

# From the margins to the mainstream

*A report on father-inclusive parenting skills programmes in Oxfordshire*

Oxfordshire  
Parenting  
Forum

Commissioned by Oxfordshire Parenting Forum



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This report is dedicated to the memory of Albert Ford and the practitioners who continue to champion fathers' work at all levels across the County.

**Martin Andrews,  
Research and Development Worker,  
Oxfordshire Parenting Forum.**

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# PART ONE: Background to the report

## 1.1 FOREWORD by Chris Sewell

Oxfordshire Parenting Forum commissioned this report when its three year funding from the Wates Foundation for developing fathers' work in Oxfordshire was coming to an end. Our aim was to assess the landscape of fathers' work in the county and to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for further development. Within that landscape lay an area of much debate and uncertainty, i.e. the lack of fathers taking part in parenting programmes, the lack of bespoke programmes for fathers and the apparent absence of county strategies to develop father-inclusive practices in parenting programmes. We asked Martin Andrews to examine the current practice in the county of parenting programmes targeting fathers.

At the time of going to press there are no bespoke fathers' parenting programmes being used within the county. Further there is little evidence of a planned programme of father-inclusive parenting programmes through hubs and children's centres. CAFCAS is currently struggling to find courses to refer fathers to. Fathers and their children are being short-changed – especially vulnerable ones. The participation of fathers in parenting programmes remains low and the lack of availability of suitable programmes is an important equal opportunities issue, especially in the light of the known benefits for children of father engagement. Where vulnerable fathers are concerned it must also be a safeguarding issue.

The Fatherhood Institute has recently drawn attention to a global review of evidence from Yale University that suggested that fathers 'are largely ignored by parenting programmes in the UK and elsewhere'. Parenting programmes, the review concluded, rarely attempt to engage with fathers or evaluate their impact on key outcomes for both parents. The Institute argued that a 'game change' is needed in the commissioning, design and evaluation of parenting programmes, to get fathers more involved and thus improve child outcomes and value-for-money.

We could not wish for a better time to test this view through an examination of Oxfordshire's own practice. Martin Andrew's findings are clear and his recommendations are powerful



*"The participation of fathers in parenting programmes remains low in the county and is an important equality issue, especially in the light of the known benefits for children of father engagement. OPF welcomes this report and its findings."*

and pertinent. OPF welcomes this report and its findings which reveal the existence of effective father-inclusive practice within the County as well as serious deficiencies. We believe that Oxfordshire is at a turning point. Father-inclusive parenting programmes have the potential to transform the lives of fathers and their families within a whole-family approach. Yet the excellent practice honed over many years could wither on the vine without policies to promote it or practice to let it grow organically.

We see this report as a road map for practitioners and a manifesto for change. There are strong messages for practitioners, trainers and outreach workers. There are also messages for commissioners and service managers about the current lack of father-inclusive and gender-differentiated parenting groups within the county. We hope that these recommendations will be acted upon for the long-term benefit of staff, fathers and their families. Such an outcome would be a fitting tribute to the tireless efforts of the late Albert Ford who championed the needs of fathers in Oxfordshire long before they became a priority at national level.

Finally, we would like to thank Martin Andrews for his commitment, energy and patience in pursuing his research\* and turning challenges into real opportunities for growth and change.

**Chris Sewell**  
**Trustee, Oxfordshire Parenting Forum.**

\*Martin's wider research into father-inclusive practice, 'Voices from the Field', is due to be published in December 2014.

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION by Chris Sewell

Oxfordshire Parenting forum was set up in 1994, the International Year of the Family. One of its key roles has been to raise the profile of parenting education and to promote models of good practice. Ten years later the engagement of fathers became a hot national priority for the Health Service, for Children's Services and for Sure Start. Locally the County Council responded by giving funds to OPF to set up a grants fund for fathers' work and to develop and promote father-inclusive practice. Even before this change in national priorities, parenting programmes for fathers had been pioneered within the county by the late Albert Ford, who, having benefited himself from attending parenting programmes, set about developing a programme, '*Man Enough*' that was designed specifically for fathers. The programme itself followed the Family Caring Trust's *Veritas* programme, but what made it special and popular with fathers was that it was run by fathers for fathers and that the methods used were father-friendly. '*Man Enough*' remained independent and was run very successfully by Albert for many years until his untimely death in May 2012.

Following Albert's death *Man Enough* continued to be offered within the county and was coordinated by Albert's co-facilitator, Mark Ginsburg. The OPF Fathers' Champions' Network (formerly 'Think Dad') became a reference point for the continuation of *Man Enough* and the recruitment of male facilitators. At the same time the County Council's Early Intervention Service was drawing up a list of evidence-based parenting programmes, based on national guidelines, that would be permitted to be run or funded through its Hub Teams. An approved list was drawn up but excluded the Family Caring Trust on the grounds that it did not have sufficient national validation and that much of its material needed to be updated. At a stroke the *Man Enough* was undermined.

OPF's immediate response to the rejection of the Family Caring Trust programme – and in consequence the *Man Enough* course – was to warn against throwing the baby out with the bathwater. There was a serious risk, OPF believed, that participation by fathers in parenting programmes would significantly decline as a result of excluding *Man Enough* from the approved list. *Man Enough* may have been cast aside on grounds of the quality of

materials and the alleged lack of an evidence base, but the methodology unique to that programme – and much valued by fathers – needed to be preserved, disseminated and embedded in the other approved programmes. A phased withdrawal and dissemination to other approved programmes would have been far more constructive.

