

The newsletter concerning parenting support for black and minority ethnic fathers



Supporting black and minority ethnic fathers networking conferences

The two networking conferences for the supporting black and minority ethnic fathers in their parenting role project took place on 6 December 2005 in London and 20 February 2006 in Leeds. The aims of the events were:

- ¥ to provide an opportunity for organisations to discuss issues facing fathers from Asian, African and Caribbean communities;
- ¥ to share successful ways of working with these groups of fathers and share this good practice with others;
- ¥ to exchange information and develop a network of organisations supporting black and minority ethnic fathers

Both events were well attended. The London conference had 140 delegates present, 15 of whom had not registered but turned up on the day on the chance of taking the place of any dropouts. This high number proved challenging in terms of room capacity!

The majority of delegates were from London, but others came from Kent, Coventry, West Sussex, South Yorkshire, Gloucester, Nottingham, Birmingham, Manchester and Stoke on Trent. We were successful in attracting a number of men, who accounted for approximately 20 percent of the delegates, some of whom were fathers.



We aimed for the day to be a truly working event

The Leeds conference was attended by 100 delegates from Leeds, Manchester, Bradford, Sheffield and other areas in the North of England.

Delegates represented statutory and voluntary organisations, in particular participants came from Sure Starts and Family Centres. Surprising there was attendance and interest from schools, with one father being encouraged to attend by his children's school. Unfortunately there was low representation from the black voluntary sector, organisations working specifically with Asian, Chinese or African families, and from the disability field.

We aimed for the day to be a truly working event, whereby delegates get the opportunity to explore fatherhood issues, find out what support is available, question how their own organisations are working with fathers and provide a forum for networking.

The programme consisted of a general introduction on what is known about Asian, African and Caribbean fathers, followed by short presentations from organisations working with black and minority ethnic fathers: boys2Men project, Focus on Fathers, the Leap project, * Azzam Sheik facilitator for the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities parent programme, Elijah Project and the Babyfather Initiative. The workshop sessions provided delegates with the

opportunity to find out how others were supporting black and minority ethnic fathers, and look at specific issues in working with this group of men. Looking at current developments such as Children's Centres, the Every Child Matters programme and the proposed gender clause in the Equalities Bill, enabled delegates to explore implications for parenting support to fathers within the context of family/parenting policy initiatives.

Themes from the events

We found that there is work with fathers being carried out, but limited examples of working with black and minority ethnic fathers. Many of the delegates were just starting to look at working with fathers generically, let alone identify specific plans for working with minority ethnic fathers. The gendered orientation of parenting support, stereotyping men, time limited funding, inappropriate activities and inadequate staffing, were some of the barriers to working with fathers. In addition, educating organisations to realise parenting work includes fathers as well as mothers was stressed. Those organisations already working with fathers noted that recruiting a fathers worker, good marketing of the service, flexibility in how services are provided, using different methods for engagement and participation, were some of the practical ways that worked in developing effective parenting support to fathers.

Much of the discussion on how to support Asian, Caribbean and African fathers, focused on the difficulty some organisations had in engaging this group of men. Issues raised included: how to find out what is important to minority ethnic fathers, what methods work well, what services are appropriate, and challenging individual and organisational prejudices. Meeting fathers in places where they are—barbershops, betting shops, through churches or mosques, as well as embracing stereotypical activities of men, through sport, were working examples. Importantly, while initial engagement is important to get the fathers through the door, it was noted that services designed for black and minority ethnic fathers need to consider the recruitment and retention of these groups from the outset. One organisation mentioned the large numbers of fathers registered with their service but the low turn out for group meetings.

Essentially, it was acknowledged that there is limited information and good practice on how to support black and minority ethnic fathers. Only a small number of organisations were working directly with black and minority ethnic fathers. Some were fairly new and were building on work that had tailed off in the area. Others were trying not to reinvent the wheel and working with other community organisations, but were experiencing difficulties in partnership working. Recruiting a male fathers worker many felt was crucial

to developing fathers work. But this experience has often been poor for the worker and the fathers receiving support. For example, male workers were sometimes seen as threatening in the family centre environment. Other delegates felt a father's worker was not necessarily the answer, and that all staff having a commitment to work with fathers was preferable. For example, one family centre for the past six years has successfully run a fathers group with a female staff group. Whilst it was generally accepted that a fathers worker may not necessarily be the answer, effective fathers work was noted to be built around individual staff and how they worked with groups. This was felt to be a motivator but sometimes a hindrance to continuation of any father's project.

There were examples of innovative work with black and minority ethnic fathers, such as Nottingham Sure Start Plus successfully engaging young fathers. As well as good practice tips, such as the Crystal Vision Trust, a black voluntary organisation which empowers fathers by giving them the responsibility to manage their group, organise events and decide on their parent group programme. Although there were examples of support, these were patchy and not widespread. Moreover the effective ways of working with minority ethnic fathers were not shared with other organisations doing or wanting to do similar work. Essentially the conferences called for the



Every Child Matters - impacting on work with fathers

sharing of learning of what works in support to black and minority ethnic fathers.

