

Media Release

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Father's Day is on its way Time fathers got a look-in

Family services need to engage proactively with fathers to give them the right support to fulfil their potential as parents – especially in circumstances where support can make the difference between a father being there for their child or giving up as a parent.

As more men take on childcare roles and families become more diverse, with stepfathers, foster fathers and grandfathers as well as biological fathers playing an important role, the presumption that the mother is main carer is increasingly outdated. But many fathers still feel excluded by children's services that remain tailored to the needs of mothers, say Children in Scotland.

The findings come from *Making the Gender Equality Duty real for children, young people and their fathers*, a 3-year project run by Children in Scotland for the Scottish Government.

Fathers can feel excluded by the language services use – with even neutral terms such as 'parent' or 'carer' often being more closely associated with the mother – and by mainly female groups for antenatal and postnatal support, while family services are still mainly staffed by women. Working fathers can find it difficult to attend daytime courses and groups.

Services tailored to fathers' needs are generally precariously funded and under threat, and highly localised across Scotland.

Katrina Allen, policy officer for Children in Scotland, said:

"Individual fathers are often highly motivated to overcome their own difficulties and put their children's needs and interests first because, more than anything, they want to be good parents. If we're serious about gender equality and putting the interests of children first, it's time to focus on positive fathering as well as mothering experiences and invest in the projects behind them."

David Drysdale, chair of Fathers Network Scotland, said:

"In our experience, when fathers are included, engaged and supported by family services, they become more confident and as a result more likely to stay active in their children's lives. We're seeing significant benefits of engaging fathers in this way – not just for their children but for their partners, their families and their communities."

Notes to Editors

1. *Making the Gender Equality Duty real for children, young people and their fathers* is a 3-year project funded by the Scottish Government's Equality Unit. The project began in 2008 and will complete in 2011. Thirty local authorities and nine NHS boards across Scotland took part in the research.
2. The public sector Gender Equality Duty came into force in 2007.
3. Up to 17,000 lone parent families in Scotland are headed by a father (based on figures from the General Register Office/Office of National Statistics).
4. **Fathers Network Scotland** promotes positive engagement with fathers by raising awareness of the importance of fathers in child development and parenting – and by supporting professionals and agencies in their work with men in all aspects of their role as fathers.
5. **Children in Scotland** is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children's sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit www.childreninScotland.org.uk.

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