

# Regional Resource Centre for Fatherhood

Crossgate Centre, Alexandra Crescent, Durham City. DH1 4HF  
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This document has been prepared in response to the draft Children and Young People's Plan for the County of Durham.

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### The Importance of Fathers and Male Carers

Including fathers and male carers in the provision of services to parents and families has been shown to have a significant positive impact on outcomes for children and young people across educational attainment, anti-social behaviour, mental and physical health. (see attached – Children’s Centre Guidance s.11 DfES 2005).

We propose that the Children and Young People’s Plan should address the following questions:

- *How are we utilising the fatherhood resource in Durham to ensure that children grow up healthy?*
- *How are we utilising the fatherhood resource in Durham to ensure that children grow up safe?*
- *How are we utilising the fatherhood resource in Durham to ensure that children enjoy and achieve?*
- *How are we utilising the fatherhood resource in Durham to ensure that children make a positive contribution?*
- *How are we utilising the fatherhood resource in Durham to ensure that children achieve economic well being?*

### Children North East

Children North East has been working since 1891 to improve the lives of children and young people. In 1997 the organisation began work with maternity services, education services, early years and other agencies to facilitate the inclusion of fathers and male carers in decisions which affect their children.

The Regional Resource Centre for Fatherhood is funded by the DfES and is the first and only centre of its kind in the UK. It has a role in drawing together and disseminating the experience gained from the development of work to include fathers and male carers across a range of settings throughout the country. Through its Father Work Forum the Resource Centre supports the work of over 200 practitioners in the North East working mainly in early years, maternity, education, teenage pregnancy and other health settings.

### Work in Durham to Date

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In recent years service providers in Durham have successfully initiated a number of programmes across early years, education and health aimed at engaging and working with fathers and male carers. This work is still in its early stages (at present there is exclusion of fathers and male carers in Durham from the provision of parental support in early years, from teenage pregnancy support and are less likely to be involved in their child's education than mothers and female carers).

The relative ease with which fathers and male carers can access services varies greatly from locality to locality. Engaging fathers and male carers in agency settings represents a challenge to service providers as well as a challenge to prevailing cultural norms in many of their communities.

### **Including Fathers and Male Carers in Future Provision of Services in Durham.**

In planning for the commission and delivery of services for children, young people and their families it is essential that fathers and male carers are included at every level of the process in achieving positive outcomes for their children.

Experience has demonstrated that unless agencies providing services to parents have a clear policy on father/male carer inclusion and unless there is ongoing monitoring and assessment of the way that policy is put into practice and the effect that this has on the community then the dominant tendency of many agencies to exclude fathers and male carers will prevail and the positive work that has been undertaken to date in Durham will be lost.

Enabling inclusion is dependant on a whole team whole system approach to change. Organisational planning and policy documents must recognise the need to challenge the exclusion of fathers and male carers from service provision. There is a need to challenge discriminatory attitudes held throughout service provider organisations and communities. Staff should receive specific training on the subject of fathers and male carers and ongoing assessment and monitoring should be employed to track accessibility of services to fathers and male carers.

## **The Durham Children and Young People's Plan**

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The Children and Young People's plan for the County should value the parenting resource available in the County's fathers and male carers. It should recognise that this resource is currently underutilised and that many fathers and male carers are currently excluded from services provided to children, young people and their families.

The plan should include measures to address the discrimination in communities and in organisations which deprives many children and young people of the benefit of engaged and involved fathers and male carers.

Raising the participation of fathers and male carers will lead to greater engagement and in turn to higher aspirations for children and young people. Participation will enable service providers to respond to the needs of the community.

Experience shows us that often where agencies describe their services as available to 'parents,' fathers and male carers are in fact excluded. Good practice in challenging this discrimination is to use the term 'mothers, fathers and carers' wherever possible. This clarity should begin with the Children and Young People's Plan and we propose that the above terminology be used throughout.

There are a range of assessment tools, training programmes, networks, events and resources available for staff and service users to support the development of work with fathers and male carers.

*A senior manager in the County should be nominated as lead worker for male inclusion with responsibility for overseeing men friendly policies and services are delivered across the County.*

The Male Inclusion Officer would ensure the provision of services in the County are assessed and monitored for male inclusion and would identify need and commission 'men friendly' training for managers and practitioners.

The role would include liaison with male inclusion officers in other authorities, support for male work practitioner networks and liaison with other agencies in the statutory and voluntary sector whose activities impact on the level of male involvement in the lives of their children.

The Male Inclusion Officer would ensure local support for regional and national events such as North East Fatherhood Week, which promote the importance to children and young people of engaged fathers and create opportunities for service provider agencies to engage with fathers and male carers in their localities.

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Father-child relationships have been found to be particularly vulnerable in families with disabled children, in families where young people themselves become fathers and with black and minority ethnic families. The Male Inclusion Officer should ensure that agencies offering support to these vulnerable families include men in the services they provide.

The Male Inclusion officer would also liaise with EYDCP, employers, training organisations and other agencies to address the gender imbalance in the childcare workforce.

A major barrier to fathers being more engaged with their children is the hours that many men are forced to work. As a major employer and purchaser of services in the County the authority is in a strong position to influence the development of family friendly working practices. As a provider of services the authority should ensure that services are provided in ways and at times that are accessible to all the family.

**David Van der Velde.**  
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