This report examines local evidence of the effectiveness of the *Man Enough* and draws out the practice that could be translated into existing approved programmes. It also describes attempts that have been made since 2012 to use father-friendly methodology within those approved programmes. Through this examination of practice the report has been able to throw fresh light on associated issues such as availability and access, the value of all-male groups, the necessity (or otherwise) of having only men to facilitate fathers' groups, and the question of whether female facilitators could also run or co-facilitate groups of men on their own or alongside a male colleague.

Martin Andrews was asked to examine the above practice within Oxfordshire against a backdrop of national and international research into the engagement of fathers in parenting support. He has been able to identify the critical factors that make programmes father-inclusive. He has also addressed the issues of availability, access, targeting and the gender of facilitators. He identifies both the strengths and weaknesses of current practice within the county. Martin Andrews concludes with recommendations in relation to strategy and practice that we hope will take father-inclusive practice beyond arguments about a particular programme to the far greater task of making parenting programmes available and accessible to all fathers across the county.

In this respect, it is encouraging to see that the recently produced Oxfordshire Hub Directory for the delivery of parenting programmes contains much guidance consistent with this report's findings. It is hoped that the detailed examination of current practice which follows will provide a valuable resource for those seeking to follow the Hub Directory's guidance in relation to father-inclusive parenting programmes. This would effectively take father-inclusive programmes from the margins to the mainstream.

## 1.3 REPORT AIMS

- To highlight current national research that shows the benefits for fathers, their families and children when they are supported with their parenting skills.
- To find and present a series of short case studies of local parenting skills programmes in Oxfordshire that have successfully engaged male carers and delivered positive outcomes for the family and the child.
- To identify and summarise specific practices used by these programmes in order that effective father inclusive delivery can be replicated.
- To examine the evidence from the Man Enough programme and identify practice which can be embedded in other evidence based programmes in order to target fathers.
- To highlight the ongoing barriers that may be preventing parenting programmes from being father-inclusive and suggest the next steps and cultural shift needed to be taken to overcome any service gaps.
- To consider how the impact of effective practice with male carers in Oxfordshire relates to the essential issues of safeguarding children, service value and the maintaining of the Council's positive image in the County.
- To conclude with a series of recommendations of how services in Oxfordshire can become more effective and collaborative in the future delivery of parenting programmes for fathers.
- To present the report to Oxfordshire Parenting Forum, practitioners, Centre managers and service commissioners working for Oxfordshire County Council and local Councillors.
- To facilitate an ongoing dialogue so professionals can respond, challenge and champion effective practice for fathers accessing services across the County.

## 1.4 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“It is one thing to know what methods work, quite another to understand why. Without understanding why they work we are most unlikely to use them effectively.”*



**Geoff Petty, Evidence Based Teaching (2006)<sup>1</sup>**

- UK research on the benefits of fathers attending parenting programmes states:
  - ❖ Delivering Parenting skills programmes to fathers improves outcomes for families.
  - ❖ Fathers can be just as effective change agents as mothers and should be included in services.
  - ❖ Services are more effective if they engage with fathers as much as mothers by adopting a whole-family approach.
  - ❖ When parenting interventions are delivered in a gender differentiated way they are more effective in engaging men, are more likely to receive higher levels of user satisfaction from men and will achieve greater outcomes for men and their children.
- Uk research on the effectiveness of programmes currently being commissioned by Local Authorities states:
  - ❖ Evidence based parenting interventions are not currently being delivered in a father-inclusive manner, are not being evaluated for their impact with men and may require adapting to be effective with men.
  - ❖ A 2014 review on the effectiveness of parenting programmes for fathers in the UK states that Local Authorities are not being cost effective due to their delivery of parenting programmes that ignore fathers and waste money.
  - ❖ The Fatherhood Institute has stated that this should act as a ‘wake-up call’ for those who commission, design and provide support to families, who are failing children, imposing too much responsibility on mothers and wasting taxpayers’ money.
  - ❖ Providing effective Parenting programmes for both men and women remains an Equality, Safeguarding and Legislative requirement for all Local Authorities in the UK.
- Oxfordshire settings that have delivered parenting programmes using father-inclusive strategies were able to provide the most evidence for this report of being effective with male carers. Local case studies included in this report are:

- ❖ A series of Family Caring Trust programmes delivered by male facilitators to all male carer groups at numerous Children’s Centres and EI Hubs over several years, known as ‘Man Enough’.
  - ❖ A Webster-Stratton programme delivered as a series of ‘gateway’ evening workshops to all male carer groups by male and female facilitators at a Children’s Centre.
  - ❖ A Family Links programme delivered in the evening, jointly by female facilitators from a Children’s Centre and EI Hub to an all male carer group.
  - ❖ A PEEP programme delivered on Saturday mornings to male carers of babies by a female facilitator.
  - ❖ A Take 3 programme delivered in the evening at an EI Hub by male facilitators to an all male carer group.
- The factors that enabled evidence based programmes to be delivered locally in the most effective way with male carers included:
    - ❖ The use of male carer only groups.
    - ❖ The use of father-inclusive methodology with mixed-carer groups.
    - ❖ Evening and weekend timings of delivery.
    - ❖ The flexibility to adapt programmes to appeal to men without sacrificing fidelity.
    - ❖ Providing a male inclusive environment for male carers to explore their own values of fatherhood.
    - ❖ The use of facilitators trained in working with men and setting staff trained in father-inclusive practice.
    - ❖ The support of managers of settings that believe that becoming father-inclusive and adopting a whole family approach can increase outcomes for families.
  - Oxfordshire settings that delivered mixed gender whole family programmes and specifically targeted male carers also had success in reaching fathers. This included:
    - ❖ A series of Webster-Stratton pre-school & school age programmes which have successfully engaged male carers at various venues over several years.
  - Oxfordshire settings that delivered whole family programmes but relied on the fidelity of the evidence based materials programme rather than focussing on father-inclusiveness were more limited in reaching male carers, particularly separated fathers. This included:
    - ❖ A Strengthening Families programme delivered at an EI Hub which was completed by nine families of which only one included a male carer.

