

# Making Gender Equality Real for Children, Fathers and Families

## 2011-12 activities

We are very pleased to have received continuation funding for this project from the Scottish Government's Equality Unit for 2011-12. We shall continue to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality relating to parenting and caring roles, from a **child-centred viewpoint**. Our focus is on children's rights and wellbeing. Fathers are important to us because we know that they have substantial impacts on the development and wellbeing of their children.

Work this year will include monitoring the impacts of the new public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. Another important area of policy development, which we shall be reporting on, is the introduction of increased rights to paternity and parental leave for new dads. Last – but not least – we are working to support and promote **good practice** in working with dads of all kinds, through the activities described below.

## Dads2b Resource

Over the last six months, we have been working in partnership with NHS Lothian, NCT (National Childbirth Trust), West Lothian Sure Start and Fathers Network Scotland to produce a national resource for professionals providing antenatal education and support to fathers. The **Dads2b** Resource has its origins in the successful NHS Lothian and West Lothian Sure Start partnership initiative: Dads2b, which has offered antenatal education to groups of fathers in the Lothian area since 2004. The main aims of the Dads2b approach are: to increase fathers' skills and confidence to care for their baby; to support their partners through childbirth; and to highlight issues of mental health and wellbeing associated with parenthood.

Antenatal education has historically focused on expectant mothers, and particularly on physical health aspects of pregnancy and birth. However, the importance of: engaging directly with fathers; supporting the emotional adjustment to parenthood; and developing the capacity of mothers and fathers to parent well, are increasingly recognised.

In response, the Dads2b Resource builds upon the West Lothian Dads2b model, and wider antenatal education experience, to create a tailored resource for antenatal educators and parent support professionals working with groups of expectant dads/parents across Scotland. It incorporates 'tried and tested' education tools from a number of services. We were delighted by the inclusion of the resource in NHS Health Scotland's new Scottish Antenatal Parent Education Pack, and their support in

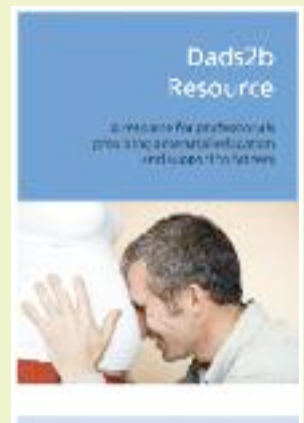
promoting Dads2b in the launch events held in Glasgow, Dundee and Inverness in June. This ensured that information about the Dads2b Resource will reach NHS practitioners nationally.

We are currently working with our partners to enable the provision of information and training to dad/parent support practitioners, who would like to include antenatal education elements in their services. **If this is something that would interest you, please contact me, Katrina Allen** (email: [kallen@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:kallen@childreninscotland.org.uk) tel: 0131 222 2440).

**For free access to the full resource, click on the link below:**  
[www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/13302Dads2bResource\\_A-2.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/13302Dads2bResource_A-2.pdf)

We also have a **CD Rom version** of the Dads2b resource available. To request free copies, contact Sara Collier (email: [scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk) tel: 0131 222 2412).

We would very much welcome your feedback on the Dads2b resource and whether/how you might be able to use it in your work.



## Father's Day Storytelling event

An innovative Storytelling for Father's Day event was held at the Scottish Storytelling Centre on Saturday 18th June. It was good to meet with participating dads, their children and mums too, as well as dads' support workers. The event was organised by Prestonpans storyteller Tim Porteus and included two workshops specifically for dads: 'Challenges of Fatherhood' and 'Being a Storydad'. The event also included storytelling sessions for children, live music and arts and crafts activities open to all. There was no charge for the event or workshops as all contributions to the day were voluntary.

According to organiser, Tim Porteus:

"Storytelling can be a really powerful way for dads to bond with their children, particularly for dads who have problems over access or who don't see much of their children. It can be hard for men to find space to spend time with their children, and many dads welcome the chance to build confidence when talking to and building a relationship with them".

