



APPG Fatherhood Meeting Minutes

Date: 19th November 2013

Time: 3pm – 4pm

Location: Committee Room 20, Cromwell Rd Entrance

Attendees:

David Lammy, Chair, Shane Ryan, WWM, Sally Mehta, WWM, Owen Thomas, WWM, Ashleigh Ryan, WWM, Marie M'Pondo, WWM, Nick Smithers, AMIS, June O'Sullivan, LEYF, Matt Buttery, Triple P, Scott Colfer, Young Dads TV, Seany O'Kane, St Michael's Fellowship, Dr. Laura Davis, Leeds University, Mary Crowley OBE, International Federation for Parenting Education, Gracia McGrath, Chance UK, Helen Wroe, Rosendale CC, Jai Patel, LEYF, Ross Jones, Families Need Fathers, Labibun Nessa, Westminster Commissioning, Kate Bulman, Oakhill STC, Fiona Stokes, Tower Hamlets Parent and Family Support Service, Andy Simons, Tower Hamlets Council, David Marjoribanks, Centre for Social Justice, Martin Andrews, Dads Organisation Oxford, Dan Bell, CALM, Richard D'Souza, DWP, Naomi Eisenstadt, Oxford University, Alison Hadley OBE, Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange, Andrew Selous, MP, Mark Osborn, Fatherhood Institute, Richard Joshua, DWP

1. Introduction, Rt Hon Mr David Lammy

David Lammy formally opened the meeting and welcomed all present. He advised that the AGM element of the meeting would be postponed in order to unify the proceedings.

He then went on to introduce the speakers June O'Sullivan and Nick Smithers and give a brief overview of their organisations, roles and achievements.

2. Presentation on Men in Childcare, June O'Sullivan – CEO, London Early Years Foundation

June provided an introduction to the Men in Childcare (MiC) Network, a network designed to help staff cope with and tackle the negative societal views that discourage men in childcare. The network aims to develop a gender balanced workplace within nurseries and children's centres.

June discussed the barriers to men working in childcare settings namely:

- Career Guidelines
- Pressures to be a 'male role model'
- Inadequate recruitment
- Female Colleagues
- Media stigmatisation

She gave an overview of a survey conducted to ascertain the main purpose and structure of the network, the majority of those asked agreed that this was to:

- To advocate the importance of men in the childcare sector
- To educate the public to the benefits of men in childcare
- To report on the impact of men in childcare/research in men in childcare, on the sector?
- To collect case studies

The majority saw it prudent to invite male and female practitioners as well as dads to join the network

June noted that the children that she had spoken with did not seem to notice the gender of the person caring for them but more the activities that they enjoyed doing with specific people regardless of their being male or female.

To conclude June highlighted the achievements of the MiC Network as they celebrated their 1 year anniversary, the network is currently made up of 76 people, most of whom are men; June called to women to join.

3. Presentation on Fathers and Social Work, Nick Smithers – Abused Men In Scotland

Nick gave an insight in to men's experience of child protection, he began by contextualising the current situation using data to illustrate the access that men have to their children in comparison to the figures from the turn of the 21st century, these highlighted the decline in father's access to their children, he advised that children in the child protection system have significantly less access to their children than the wider population.

Nick highlighted the negative way in which fathers are depicted on published literature which aims to illustrate family life, on examples shown the fathers were either portrayed as disengaged or absent all together.

He went on to provide further insight in to fathers experiences of child protection agencies in their own words, and stated that whilst agencies will move mountains to ensure a mother has access to her child, fathers often have an uphill battle and little support.

4. Q&A

Naomi Eisenstadt, Oxford University - asked June O'Sullivan whether she deemed the salary and career structure a barrier to men entering the field of childcare given that the salaries in the sector are low, would the offer of more money be an incentive?

June O'Sullivan, LEYF - did not think that this was a barrier in this sector specifically and that in truth any sector would benefit from an increase in salary but this is not seen to be one of the issues preventing men entering the field.

Sally Mehta, Working With Men – mentioned Gavin Swan previously of Islington Child Protection whose project 'Islington Breaking Down Barriers' was to ensure all practices, procedures and systems within Islington children's services considered fathers.

Nick Smithers, AMIS – is familiar with this work & saw it had resulted in a huge increase in male engagement. He also mentioned that in his position as a father's worker he saw his role as more of a mediator; he felt that the task of engaging fathers should be in social workers position statement.