- Oxfordshire settings that delivered evidence based parenting programmes without using father-inclusive strategies at all provided the least evidence of them being effective with male carers. Through attendance at area meetings and discussions with Children’s Centre managers it was established that the mainstream delivery of mixed-gender programmes were ineffective at involving fathers.
- When Area Managers made further requests for Oxfordshire Children’s Centres to provide evidence of mixed-gender group programmes being effective with male carers, only one setting out of 44 Children’s Centres provided any evidence of this:
  - ❖ A Family Links programme was attended by 14 participants and included 2 male carers.
- The barriers to evidence based programmes being delivered effectively with male carers by local settings included:
  - ❖ A belief by Managers and facilitators that solely relying on a programme being evidence based will automatically mean it will be effective with fathers.
  - ❖ Facilitators unwilling to adapt delivery for fear of losing programme fidelity.
  - ❖ Lack of will by workers and managers to adopt father-inclusive strategies when delivering parenting programmes even when informed this made them more effective with men.
  - ❖ Lack of commitment by settings to use their time, staff, budgets and resources to deliver programmes and services to the whole family, preferring to focus on delivering services for female carers needs.
  - ❖ Only delivering programmes in the daytime when some male carers could not attend. Managers unwilling to challenge staff who were not prepared to work weekend or evening hours even though this is stated in their contracts.
  - ❖ Examples of Managers unwilling to pay their staff for delivering services to male carers or expecting them to do this in non contracted hours.
  - ❖ Setting only delivering programmes to ‘mixed gender’ groups which were attended predominantly by female carers, leading to an over feminized environment and excluding male carers from attending.
  - ❖ Lack of father inclusive training provided by the Local Authority so its employees remained inexperienced in delivering its services more effectively with male carers and the whole family.
  - ❖ Belief by Managers of settings that they are no longer obliged to provide services to the whole family or meet KPI’s set by the County as fathers are no longer considered a target group by Ofsted.
  - ❖ A lack of instruction by senior managers as to whether settings are required to deliver services for target groups individually to meet their KPI’s or whether this can be done by ‘clustering’ programmes across an area.
  - ❖ A lack of commitment at a higher strategic level to champion father-inclusive practices.

- ❖ A lack of will by Managers to challenge settings when discrepancies were raised between what is required of them to be inclusive of fathers and what actions they are currently taking.
- This report pinpoints that the success or failure of a programme's effectiveness with male carers is not solely due to it being an evidence based programme approved by the Local Authority. Rather it is the ability and motivation of the facilitators and settings to deliver a particular evidence based programme in a father inclusive-manner that makes it effective with men. If evidence based programmes continue to be delivered without using father-inclusive strategies they will continue to be ineffective with male carers.
- There is both effective and ineffective delivery of parenting programmes for male carers in Oxfordshire. Effective practice is currently reliant on individual grassroots workers, Dad Champions and specific settings that are leading the way in making the delivery of their services more father-inclusive. Due to the inconsistency of father-inclusive practices, the County as a whole cannot claim to be currently offering effective and inclusive services for the whole family.
- Oxfordshire services can claim to be leading the way in a limited number of effective father-inclusive programmes. This expertise is included in this report and is available for sharing with practitioners, senior managers and service commissioners.
- Oxfordshire services still require a 'cultural shift' in its further commitment to father-inclusive practice if it hopes to incorporate this shared learning into mainstream practice and increase outcomes for families and children.
- This report states that there are more gains than losses to the county if it chooses to deliver its programmes in a more inclusive and effective manner rather than choosing to remain as it is. E.g the county includes more carers, achieves more outcomes for families, which relates to more value for money for its services and maintains a positive image with a reputation for pioneering work with fathers.
- This report has identified that Social Services and CAFCASS are continuing to make attempts to refer men with complex needs to father-inclusive parenting programmes. However, since the removal of 'Man Enough' and the ending of the father-inclusive pilots described in part three of this report, there are currently very few father-inclusive parenting programmes available for men in Oxfordshire. This is a safeguarding concern.
- As a result of this research, recommendations for both policy and practice have been drawn up to promote father-inclusive practice in parenting programmes across the County. These are found in section 6.
- This report welcomes that some of these report's recommendations have been included in the latest Early Intervention Service Directory, 2014.

# PART TWO: Messages from research - The rationale for including men in parenting programmes.

## 2.1 Delivering parenting skills programmes to fathers improves outcomes for families

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of parenting skills programmes on offer for men in Oxfordshire, this report looked at the latest national research on the benefits and strategies for including fathers in parenting interventions.

What do the experts say?

Research published by The Fatherhood Institute has demonstrated that parenting skills courses are an effective way to increase positive outcomes for the child and the male carer:



*“Fathers who attend parenting courses tend to do more with their children afterwards and do it better and their babies and toddlers also develop faster and better, including developing higher IQ’s.”<sub>2</sub>*



*“Participation by low income fathers in parenting programmes is associated with improved behaviour, increased understanding of child development, increased confidence in parenting skills, more sensitive and positive parenting and greater interaction with children.”<sub>3</sub>*



## 2.2 Fathers can be just as effective change agents as mothers and should be included in services

When it comes to improving the outcomes of children, services should consider focusing their resources and services on both the female and male carer as fathers are proven to be just as effective in meeting the needs of the child. In a recent study by Elder in 2011 involving a male only parenting course, research found:



***“Fathers were no less effective than mothers in implementing change.”<sup>4</sup>***

Research by The Fatherhood Institute also shows the specific importance of the fathers role in the child’s development:

***“School readiness in young children is associated with the sensitivity of their father, over and above that of their mothers”<sup>5</sup>***

***“Fathers’ positive involvement in the month following birth is linked with better infant brain development at one year”<sup>6</sup>***

***“Fathers can often be less confident and skilled than mothers looking after children. This doesn't mean they're less good at it - just that in most cases, they have less experience. Helping them develop their skills can enable them to take responsibility as independently capable, hands on parents.”<sup>7</sup>***

## 2.3 Services are more effective if they engage with fathers as much as mothers by adopting a whole family approach.



The Fatherhood Institute believes both carers need be included in services and this may require male and female carers accessing different programmes:

*“If only one parent attends a session, the other may not understand changes the ‘attending parent’ tries to introduce at home, and may undermine them. When both parents attend child behaviour tends to improve more quickly and positive changes are maintained.”<sup>8</sup>*

*“Dads don’t always live with their children all the time. These dads are really important for their children and a good course could help them stay positively involved. It can also help the mum and dad think about ways to ensure they present a ‘united front’ on key issues with the children.”<sup>9</sup>*

Research by **Parenting UK**, the body of practitioners who are currently running 26 national parenting projects in 2014 also highlight that for parenting skills to be most effective they need to be offered to both men and women:

*“Projects have been encouraged to work with a whole family approach. The greatest successes have been those involving the whole family in interventions. Successful projects have avoided more ‘formal’ approaches.”<sup>10</sup>*

*“The dad and mum can come to different courses and still benefit hugely from the experience.”<sup>11</sup>*

## 2.4 Evidence based parenting interventions are not necessarily father-inclusive, are not being evaluated for their impact with men & may require adapting to be effective with men.



### UK research on the Triple P based programmes states that interventions are less effective with men:

“A recent meta-analysis of the few Triple P evaluations which have disaggregated outcomes by gender found that mothers showed moderate to very large increases in positive parenting practices across all triple P formats.”

“Fathers showed much smaller improvements (with the exception of the one study that used the triple P Stepping Stones format with mothers and fathers of young children with disabilities.”

“Where attendance was reported by gender fathers were significantly less likely than mothers to attend all sessions.”

“Fathers reported fewer positive changes in their children’s behaviour, their own parenting behaviour and their perceptions of parenting.”

“Programme design may be substantially less appealing to men.”

“We could just as easily have examined any of the established BPT programmes such as Webster Stratton’s incredibly years, Strengthening families etc, Triple P is representative of them in the extent to which it does, or doesn’t, assess the impact of involving fathers.”<sup>12</sup>

“Anecdotally facilitators report adapting the curriculum as they go along so it will work better with dads.”<sup>13</sup>

‘Fatherhood: parenting programmes and policy’: Mcallister F & Burgess A The Fatherhood institute 2012

“To deliver good outcomes for fathers conventional programmes will need to adapt content, methods and goals.”<sup>14</sup>

## 2.5 Services need to make their programmes gender differentiated if they want to be father-inclusive and be more effective

To deliver parenting skills to men effectively, services need to acknowledge what their current approach is and commit to a plan.

In his 2012 book, 'Engaging Fathers in the Early Years', Roger Olley MBE sets out the need for a service to reflect on its father-inclusive practice. Those responsible for delivering parenting programmes should be able to acknowledge the three distinct approaches to working with mothers and fathers and adapt their strategies accordingly:



**“AGNOSTIC”** - *‘services have no identified approach to working with men as they have not thought about it’*.<sup>15</sup> An example being ‘mixed gender’ parenting programme delivered in the daytime by female facilitators for the primary benefit of female carers.

**“GENDER NEUTRAL”** - *‘services which regard men as the same as women and offer the same services, courses and resources to women and men as they have made a conscious decision’*.<sup>16</sup> An example being a parenting programme delivered in the evening, by male or female facilitators to the whole family.

**“GENDER DIFFERENTIATED”** - *‘services which regard men & women as having different needs which need to be addressed differently, requiring the provision of different experiences, courses and resources for men in order to attract them to the service & maintain their engagement’*.<sup>17</sup> An example being a parenting programme delivered in the evening, by male facilitators, for the sole benefit of a male carer only group.

## 2.6 Parenting interventions for men are an equality and legislative requirement and a safeguarding issue:

There are strong policy drivers for engaging with fathers generally and specifically around parenting interventions. Examples of policy documents that require the inclusion of fathers in parenting interventions:



### ➤ Every Parent Matters (DfES 2007):

*“irrespective of the degree of involvement they have in the care of their children, fathers should be offered routinely the support and opportunities they need to play their parental role effectively”<sup>18</sup>*

### ➤ The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000):

*“the parenting tasks undertaken by fathers or father figures should be addressed alongside those of mothers or mother figures”<sup>19</sup>*

### The Equality Act & Local Authority services for fathers:

This includes a duty to gender equality and with the impact assessment of services funded by the public sector it requires them to ensure that their services and service users are not disadvantaged on the grounds of gender and that services meet the needs of both sexes.

### The Children and Families Act 2014:

Latest UK legislation ensures there is now an expectation of the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children, including separated fathers. Early years services are required to meet the needs of the whole family and therefore will need to include both genders of separated carers seeking to be involved in their children’s lives. In order to do this, services will need to demonstrate that separated fathers have access to parenting skills programmes as much as separated mothers.