During the day, I asked dads about their experiences of becoming a dad for the first time and about proposed changes to statutory paternity and parental leave entitlements (details below). The dads I spoke to emphasised the need for **emotional** as well as practical support for new dads – including the opportunity to get to know other dads. They very much appreciated the sort of support provided through child and family centres. Some called for services to be made available to all dads. Not surprisingly, dads were in favour of proposals to increase statutory entitlement to paternity/parental leave. They particularly valued **flexible** working arrangements e.g. so

they could take time off when needed or rearrange shifts to spend time with their children before bedtime. A couple of dads described positive experiences with family-friendly employers who had allowed them considerable flexibility, highlighting that this is not just an issue of legislative change, but also one of **cultural change** in how working fathers' roles are viewed. As one dad put it, "we're not just breadwinners!"



## Consultation responses

We regularly submit responses to Scottish and UK Government (and occasionally European level) consultations on proposed changes that are likely to have a particular impact on the lives of children, parents and families – making sure that fathers' issues are included. Recent Children in Scotland consultation responses of particular relevance to the Making Gender Equality Real project – and to services supporting dads – include:

**The Department for Work and Pensions Green Paper on the future of child maintenance** (click on link below to view our response)  
[www.childreninScotland.org.uk/docs/CiS\\_DWP\\_CMResponseFinal7April11.pdf](http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk/docs/CiS_DWP_CMResponseFinal7April11.pdf)

**The reform of the Equality and Human Rights Commission**  
 (click on link below to view our response)

[www.childreninScotland.org.uk/docs/EHRCCISResponseJune11.pdf](http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk/docs/EHRCCISResponseJune11.pdf)

A substantial cause of concern for us with both sets of proposals for reform was their failure to consider the Scottish context or to address Scotland-specific issues. Both proposals also appeared to rely on the availability and capacity of third sector service providers to step in and provide necessary support to vulnerable families, without adequate consideration of how these new or expanded services would be resourced.

## Key current policy areas

### Paternity leave – radical reform ahead

The UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) is currently consulting on a proposed new system of flexible parental leave that will apply across the UK, as part of its plans to create a 'modern workplace'. Current regulations have been held to be too rigid, reflect outdated notions of parenting and family responsibilities and restrict employers.

Business Secretary Vince Cable said:

"New parents should be able to choose their childcare arrangements for themselves, rather than being dictated to by rigid Government regulation as is currently the case. And employers should be encouraged to come to agreement with employees on how work and family responsibilities can be met simultaneously. These measures are **fairer for fathers** and maintain the existing entitlements for mothers – but crucially give parents much greater choice over how to **balance their work and family commitments**".

Fathers are currently entitled to 2 weeks of paid statutory paternity leave and mothers to 39 weeks. Since April 2011, fathers have also been entitled to take up to six months of any unused maternity leave as additional paternity leave if the mother decides to return to work in the second half of the baby's first year. Similar rights have also been extended to adoptive parents. Current proposals would again increase the amount and flexibility of statutory parental leave available to new fathers from 2015. In summary, the 2015 proposals are to introduce entitlement to:

- 18 weeks for mothers and 2 weeks for fathers with full pay, to be taken around the birth
- 4 weeks of paid parental leave for each parent to be taken during the baby's first year
- 30 weeks (17 weeks paid) of flexible additional parental leave available to either parent, which may be taken in several blocks (with the agreement of the employer), and, potentially, could allow both parents to work part time during the same period.

The consultation ran until 8 August 2011. You can view

further information, including the consultation document at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/modernworkplaces> Children in Scotland has submitted a consultation response which will be made available in the policy section of the Children in Scotland website.

### Health services engaging more with fathers

The new Refreshed Framework for Maternity Services in Scotland includes a statement that maternity services should 'recognise the role of a woman's partner and the baby's father', and ensure that they are involved in 'supporting the woman during pregnancy in line with the woman's wishes'. This shift towards increased engagement with fathers in antenatal education is reinforced and developed in the new Scottish Antenatal Parent Education Syllabus launched in June. The new syllabus emphasises the impact of parenting on mental health and relationships for both mothers and fathers. It underlines the importance of informing mothers and fathers about: the effect that postnatal depression of either parent can have on their relationships and capacity to parent; recognising the signs of postnatal depression; and how to get help.