Gracia McGarth, Chance UK – stated that she felt you can have a good mother but for people to take a father seriously he had to be exceptional.

Kate Bulman, Oakhill Secure Training Centre – had observed that the boys she had met were terrified of social workers, believing that they would automatically take their child away; some had kept their fatherhood secret. She said that social workers should support first.

Alison Hadley, Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange – suggested introducing childcare as a profession early on, use young dads open to childcare appointments.

June O'Sullivan – agreed that an introduction in schools was important, she stated that she was currently working on a video to aid with recruitment, she also explored the idea of having potential teenage parents go to a nursery, work with toddlers, this may work as a preventative measure. June also thought it prudent to have male mentors for students/ apprentices along with a female tutor to further dispel the gender misconceptions.

Alison Hadley – asked Nick Smithers about upstream prevention, midwives may be able to catch problems at an early stage where they have not been outwardly expressed.

Nick Smithers – responded that he had asked other professionals, Health Visitors said that they were scared and midwives said that they didn't work with men. He believed that there were multi - factorial reasons that were barriers to gender neutralisation.

5. Shane Ryan & Owen Thomas - Feedback from Young Fathers Steering Group. Update from Group

Shane discussed the origin of the steering group and directed that Owen would give further insight.

Owen advised that the group met on 22nd August at the Esmee Fairburn Offices.

The group is made up of representatives from WWM, and other organisations, including but not limited to, Barnardos, Families Need Fathers, Birthing Matters, Men's Network, Action for Prisoners Families, St Michaels Fellowship and Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange.

The purpose of the group was to discuss and decide on two issues that the group felt most important to young fathers and wanted to focus on in the next year in terms of affecting change on those issues.

The group agreed that more systematic national data collection on young fathers was needed across all services, including but not exclusive to; maternity, ante natal, Children Centres, Midwifery, custody, YOT, leaving care. Unless there is a safeguarding issue as to why the information is withheld, then the information should be asked as routine and provided. With more information, the group would be best placed to make recommendations on how that data is used.

After agreeing on data collection discussions moved to early years and midwifery. But a firm conclusion about the second point was not reached so it was decided that at this stage the group would concentrate on the first point and continue to think about and discuss finalising the latter.

The group agreed to use their various contacts at ONS, Department of Health and PHE etc to find out about their collection of data on young fathers.

The group will also try to arrange a meeting with the Royal College of Midwives about their data collection and offer to develop resources or training to improve awareness and engagement around young fathers.

Sally Mehta, WWM - advised that she had attempted to contact the RCM to no avail; David Lammy suggested he may be able to assist with this communication.

6. Q&A Continued

Mary Crowley, International Federation for Parenting Education - brought David Lammy's attention to the current debate in parliament during the APPG, which pertained to childcare, she commented on the few number of MP's sitting.

David Lammy - advised that the chamber was not always an indicator of interest, other engagements may have been unavoidable, and he advised that MP's that were absent may catch up on the debate later that evening.

June O'Sullivan – asked that all watch, 'The Angel's Share' which stars Paul Brannigan, a Scotsman who faced difficulties as a youth and later went on to join the violence reduction unit in Scotland. He was able to illustrate how a small change can make a great difference.

Dan Bell, CALM – asked how important the speakers thought images and the depiction of fathers on television were, he felt that fathers were debased in the media

Nick Smithers – agreed that these have a huge impact, he suggested that it was not different services we needed but different mindsets, including the perceptions of domestic violence and how it was sometimes used to keep fathers from their children even when accusations were proven false, due to existing mindsets, services were still reluctant to support fathers engagement.

June O'Sullivan – suggested that often the issue is not an issue until it becomes an issue, we live in a very visual culture, main stream soaps show fathers in a less than flattering light, we need to look at postmodern feminism and reframe the conversation.

Naomi Eisenstadt – commented on the notion of 'Role Models', stating that she believed role models should be the fathers, another man should not be the child's role model unless in the real absence of the father. Another woman is not deemed a 'role model' to a child.

Owen Thomas, WWM– drew attention to the research currently being conducted at the Open University in conjunction with Action for Children, titled 'Beyond Male Role Models' exploring gender identities and practices in work with young men.

David Lammy – concluded the Q&A stating that some of the issues are built up in the 'statuses' of men, expectations tend to be low and class based, there are questionable perceptions surrounding domestic violence, how are these men to change a cultural attitude?

Meeting Closed