*“The Act sends a clear signal to separated parents that courts will take account of the principle that both should continue to be involved in their children’s lives where that is safe and consistent with the child’s welfare.”<sup>20</sup>*

## Parenting interventions with men & safeguarding:

Research by The Fatherhood Institute highlights the importance of a fathers positive involvement around the safeguarding needs of the child:

***“Children at risk of social problems, poverty and maternal drug use, talk and learn better when their fathers provide financial support, engage in nurturing play and are satisfied with parenting.”<sup>21</sup>***

**Research shows that participation by vulnerable fathers in interventions leads to:**

- Increased knowledge and understanding of child development.
- Increased confidence in their parenting skills more sensitive and positive parenting.
- Greater involvement in infant and child care.
- Paternal care of infants and young children by males from unpromising backgrounds can facilitate productive engagement with family and society.
- Child-mother attachment more secure when child-father attachment is secure.
- Fathers’ behaviour and beliefs impact on mothers’ behaviour: father’s understanding of benefits of breastfeeding strongly connected with mother’s likelihood of commencing and maintaining breastfeeding.

This research includes one study of 24 highly vulnerable families, in which only one father was unable to reflect usefully on his identity as a man, father and partner.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, research by J.B Scourfield, ‘Constructing men in child protection work, Men and Masculinities’, 2001 found that:

“Despite the mutually negative perceptions of professionals and fathers, their lack of involvement in the process was usually considered to be a bad thing. Non-offending fathers can have a significant role in the recovery process if they can provide verbal, emotional, and physical reassurance to their child”.<sup>23</sup>

while research by Stott, 1998 states:

The study found in the sample of abused children, that nearly four fifths of the children had a non-offending father figure. This emphasises the potential value of involving these men in their child’s support and parenting needs.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.7 Local Authorities in the UK are not being cost effective due to their delivery of parenting programmes that ignore dads and waste money.

Including dads could boost child outcomes and save taxpayers' money, says global research review, published September, 2014.



“The review confirms that those who commission, design and provide support to families are failing children, imposing too much responsibility on mothers and wasting taxpayers’ money. Outcomes are undermined when the other parent (usually the dad) doesn’t understand what’s going on and isn’t ‘on board’. As we said in the review, it’s time for a game change.”<sup>25</sup>

The Fatherhood Institute and leading experts from US and UK universities say a ‘game change’ is needed in the commissioning, design and evaluation of parenting programmes, to get fathers more involved and thus improve child outcomes and value-for-money.

Research shows clearly that fathers have substantial impact on child development, well-being, and family functioning. But a global review of evidence by researchers at Yale University and the Fatherhood Institute in London, published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, found that they are largely ignored by parenting programmes in the UK and elsewhere.

Parenting programmes rarely attempt to engage with fathers or evaluate their impact on key outcomes for both parents, such as parenting and co-parenting quality, family functioning, parental stress or depression, or a range of child health outcomes, the researchers found.

Cost-effectiveness analysis is also rare, but some studies suggest parenting interventions can produce a healthy return on investment and research shows clearly that programmes work best where both parents are engaged, so well-designed, father-inclusive programmes should be more cost-effective.

The UK Government recently announced an extension of its ‘troubled families’ programme to 500,000 families, as well as doubling funds for relationship counselling to £19.5 million and launching a ‘family test’ to be passed by all domestic government policies.

Fatherhood Institute head of research and joint chief executive Adrienne Burgess, co-author of the research review, described it as a ‘wake-up call’ for everyone involved in early years and other family services.

Thousands of parenting programmes are delivered mainly to mothers every year across the world. The researchers identified only 199 that included some evidence of father-inclusion or father impact on child or family outcomes.

Among the 34 ‘exemplar’ programmes they highlighted, just three are in the UK: the government-initiated Family Nurse Partnership, Bath and North East Somerset’s Celebrating Fatherhood initiative and the Strength to Change programme for fathers who have perpetrated domestic violence.

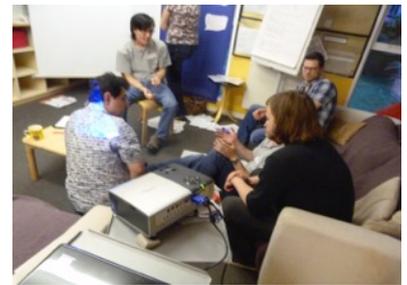
In his commentary on the research review in the same journal, leading UK child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr Paul Ramchandani of Imperial College, London, added that Britain’s child and adolescent mental health services need to engage both parents right from the earliest point of contact, and change the way they engage and work with fathers throughout the clinical journey; and that all early years providers should focus provision on families, as opposed to just mothers and infants.

**“We hear too many stories from men who feel sidelined by services provided for their children... the active engagement of both parents or carers is of such potential benefit to children in the vast majority of cases that to ignore the opportunity to change seems wasteful.”<sup>26</sup>**

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## PART THREE: Case studies of parenting skills programmes aimed at men in Oxfordshire



### 3.1 What was the rationale of studying male carer only groups?

Firstly, Roger Olley's assessment is that for services to be most effective in improving the outcomes for male carers they need to develop a '*gender differentiated approach*' such as parenting interventions being solely aimed at a group of male carers. This report has identified programmes that have been delivered specifically for men in this way in Oxfordshire.

Secondly, this report has not attempted to gather the complete evidence base of male carer only programmes or the complete evidence base of all parenting interventions types attended by men. More realistically it has attempted to gather an example from each of the most popular programmes currently being delivered in the County to draw conclusions of effective practice.

Thirdly, this report was keen to offer a balanced view by also looking at examples of interventions that used exactly the same evidence based materials that were used with fathers attending mixed-gender and whole-family programmes.

It should be noted that settings delivering male carer groups were keen to share their evidence of outcomes for this report. They were already advocates of father-inclusive practice by the very nature of providing this gender targeted service and wanted to champion effective work to others by sharing best practices.

It should be noted that settings delivering only mixed-gender groups had not adapted their services as much in order to target men to attend and had not undergone as much of a shift towards father-inclusive practice as settings delivering male only groups.

