

Policy Briefing: Scotland's National Parenting Strategy and Fathers

Briefing Paper: How the National Parenting Strategy is shaping up for Fathers

Background

The National Parenting Strategy¹ was formally launched in October 2012, 'as a vehicle for valuing, equipping and supporting parents to be the best that they can be so that they, in turn, can give the children and young people of Scotland the best start in life'.

Its focus has been to build upon and strengthen existing support for parents, and to work with public and third sector providers to improve access to support for the wide range of parents and carers.

The strategy was shaped through consultation with over 1,500 parents and practitioners from across Scotland, including many fathers and fathers support workers. Views and experiences shared during the consultation were published in an accessible report,² which was shared with contributors in September 2012, prior to the release of the Strategy.

In May 2012, Children in Scotland produced a briefing on mechanisms by which the National Parenting Strategy could improve support for fathers.³ This second briefing on fathers and the National Parenting Strategy will summarise the key commitments relating to fathers contained in the published Strategy.

Overview

Children in Scotland commends the Scottish Government for the manner in which the views of fathers and their representatives have been included in the development of the strategy so far, and welcomes the commitments that have been made.

The key, overriding commitments are:

- To improving the engagement of fathers, including those who live apart from their children, in policies and services
- To take steps to increase the number of men in the children and families workforce.

Fathers and the strategy

The fathers-specific section of the Strategy is contained within a broader section on 'Additional Challenges'.

While at one level, it is regrettable that supporting a swathe of parents as significant as fathers is considered an 'additional challenge', Children in Scotland recognises that this reflects aspects of the current parenting support environment, which has a long history of focusing on mothers as primary carers.

We hope that as the National Parenting Strategy is implemented, support for fathers will be increasingly mainstreamed within family and parenting services, rather than being treated as an add-on to core services.

In addition to listing projects relating to fathers and/or men in caring roles that the Scottish Government is already funding, the fathers section of the strategy outlines the following important policy developments:

- The establishment of a Fathers roundtable meeting twice a year to feed into and advise on national policy
- The establishment of an NHS Health Scotland Fathers Forum whose role will be to share practice and to help make NHS policies and services more father-friendly.

Broader commitments in the Strategy that are inclusive of fathers

In addition to the projects and work outlined in the fathers section, the main body of the Strategy contains a large number of commitments.

Outlined below, are the specific commitments which are likely to impact most directly on fathers as a broad group:

- By April 2013, 24-30 month review by Health Visitors including parenting capacity, family relationships and actively promoting fathers' role in child health and development

- PlayTalkRead campaign 2012-15 is to include a new focus on fathers and male carers, including non-resident fathers

Further commitments that are targeted, inclusively of fathers, at specific, vulnerable, groups, including: young parents and their children; families with a parent in prison; and families with a history of domestic abuse, are:

- Family Nurse Partnership programme extension (to 5 NHS Boards by the end of 2013, with a view to rolling out nationally) to include reaching 'many of the dads' as well as teenage mums. Reporting on the programme documents very little engagement of this programme with fathers so far.
- Prisons: parenting issues are to be included in the Prison Visitors survey (winter 2012) for the first time. The Scottish Prison Service is to develop minimum standards of family support and to explore the feasibility of family-friendly visitor centres.
- The Caring Dads Parenting Programme – the Scottish government is funding a 17 week group work programme that aims to help fathers improve their relationship with their children and end 'controlling, abusive and neglectful' behaviours. This follows on directly from men's involvement with the Caledonian System programme.

These specific commitments provide benchmarks against which we will be able to monitor progress, both in relation to meeting the commitments themselves, and also as indicators of broader progress in the provision of support to fathers.

Monitoring progress

An important aspect of implementing the parenting strategy at national level will be the development, by a parenting data working

group, of a framework of outcomes and indicators on parenting, as a tool with which to measure progress. The framework will build upon existing tools and data sets. However, the working group will also consider the need for new indicators that can be used at national and local level to capture factors such as parental confidence and wellbeing, and to develop indicators that are explicitly inclusive of fathers.

Children in Scotland's perspective

At Children in Scotland, we believe that capturing information about fathers as well as mothers and other carers, and embedding this data in formal evaluation processes, will be key to realising the potential of the national parenting strategy. We look forward to continuing our work with the Scottish Government and a range of partners on the strategy as it develops.

Further information is available from the project website <http://makinggenderequalityreal.org.uk/>

To find out more about our gender equality and fathers work and/or share your views and experiences, please contact Sara Collier scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk, tel 0131 222 2412.

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References and Links

(1) National Parenting Strategy
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00403769.pdf>

(2) 'Bringing Up Children: Your Views'
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00401057.pdf>

(3) Members' Briefing: Scotland's National Parenting Strategy and Fathers
<http://makinggenderequalityreal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/nationalparentingstrategyfathers.pdf>