How to support black and minority ethnic fathers?

Of concern was the short lifespan of several support services who had made strides in their work with fathers. Several projects via Sure Start and Sure Start Plus, who were working effectively with black teenage fathers, have no funding after March and continuation of work with fathers is now at risk.

Finding out what is important, as well as what fathers from Asian, African, and Caribbean communities want, would be a starting point. Learning from established black and minority ethnic fathers projects, such as those presenting at the conference, is essential.

A reflection of the London event

A well organised event!! All the hard work invested by the REU team certainly paid off and was a credit to them.

The conference certainly had great appeal to many people not only a great atmosphere but also a sense of joint purpose all under the banner pro fatherhood. I suppose the only negative aspect was our arch enemy 'TIME' ideally we needed more time.

The conference workshops were also of great value; here the subject matter evoked quite mixed response and opinion which came from various people of differing backgrounds, both personal and work experience. Again, just when things were getting heated and lively it was time to curtail and conclude. There is certainly the need to have such provocative debates that serve to educate, inform, support and validate people's experiences.

In closing I'm left feeling impressed and reassured with the work already being undertaken by practitioners but more so with mantle of importance placed in this specific area by all who attended the conference with the desire to network and implement new and fresh initiatives. May we continue to build on the provisions that already exist.

Looking forward to the next one!

We intend to draw on the issues raised in the discussion from these two events to move forward in mapping of materials of support available to Asian, African and Caribbean fathers, and disseminating good practice.

*The presentations from this event are available on our website www.reu.org.uk

As you will all know, significant parts of local government are currently going through a series of changes as a result of the Government's 'Every Child Matters' reforms. These reforms provide a framework for organisations working with children from 0 – 19 years of age.

These reforms primarily came out of a number of Social Services (and other agencies) failures to protect children (the death of Victoria Climbié is one such high profile example), and they have a significant bearing on what we do with fathers.

While this article tries to deal with the main issues for Working with Men, as an organisation, it is not a substitute for looking at the reform outlines themselves. The more familiar we are with these, the more we will be able to contextualise and integrate what we do within mainstream services. I suggest everyone reads at least the summary of the reforms that can be found on www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

The new framework is outcomes led. The five basic outcomes for every child are to: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being.

Children's Trusts will effectively be multi disciplinary teams bringing together all services for children in one area. These Trusts are likely to commission work on the basis of meeting pre-identified outcomes measurable against the five key areas. For work with fathers this will bring into even stronger focus the need to stress the relationship between work with fathers and their actual or potential impact on children's lives.

Within Sure Start (moving into Children's Centres) and Teenage Pregnancy teams, there is recognition that if you support and engage parents, this in turn will mean they will have a positive impact on their children. In some places, fathers organisations we may need to make a case that fathers being parents!!! We need to show how our intervention may have the effect of reducing the negative impact of some fathers on their children. This will allow us to legitimately identify specific aims of the five outcomes in Every Child Matters as our project aims. One area of Working with Men's work is with young fathers. We will argue that the involvement of young fathers impact on the be healthy and stay safe outcomes for children, and we are already thinking about the evaluation methods we will need to introduce to measure this. Rather than using these targets to legitimise what we do.

As well as the more direct outcomes, we will have to argue for the specific fathers we work with. These are more graspable within the targets and indicators of the programme (see appendix to the Every Children Matters paper). Our evidence-base will need to be even stronger. So, for example, young men and young fathers are notoriously poor users of voluntary services, and therefore achieving any of the targets (and in turn the outcomes) will have to involve effectively targeting and engaging these males into

services. This of course is a critical element to most of the work we do (and the basis on which we are often commissioned to work with fathers), and will continue to be a strong part of the case we make for doing what we do.

While the Boards (that will direct the implementation of the reforms) have a broad range of agencies involved, some have suggested that there will be a few local battles primarily involving Social Services, Primary Care Trusts and Education. We may have to be aware of local tensions and priorities, as this will have implications on our work.

The second level we need to engage with is the joined up and integrated approaches that Every Child Matters promotes (indeed insists on). Improving information sharing, common assessment frameworks, lead professionals, coherent packages, and multi-disciplinary teams are all mentioned as important elements of early intervention and effective protection. We will of course need to understand how these will work and also where we might fit. This maybe easier for those of us working in Sure Starts or Teenage Pregnancy teams as there is sometimes an expectation that our work is integral to a general approach. However, those Sure Start fathers workers

who develop discreet pieces of project work will have to work even harder to become an integral part of the new approaches.

