL

“Look back at the childhood I had, mother was an alcoholic, I was thrown out, slept in a cardboard box, wouldnae want that for any wean. Father on the rigs four weeks on and off, I used carry on when he was away. Granny was my mum, used to call her mammy sometimes. When my mum died my cousin L stepped in. Since my gran died it is my weans that keep me going” PL

“My father was a boxer and I never really knew him – he wasn’t around – he was always a grafter – I wouldnae want to be like ma dad - my old man was only ever in the house when he was on the drink and wasnae working” BD

“My dad used to hit me all the time and get me in trouble all the time so I used to go out and cause trouble to get that wee bit of kick, take drugs and that – I didnae want to be like that so that was my main focus” OP

“I stayed at home with my mum and dad and eight other kids so there was no attention there, I used to get into a lot of bother – father was only involved in parenting me when I was at primary school – I was glad my old man was never in the house” AP

“My grandfather used to build up his feelings and then blow up and we all had to leave, I used to do what my grandfather did...drinking after work. I didn’t have a dad, the two of us

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have worked together to make sure we don't do what our parents did to us – M's (SL's partner) parents left her on holiday and she was doing the same things as her mother at the start of our relationship" SL

"There's not a lot to tell as I don't have any experience of a father cause I was brought up in care" JS

"my dad was there for me when I had any problems, gave me what I wanted" ED

"I think my father chose not to take part (in upbringing) for an easier life – I just had to accept that he was never going to be there – then I had my step dad and then knew what a dad was" GF

"my dad didn't get attention of his dad then why should he give me attention, need to teach yourself new tricks, set yourself targets to be a better parent" JF

" my Gran was hard working, straight to the point, she got what she wanted, mother worked all the time, grandmother looked after us, you can blame situations but you still make your own choices" SF

"my dad wasnae there for me – my dad left when I was six and I never saw him" JF

"I would say that my mum and dad were there for me and did the right thing for me but they split up, my dad had a drug habit and my mother had to work all the time and I started to spend all the day at home rather than at school then my sister copied me and my mother couldn't do anything about it because she was at work – my parents were responsible people and they are now better parents to my child than they were to me and I don't know what this is about" JF

"Large extended family get togethers don't happen anymore and I miss that – we do it now on a smaller scale – family sense of thing is no around anymore" MP

### ***Personality traits, temperament and attitude to parenting***

"You have to be positive in front of the kids – it's no your kids fault" MP

"if you are angry all the time it doesn't help – if you have depression, when you're having a bad day, it rubs off on everybody – I know when I am feeling depressed or angry then I am better taking five minutes away than sitting their boiling in front of the kids it can ruin the day– I have had my son say to me 'It's scary when you shout daddy' and that hurts." JP

"I know what type of parent I want to be and what I want to do with the weans – different to what my missus wants to do, I wouldn't say she was right or wrong but you just have to do things the way you want to the best of your abilities" SF

"I'm always there for them, trying to make up for lost time, I've got a lot to make up for," JF

"You learn through your trials and tribulations – I might not be the best dad in the planet but I'm getting there – learning along the road" SF

"I think when you become an adult you start to get your own morals and beliefs – so if you've no got your own fuckin self morals to want to be there for your weans....." SF

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“there’s no social worker that’s going to stop you having contact if you really want it – I really don’t think there is an excuse if you want to be part of the weans life” JF

“you need a sense of humour, patience” GF

“you don’t have to have a certain personality – just have to be there for them.... Situations can change your personality – things can change in your life which make you want to be more involved” JF

“I was never angry towards my children but I am angry towards workers – I’ve had to change this – it’s natural to be angry, it’s what you do when you’re angry” JF

“Brought myself up, trying to avoid them doing the same as I did – strive to do the best - Learned to be a father just by doing it” JS

“I just do the father thing the way as I see it should be I don’t know if I am doing the right thing” JS

“I am quite laid back (you need to be)” SL

“I wouldn’t like them (children) to say I didn’t do that much - that would kill me.” SL

“I have to say that I am sick of it sometimes when I am there 24/7 and never get a break – but I love it also and wouldn’t want to be anywhere else” OD