A 2010 report of research conducted by the Scottish Centre for Social Research on health and parenting information needs concluded that:

"despite the long standing literature describing difficulties in engaging fathers and the multiplicity of information resources now available for them it appeared that there was still a long way to go to ensure fathers were receiving the most appropriate information" (NHS Health Scotland, October 2010).

Following on from the research described above, Children in Scotland has just started work on a **new NHS Health Scotland project**. The project is designed to explore in depth the **information support needs of parents** and to feed these findings into the planning and development of future information services. Fathers are one of the targeted groups for focus groups, interviews and (anonymous) case studies. **Please contact Sara Collier** (email: [scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk) tel: 0131 222 2412) **if you, or fathers with whom you work in Scotland, might be interested in participating.**



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## Equality Act and public sector duties update

Under the Equality Act 2010 the new public sector equality duty covers the 8 protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Act places a legal obligation upon public bodies across Scotland, England and Wales to have 'due regard' for the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

In order to meet this requirement in relation to gender equality, public bodies will be required to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by women or men due to their gender
- Take steps to meet the specific needs of women or men where these differ

- Encourage women and men to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The 'general equality duty' described above came into force on 5 April 2011 across Scotland, England and Wales. Specific, additional equality duties that will apply to public authorities in Scotland will be set out in The Equality Act (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations. A draft of these Regulations was considered by the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee in March 2011. Following lobbying by some equalities organisations and individuals, the Committee chose not to recommend approval of these draft Regulations, which were subsequently withdrawn. The main concerns of lobbying organisations were that the proposed specific duties were too weak, that they would reduce the accountability of public bodies and that they would be in danger of creating a hierarchy of equality.

The Scottish Government intends to undertake further consultation and to draft new Regulations for public authorities in Scotland later this year.

## New resources

### Oxford study on shared parenting

A recent study from the University of Oxford ('Caring for children after parental separation: would legislation for shared parenting time help children?') found no clear evidence that any specific post-separation parental time-sharing arrangement produced better outcomes for children. Far more important factors were held to be the ability of parents to cooperate and agree their own arrangements without involving lawyers or the courts, and financial security. Yet legislation would most directly apply to those who had turned to the courts after failing to reach agreement. Rather than seeking to enshrine a presumption of shared parenting time in law, the report

argues that children's interests will be best served by supporting separating parents to carefully consider arrangements and to prioritise their children's changing needs over their own wishes. The report has received some criticism for its emphasis on shared time, rather than considering a broader definition of shared parenting that focuses more on quality. To view the Oxford report, click on the link below. [www.nuffieldfoundation.org](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org)

### Children in Scotland Early Years materials

Children in Scotland produces a range of publications focusing on early years

practice and policy issues. These include the quarterly Early Years Newsletter, recent briefings on Preconception Health and Fetal Alcohol Harm and a report on The Cost of Childcare in Scotland. These materials can all be accessed via the website link below.

[www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/ScotlandsChildrensSectorForum.htm](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/ScotlandsChildrensSectorForum.htm)

### Fathers Network Scotland

The national network for dads and people working to support fathers continues to grow. It is now possible to upload and share details of projects, people and events on the website

[www.fathersnetwork.org.uk](http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk)

## Contact us

If you have feedback or information to share about your own work please contact:

Katrina Allen tel: 0131 222 2440 email: [kallen@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:kallen@childreninscotland.org.uk)

**I would be delighted to hear from you!**

To find out more about this project, access our reports and other resources and/or to sign up for updates, please visit our website:

[www.makinggenderequalityreal.org.uk](http://www.makinggenderequalityreal.org.uk)

**This project seeks to move the gender equality agenda forward by encouraging all professionals and organisations providing services for children, parents and families to actively engage with men as parents and carers, and to support positive engagement by fathers as well as mothers in their children's lives.**