Because the reforms are primarily targeted at protecting the most vulnerable, many of the proposals focus on individual work in the form of core packages (often with a number of professionals involved). While some of our work is currently in this form, we may have to move more in this direction. Even if we do not, we may have to think about how our group work initiatives fit within a core / coherent individual package.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the impact that Every Child Matters will have on our developing work and the ways we may have to promote the work that we do. Please respond to this paper, raising questions that will need further discussion, as these changes could be the making or breaking of work with black and minority ethnic dads.

Trefor Lloyd
Working With Men

Father work across the UK

Elijah Project

The Elijah project offers support and advice to black and minority ethnic fathers and their children in Chapeltown and the Harehills area of Leeds. This project is the result of collaboration between the Chapeltown Community Church and Barnardos.

The project aims to provide accessible, responsive parenting advice and support to African Caribbean fathers. We are developing a parenting support programme for fathers, and currently run parent support groups, engage fathers through healthy life style initiatives, provide a confidential service, work with fathers to identify their needs, help fathers with their children when they are living separately from their families and provide a drop in service. The Elijah project provides a regular and stable environment where men can socialise and focus on their educational needs.

The response to our service has been received positively. In particular, clients feel that a confidential service is very important to them because without it, African Caribbean fathers and children do not feel

comfortable to talk about problems and will not be able to use the service to help them find solutions to their problems. The clients also feel it is important to build relationship with someone you can trust and rely on and that is why seeing the same person every time is also important. The feeling of trust and mutual relationship is evident within the Elijah Service.

For further information contact Paul Thomas, Development Worker on 0113 274 4940

Sowing Seeds

Sowing Seeds is a not for profit organisation based in Manchester that works for the equality and inclusion of ethnic minority communities. Sowing Seeds started in 2002 following the conference Sowing Seeds for black men.

Our aim is to look at and tackle those issues that are experienced by black men and those deemed to be socially excluded. We do this through a variety of activities working with fathers and young fathers through personal and social education to raise their

self worth, esteem and confidence using workshops and seminars and providing volunteering opportunities.

Since 2004 we have devised specific policies and procedures and instituted a capacity building programme, run a series of workshops for African Caribbean fathers/men with the Barnardos Babyfather Initiative, and we are leading the work for father inclusive services within Manchester and Trafford by engaging in the Change Up agenda.

We are currently delivering an African Caribbean Fatherhood programme that looks at, and addresses some of the issues facing Black men in contemporary Britain, such as:

- ¥ Black men: who are we? Identity and belonging
- ¥ Relationships
- ¥ Money
- ¥ Parenting and Child Development
- ¥ Domestic violence

For further information contact Barrington Reeves 07799 788823.

Information exchange

Safeguarding children

What is safeguarding? Often the word safeguarding is used by individuals inappropriately to mean child protection. Having an understanding of child protection is vital; knowing how to respond, what to do and who to contact if you are worried a child is being abused. However, it is now widely acknowledged that it is very important that a preventative approach is taken to protect children from potential harm or damage. That is, we need to be proactive about keeping children safe, rather than reactive when something goes wrong. Therefore, it is about having safe working practices and involving children and young people, parents, carers and workers in their development so that they are meaningful and understood by all.

Safeguarding includes a focus on:

- ¥ Risk assessment;
- ¥ Safe recruitment (CRB checks form a basic part of this)

Information exchange (continued from page 7)

- ¥ Whistle blowing
- ¥ Policies and procedures against bullying and discrimination
- ¥ Reacting to and reporting abuse (child protection)

The National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO) has been running a Safeguarding Project for the last 3 years, funded jointly by the Lloyds TSB Foundation and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Local Network Fund for Children and Young People. As part of this project, it has run safeguarding workshops, with a focus on safer recruitment and whistle blowing, in order to support individuals to reflect on their present practice and improve, where necessary their policies and procedures.

On behalf of the DfES Local Network Fund it has produced a publication: Positively Safe: a guide to developing safeguarding practices. This publication has been designed especially for individuals who work in the voluntary sector with children and young people to support small organisations and projects in their development of safeguarding policies. The publication is free of charge (contact Prolog: 0845 6022260).

For further information contact Rebecca Edwards on 020 7833 3319 or email: rebecca@ncvcco.org.

Informed Choices conference

REU's annual Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities annual conference will take place on 3 July 2006 in London. This event will provide a unique opportunity to hear about new developments and exchange ideas about best practice in supporting parents from black and minority ethnic communities.

The aims of the conference are:

- ¥ To provide an opportunity to discuss issues around family support and parenting;
- ¥ To learn about successful ways of working with different groups of parents and share good practice with others; and
- ¥ To provide an opportunity for information exchange and networking.

For further information, contact Leandra Box on 020 7619 6226 or email leandra@reunet.demon.co.uk

Contributions to this newsletter are welcome.
Please contact Tracey Bignall at REU on 020 7619 6225 or email tracey@reunet.demon.co.uk.

About the REU



REU is a registered charity working towards better social support and social care for Britain's black and minority ethnic communities. For further information or a copy of our annual review, contact Bendu Walker.

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