“I find it hard to take on support from outside” JF

“It is the most rewarding and the most difficult job” JP

## Appendix B

### Practitioner Survey – Summary of findings

#### Scope

This survey was completed by 74 practitioners working across Scotland but due to the source was dominated by practitioners working in areas where Circle have front line services. These 74 practitioners reported working with 872 families but there may be some duplication of families due to the sharing of the survey across teams in the same area. Nevertheless this survey represents a significant attempt to gather the perceptions of front line staff working with vulnerable families. The respondents included family support workers, social workers, midwives, RCC staff, education staff and a number of senior practitioners and managers. Due to the source there is of course a large group of Circle staff in the survey but this still amounts to less than 50% of the survey.

The survey was circulated through Circle networks to other voluntary agencies, local authorities and health practices.

The survey consisted of 10 questions listed below, some with pre-populated lists of answers and multiple choice responses. There was an opportunity to comment at the end of each question and in an open question towards the end of the survey. The pre-populated lists were drawn from relevant research and writings on father involvement but all included the 'other' option.

The survey was posted on 'Survey Monkey' on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014 and was closed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2014.

#### The Survey Questions

1. What is your role/job title?
2. No. of families you are currently working with?
3. No. of fathers in these families you would describe as 'positively involved' in the upbringing of their children?
4. Thinking of one or more of these fathers – select the words which best describe the relationship they have with their children? (Sensitive, Warm, Close, Friendly, Authoritative, Supportive, Nurturing, Affectionate, Intimate, Comforting, Accepting, Attentive, Facilitative, Accessible)
5. Thinking of your experience in working with families, how significant are the following factors in the positive involvement of fathers? ((Rank in order of importance) Frequency of contact, Total time spent with children, Participation in routines, Ability to be authoritative, Takes responsibility for limit setting, Support for school related activities, Shared activities and interests, The quality of the children's other relationships, Access to resources, Relationship between the father and mother, Employment status.)
6. Thinking of the families you work with, please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements? ((Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree/Don't Know) Fathers find it easy to access support from children and families service, Engaging fathers should be an integral part of all services working with vulnerable families, The team I work in effectively engage fathers, A 'fathers worker' improves services ability to engage with fathers, Front line workers work in a way which

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ensures they effectively engage fathers, Fathers need to be living with their children to be positively involved, There is no need for specific 'fathers workers')

7. The fathers I work with who are positively involved in the upbringing of their children have? ((Always/Often/Sometimes/Never/Don't Know) A good relationship with the children's mother, a strong network of support, children living with them, a positive experience of 'support' services, no financial worries, adequate housing, a positive experience of being parented.)
8. Other comments on the positive involvement of fathers in the upbringing of their children?
9. Where you have supported families and the fathers are not positively involved in the upbringing of the children, what do you think are the main reasons? (Attitude of father, motivation of father, temperament of father, other personal issues, Relationship with children, relationship with mother of children, relationship with other family, other relationship issues, availability of support, accessibility of support, engagement with support, other support issues, physical health, mental health, other health issues, employment, drug/alcohol issues, offending behaviour, other lifestyle issues, financial issues, accommodation/housing, other reasons.)
10. I would like to know more about this research? (Yes/No)

### Data from the survey

45% of the families the practitioners were working with had fathers who were reported as being positively involved.

Where fathers are positively involved in the upbringing of their children, the relationships are mostly described as **close** and **supportive (over 50% of those surveyed chose these words)**. Other popular words were 'warm, friendly and nurturing (**all used by over 40%**). The respondents were asked to select from a list from which they were least likely to use **intimate** (9 respondents) as the descriptor and only 26 of the 74 respondents felt that **authoritative** best described the relationship.

All of the questions bar one asked respondents to think about fathers they would describe as positively involved and Q5 asked them to rate affecting factors in order of importance. The three stand out factors were:

- Frequency of contact
- Total time spent with children and;
- Participation in routines (bathing, mealtimes etc.)

All of these factors were rated in the top five by over 80% of respondents. Respondents were not required to rate all of the factors but there were two which over 90% of respondents included on their list:

- Relationship between the father and mother (68% of respondents had this in their top 5)
- Employment status (although only 12% actually had this in their 'top five')

In this question respondents were able to add other factors and those who did added 'lack of a role model' and 'the personal choices of the father'.