It should be noted that settings delivering whole-family programmes had attempted to attract men onto these programmes and have had some success. Success in getting men to attend these programmes was variable as this still depended on the motivations of the particular practitioners and settings involved to use father-inclusive strategies.

Overall, settings delivering mixed gender groups in a non father-inclusive manner were unable to provide as much evidence of positive outcomes for fathers as the male carer groups, following multiple requests for inclusion in this report.

### 3.2 What methods were used to gather evidence?

In order to gather evidence of fathers attending parenting programmes in early years settings this report made multiple requests through several methods over a period of 6 months:

- Requests from Oxfordshire County Council Area Managers to all 44 Children’s Centre Managers to provide evidence.
- Requests from Oxfordshire Parenting Forum via its mailing list of those involved in parenting programmes.
- Requests from the Dads Champion Network via its mailing list of those working with fathers.
- Requests in person to Children’s Centre Managers through the attendance of Centre Leads meetings in the County.
- Requests to all 44 Children’s Centre Managers via the lead editorial in the County Council’s monthly ‘Quickplace’ newsletter.
- Requests to 7 Early Intervention Hub Managers and their facilitators involved in programmes through email and phone calls.
- Requests in person to Early Intervention Hub Managers and Children’s Centre managers via Oxfordshire Parenting Forum meetings and the Dads Champion Network meetings.
- Requests in person via practitioner support to a specific Early Intervention Hub whilst the setting was delivering its programme.
- Requests in person to a range of facilitators of current programmes being delivered across the County.

### 3.3 What were the challenges to gathering evidence?

This report had the opportunity to listen to both grass roots practitioners and senior managers of settings. It heard a range of explanations for the limited amount of evidence they could provide of fathers attending and benefitting from parenting skills programmes across the County. These included:

1. Managers feeling hindered through recent cuts to services, meaning a lack of staffing and resources to deliver targeted work with fathers and a lack of will to share evidence with others in order to focus on their own settings needs.
2. Managers belief systems that fathers work was not necessary or a requirement to meet KPI’s or Ofsted inspections and this belief was not being challenged by senior management and service commissioners in the County.
3. A culture of settings not yet fully evidencing outcomes of their services, meaning work was taking place with fathers but not being fully evidenced, evaluated or shared.
4. Settings not being provided with sufficient father-inclusive training to understand or appreciate the benefits of this work or how to deliver targeted work, such as delivering male carer only group programmes.
5. A perception by predominantly female workers that the priority should be to deliver services to meet the needs of the main carer, often being the mother, rather than

6. providing services to the father as part of a whole family approach.
7. A lack of will and fear of change by workers and managers to adapt their practices to meet the needs of men, such as workers refusing to work evenings or weekends to deliver programmes and managers reluctant to challenge this.
8. A lack of data on the whereabouts of fathers through a Centre's inability to register fathers as keenly as mothers. The County Council not having data systems in place to identify certain carers, such as separated fathers. The County Council not having the protocol in place with Health services in order to request that the Family Nurse Partnership should share its data on young fathers they currently support or that Blue slips should be mandatorily completed with new fathers details. The combination of these factors impacted on settings being able to identify, contact and include specific targeted male carers in their services.
9. As settings generally focussed delivering programmes to mixed-gender groups or whole-family programmes that primarily focussed on attracting mothers, they simply did not have sufficient evidence of outcomes for fathers to share for the report.
10. A general lack of will by managers to champion father-inclusive work, demonstrated by lip service or deliberate avoidance to provide evidence when requested. This was driven by a fear of work being quantified and demonstrated as being ineffective.

### 3.4 What programmes were evidenced?

The 5 programmes included as male carer group case studies are:

- **Family Links for dads**
- **Parent Talk/Take 3 for dads**
- **Webster-Stratton Workshops for dads**
- **PEEP for dads.**
- **The Family Caring Trust for dads**

The examples used of whole family programmes and mixed gender programmes that were attended by male carers are:

- **Webster-Stratton Dino (Whole family)**
- **Webster-Stratton Evening (Mixed carer)**
- **Strengthening Families (Whole family)**
- **Family Links (Mixed carer)**

