



MAPPING MALE PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY SUPPORT & PARENTING PROGRAMMES

Project by FNF Both Parents Matter as part of the Children & Families Organisational Grant outcomes for 2013/14.

Methodology –

A Survey Monkey questionnaire with a set of 8 questions was created to capture data on the level of participation and engagement by men in family support services and parenting programmes during the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013.

We asked for responses from generalist family support or parenting programme providers – excluding those who had a particular focus eg disability, domestic abuse, dads projects etc. We also asked for details of ADULT service users to avoid counting of male children in the figures. However 3 responses received were from dads projects, one was focussed entirely at children & young people and didn't record gender of adult carers – while two had a disability focus.

A notable factor was the lack of recording of engagement by gender within some services. Several that were approached and would have liked to contribute were unable to disaggregate the data. It was subsequently confirmed by a senior official that ***'The Welsh Government does not ask for information from local authorities in relation to the engagement with fathers and other male carers for Flying Start or Families First'***.

Questionnaire Distribution –

Having previously attempted to gain responses on a similar exercise within Cardiff we took the decision to target a small number of services we were already in contact with directly but rely on Children in Wales' distribution network to reach other providers.

Responses -

To 26th March 2014 a total of 32 responses have been received. The geographical spread is as follows:

Cardiff – 6, Bridgend – 5, Denbighshire – 3, Anglesey – 2, RCT – 2, Caerphilly – 2 (*), Conwy 2, Ceredigion 2, Torfaen 2, Newport 2

Gwynedd, Carmarthenshire, Blaenau Gwent (*), Neath Port Talbot (*) – 1 each

All Wales 1, North Wales 1

(*) one service covered Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent, while another covered Bridgend & Neath Port Talbot. Each response has been counted against both Local Authority areas.

Numbers of service users analysed

The total number of service users from the various projects was 169,109. The figure included one service where the number was 165,000 - a health visiting and school nursing provider. Other services varied from a minimum of 4 service users to a maximum of around 700.

Male engagement (numbers and percentages)

Excluding the three dads projects the highest percentages of male engagement were 50% at a child contact centre in South Wales and a North Wales Family Information Service.

Denbighshire stood out in terms of participation as two of the three projects that reported in the county had 25% and 30% male engagement. Whilst one of the projects only had 12 service users in total another achieved engagement with 25% male service users out of a total of 141.

Bridgend was highly engaged in the survey with a total of 5 responses. Two of those covered services with higher levels of need with one identifying itself as 'an intensive intervention service operating at Tier 3 and 4 of service delivery' and had a 39% engagement rate with men (15 from 39 service users) The other had a 48% engagement level (19 from 40 service users) and described itself as dealing with child protection issues. Within services which were more universal with lower levels of need one project achieved a 25% engagement out of a total service user population of 700.

Gwynedd saw one service achieve a 25% male engagement from a total of 40 service users whilst a Ceredigion parenting service achieved a 15% rate from a total population of 140.

Qualitative feedback

Respondents were asked to identify one or more reasons from a list of six as the greatest barrier to successful engagement. (% figures rounded to the nearest whole number)

Getting men to see parenting as their responsibility	48%	Creating an environment that appeals to men as well as women	63%
Apathy by men	26%	Mothers as 'gate-keepers'	59%
Lack of interest by professionals in working with men	19%	Lack of ability by men to successfully parent	4%

In addition respondents were asked to identify any other issues. Their responses included:

'Fathers normally work during the hours that the parenting sessions run. Sessions in the locality are run during office hours. Fathers struggle to take time off to attend sessions. Fathers feel uncomfortable at attending sessions where the majority are females. Work is the priority for them especially during the period where there is a new baby as mums income has often dropped due to maternity leave. Fathers often work extra hours to generate more income for the family. Fathers make an assumption that the sessions are focused on the mother and the groups are for women only and parenting is a priority for mothers.'

'Lack of contact with absent fathers who do not appear to have any role within their Child's life, therefore offer of support cannot be provided.'

'The clientele is overwhelmingly female. The men locally tend to work during opening hours'

'All female workforce and their perceptions of fathers'

'working times often do not fit mens needs'

Conclusions

There was a clear pattern that emerged from the data. Services targeting both the higher levels of need, or, where access was universal eg FIS or Contact Centres saw the highest levels of engagement. The lowest levels were in early years and in generalist (i.e parenting support or services that targeted lower levels of need) where the engagement rate with men was disappointingly low.

The majority of mainstream projects achieved from 0% to 11% engagement.

It will be important to follow up with the successful projects to learn lessons from the successes.

The evidence shows that there is a significant problem with male engagement. Professionals assume men cannot be engaged as they work during the normal office hours that parenting support operates. There is also a perception that men choose not to engage. Interestingly almost 60% identify 'mothers as gate-keepers' as a significant barrier precluding male engagement. More research in this area needs to be undertaken to find ways to significantly increase engagement – including courses / services in the evenings as well as a strategy to engage men even if women seek to block this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Welsh Government require all family support services to record the gender of the adults they engage with and support
- Services should be encouraged to set a target (KPI) for the level of engagement with men
- Welsh Government should assess to what extent it is currently having 'due regard' to Article 18 of the UNCRC incorporated into the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 in relation to family support policy.
- Services should be able to access training and other support to assist them in improving engagement with fathers
- A review of the gender of staff employed in front-line delivery of family support should be undertaken to determine whether a targeted programme of recruiting more men into these roles may have a positive impact on engagement levels.
- Specific proposals should be considered to overcome barriers to male engagement identified by professionals – i.e 'Mothers as gate-keepers' / getting men to see parenting as their responsibility / creating an environment that appeals to men as well as women

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