



‘Public services need to improve to support fathers’

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A case study may be available. For further details, please contact Stephen Harvey, Children in Scotland, on 0131 2222446.

Public services in Scotland must do more to ensure they are welcoming and accessible for fathers and provide relevant support.

A Fathers’ Day conference in Edinburgh today (Friday, June 17), will hear that although services designed to support parents are both experienced and comfortable in dealing with mothers, many are failing to engage with fathers, particularly those who are struggling to bring up children alone.

The conference **How Equal Are Fathers?** is organised by Children in Scotland, in association with Fathers Direct and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

Stephen Harvey, national development officer for a three-year project in Scotland *Children, Fathers and Fathering*, said: “Public services in Scotland could do more to make themselves welcoming and accessible for fathers. Since starting this project I have met a number of fathers struggling to bring up children alone who feel they are not treated equally by the public services they approach for help. The problem is often that too many services don’t know how to work properly with fathers and end up failing them.

“As we approach Fathers’ Day 2005, our aim must be to help ensure that employment legislation, contact arrangements after separation and divorce, and provision of relevant, accessible support by public service providers allow men to develop their potential as fathers and role models for the benefit of children, mothers, themselves, and society as a whole.”

Cathy Peattie, MSP, who will chair the conference, said: “Fathers can have a central role in bringing up children, and it is important that society recognises and supports the involvement of fathers in childcare. Facilities and support for parents should be equally open and accessible to mothers and fathers.

“Being excluded is particularly problematic in single parent families and other situations where the father is the main carer, but for the benefit of all families whose fathers actively participate in their children's upbringing, we must address and counter such exclusion.”

Improving the support that public services provide fathers is a significant part of a national drive to increase the involvement of fathers in the care and upbringing of their children. The more extensive a father’s emotional investment, attachment and involvement in their children’s lives, the more their children benefit. As well as improving public service support, the aim is ensure that employment legislation, and contact arrangements after separation and divorce recognises the important role of fathers.

Speaker, Ewan Aitken, COSLA’s spokesman for education, said: “Exploring what it is to be a parent and a father in particular is not just about providing services. The role of a parent defines in so many ways our individual futures and the type of society we live in.

“It is time to shift our thinking so we move from finding ways to make our family lives more work friendly and to look at how we make work more family friendly.

“One of the most precious gifts we as a society can give to parents is that of time together with their children.”

Speaker, Jenny Watson, acting chair of the EOC said: "Our research shows that nine in 10 dads are as confident as their partner at caring for their child. Policy makers need to catch up with this new generation of confident dads and EOC Scotland will continue to work closely with Fathers Direct and Children in Scotland to ensure that public services can meet the needs of fathers. "

Notes for editors:

- How Equal Are Fathers? The Challenge for Public Services will be held at the Apex International Hotel, Grassmarket, Edinburgh, from 9am.
- Children in Scotland is running a three-year project, *Children, Fathers and Fathering (2005-2008)*, to improve services and support for fathers in Scotland. It is funded by the Scottish Executive and run in partnership with Fathers Direct and the Equal Opportunities Commission.
- Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provisions are of the best possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.