## 3.5 CASE STUDY - Male carers

# Family Links for Dads

Grove & Faringdon CC & Abingdon Hub

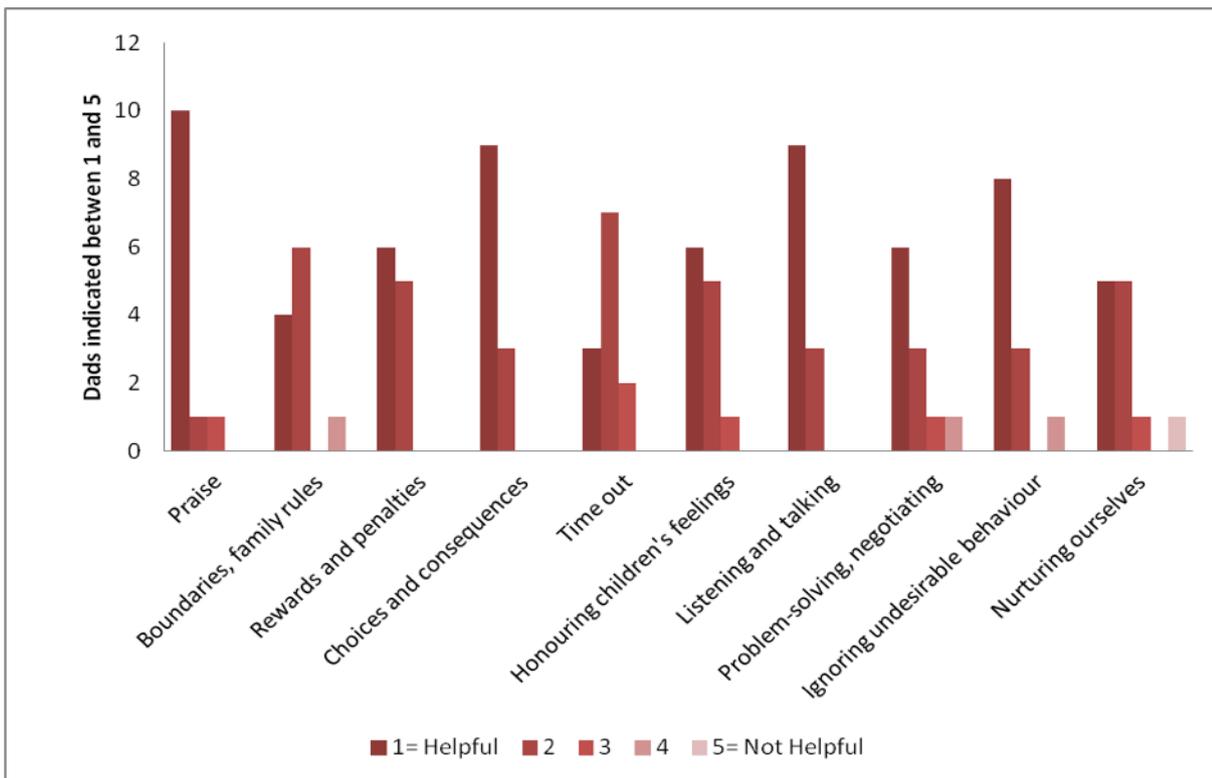


### Key findings:

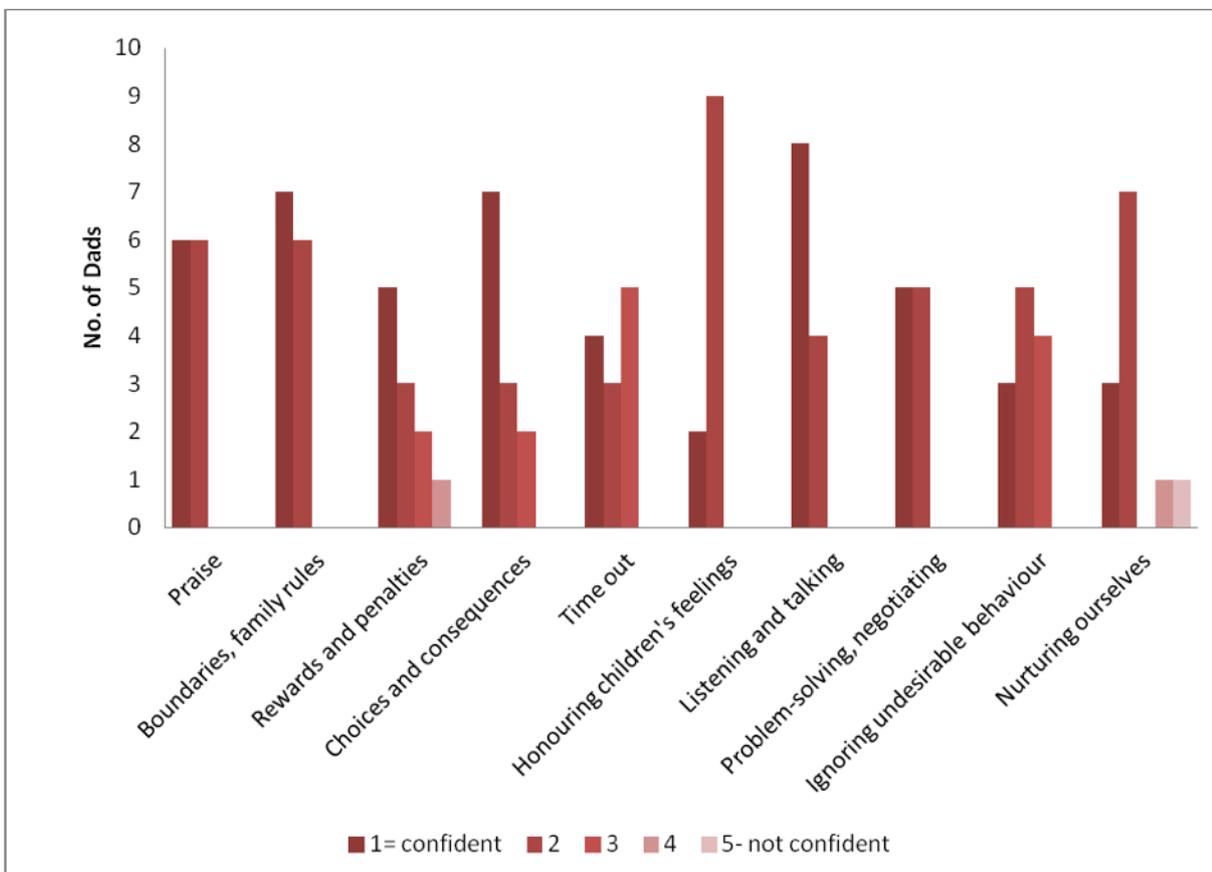
- First time this programme has been delivered to an all male carer group in this catchment of Oxfordshire, delivered from April-July 2013 and follow up September 2013.
- Delivered by female facilitators.
- Successful joint work and delivery between Abingdon Early Intervention Hub and Grove & Faringdon Children's Centre and referrals made by Health Visitor, Social Care, CC & Hub.
- 12 male carers attended the 10 weekly sessions, with a range of fathers from 28-60 years with children 0-16 years.
- High levels of user satisfaction with the programme and female facilitation, who maintained programme fidelity.
- Mid and end evaluations demonstrated ongoing positive impact on men's parenting skills.
- Feedback that it was sometimes rushed to get the 10 week programme completed with not enough time to discuss issues around fatherhood. Facilitators responded with the offer of a follow up session 6 weeks later for men to revisit ideas, which was successfully attended by 6 male carers.
- Feedback from male carers that they preferred an all male group with the belief this was more effective to guarantee their contribution and involvement.
- Feedback from male carers that partners/ex-partners would benefit from also attending a programme to reinforce learning as a whole family.
- Facilitators believed the delivery of the programme as an all male carer group contributed to its success in meeting the parenting needs of the men and they would be keen to repeat an all male carer group programme in the future.