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The latter of these resonates with responses to Q9 (the only question asking about the reasons fathers were not positively involved). In that question 73% and 71% of respondents felt that the **attitude** and **motivation** of fathers respectively were main reasons for lack of positive involvement.

In Q5 the availability of 'classes for dads' was also added as a significant factor by one of the respondents and this in turn resonated with some of the collated responses to Q6. All of the respondents to Q6 (100%) agreed with the statement 'engaging fathers should be an integral part of all services working with families' and over 90% felt they were in a team which was 'effectively engaging with fathers'. However only 24% agreed that 'front line workers in all agencies work in way which ensures they effectively engage fathers'.

Those surveyed were asked about their views on the 'fathers worker' roles and there appeared to be an overwhelming respect for what they do (80% agreeing that a fathers worker improves services' ability to engage with fathers) and of the current need for specific 'fathers workers' (74%).

The strongest disagreement for any statement was in response to 'fathers need to be living with their children to be positively involved' – 90% disagreeing (5 respondents strongly agreed).

Comments to this question were thoughtful and evidenced further insight into the issues involved in engaging fathers. One respondent emphasised that they felt that fathers were not any more difficult than mothers to engage and noted their own experience that fathers were often more reasonable and willing to accept the need to change. Four of the respondents were not supportive of the 'fathers worker' per se, one of them raising the concern that the existence of 'fathers workers' may suggest to others that engagement of fathers was someone else's task – concluding that 'all workers should be fathers workers'.

Those comments more supportive of the fathers worker role emphasised their importance in engaging and involving fathers. There was also an emphasis on the advocacy role and the support a specific worker can give to ensure fathers have their voice heard – the specific example of this was related to a father who was not living with his children and the significant part played by the father's worker in supporting the father in this circumstance.

There was only one completely open question in the survey which asked those responding if there was anything else they would like to say about the positive involvement of fathers in the upbringing of children. Only four of those completing the survey made any response to this question. One respondent felt that more directed support was required for fathers commenting that "everything was aimed at and geared towards mothers". One detailed response was concerned that social services did not effectively comprehend a father's ability or capacity to engage in a child's life at different stages. The fullest response to this question articulated the personal and social barriers to individual father involvement, pre-empting Q9 which asked respondents to comment on the reasons fathers weren't positively involved.

There was a shared view among most of the practitioners completing the survey that the relationship between the father and the mother of the children is one of the main reasons for fathers not being positively involved in the upbringing of children. However, those reasons which could be categorised as 'personal issues' of fathers (including motivation and attitude) were most consistently identified by respondents. There was a significant response to

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alcohol and drug use and offending but, while this will probably resonate with front line practitioners, this must be viewed in the context of a survey circulated around some projects delivered to families where these issues are key referral criteria. The top ten reasons for non-involvement (with % of respondents) were as follows:

1. Relationship with mother of children (91%)
2. Drug/alcohol issues (82%)
3. Attitude of father (73%)
4. Motivation of father (71%)
5. Offending behaviour (70%)
6. Mental health (66%)
7. Engagement with support services (59%)
8. Temperament of father (55%)
9. Relationship with extended family (50%)
10. Accommodation/housing (36%)

This question, focussed on non-involved fathers, was the one which received the most comments from respondents. The comments are dominated by reference to the impact of drug and alcohol use on the role of fathers. As stated above this must be viewed in the context of the survey circulation but it reiterated the links between drug and alcohol misuse, parental relationships and quality contact with children.

Other contributions included comments on housing and a specific concern for the housing circumstances of fathers living without their children – one noting that the size and location of housing impacted on contact with children and the social pressures on fathers.

Further comments also related to the fathers experience of support services, including the following comments:

“social services are not always there to help”, “fathers are dismissed”, “fathers feel isolated when children’s services are involved”, “(the father) was unhappy with the service.....which led to a complaint process which further exasperated the relationship between father and the support service”, “a cycle of authoritative service and ignorant or stubborn fathers spiral up and out of control”, “services assess aggression in a father and intervene with aggression”.