**12 male carers attended the 10 week programme**

10 out of 12 dads found that the session about 'praise' was most helpful.  
 9 out of 12 dads found 'choices and consequences' & 'listening and talking' helpful.



The dads were most confident in the 'listening and talking' with 7 dads feeling very confident with 'boundaries, family rules' and 'choices and consequences'.



## Key comments by the male carers on outcomes:

*“Becoming a lot more aware of others’ feelings and now able to put strategies in place.”*

*“My son and I are speaking a lot more rather than shouting.”*

*“Trying to give more praise, be less critical, more empathetic, and ignoring more of the little stuff.”*

*“I am more calm and consistent with praise and discipline.”*

*“I liked the visualisation exercise, I think this is something I will try when feeling angry or stressed.”*

*“Will be more aware of my kids personal space and try to respect it more.”*

## Key comments by the male carers on programme delivery:

*“Enjoyed being with group, felt people listened to me.”*

*“Really open, friendly and supportive. I have really enjoyed the whole course, much of it is due to the group dynamics.”*

*“The group was so diverse.”*

*Full praise to the facilitators.”*

*“I think sometimes it was too rushed, not enough time to ask questions and a lot to take in.”*

*“If mixed group, men might sit back and let women come forward with ideas”*

*“Should be run more often!”*

*“Very useful, will recommend to other dads.”*

## Key comments by the facilitators about the programme:

*“The commitment shown by the group was amazing, with a lot of the dads working very long hours, and also having to do a lot of travelling, one dad even worked a shift, attended family links and then went back to do a night shift.”*

*“The Dads that attended were adamant that they felt the group benefitted from it being a dads only group, as they felt they were able to be more open than if their spouses or other mums were in the group.”*

*“This has been the best FLNP I have run. The groups are courteous, respectful, inquisitive, open, challenging in all the expected and fair ways, reflective and very well engaged in the programme - participation is not a challenge.”*

*“I would do another Dads’ group again in a heart beat. The easiest to engage, keep engaged and the most positive feedback (about the strategies and course) I have ever received.”*

**Clare Warland, Community Hub Worker, South West Oxfordshire**

*“I think it works so well because it’s a Dads’ only group as I don’t think they would have been so open in a mixed group. They seem to have really engaged with each other and relate to each others’ problems and issues. It feels a very safe space for them to be able to share how they are feeling.*

**Carole Gough, Family Support Worker, Grove & Faringdon Children’s Centre**

*“I too have found it the best group that I have run. I have been amazed at how much feedback and how honest they have been about their feelings from week one. They engage totally with the programme and when they challenge us about anything its always in a positive way.”*

## 3.6 CASE STUDY - Male carers

# Take 3 for Dads

## Littlemore Early Intervention Hub

### Key findings:



- First time pilot of programme for male carers only.
- Aimed at male carers of older children & teenagers aged 10-19.
- Delivered by male facilitators.
- The programme was organised by Early Intervention Hub workers following previous programmes for 'mixed groups' having limited success engaging fathers.
- Requests for Service to the Hub for parenting support came from various avenues including Social Care, schools, health visitors, CAMHS, PCAMHS, self-referral Children's Centres, Early Intervention Workers, Nursery's, G.P's and the Hub's 'Parent Space' drop in.
- Completed by 5 male carers over 10 weekly sessions from March 2014.
- All carers completed weekly homework tasks and gave high user satisfaction in weekly evaluations, including a 'bullseye' exercise.
- Fathers were initially concerned about feeling judged by facilitators if they agreed to attend a programme that pointed out the flaws in their parenting style.
- However, during and following the programme, positive feedback was provided by male carers regarding access to a male only group and the facilitation by the male workers.
- Male carers also appreciated the space and flexibility the programme gave to them to discuss issues around fatherhood and masculinities.
- A female facilitator that stood in for a session gave feedback that she hadn't previously appreciated the benefits of an all male group programme until experiencing it for herself.
- Facilitators are keen to deliver the programme twice a year to develop a sustained offer for men at the Hub. Facilitators believe the Hub now has a more 'father-inclusive' approach.

**5 male carers attended the 10 week programme**

## Key comments from male carers about the programme:

*“Being ‘Dad only’ makes it a more comfortable environment in which to discuss ideas and easier to be reflective”.*

*“Definitely should be a Dads only class and more widely signposted”*

*“Relaxed atmosphere, supportive environment. Focus on helpful things, not solving everything at once.”*

*“Put across very well in a relaxed setting everyone got on well and the info sunk in.”*

*“Very good advice, good parenting tips. Male course a good idea.”*

## Key facilitator observations of an all male group:

*“Some of the fathers said they felt they may be judged by the facilitators for attending a parenting programme and they were worried that we might be pointing out the flaws in their parenting style.”*

*“They didn’t want to feel ‘talked to’ in the programme, so we spent some time in the introduction on their hopes and fears and reassured them that the group would be a safe male environment.”*

## Female Early Intervention Hub Worker comments:

*“I stood in for my colleague last night and was honoured to have been able to be part of the session. Initially I have questioned why it needed to be a Dads only group, but having seen the honesty and support that these gentlemen are giving one another I can totally understand why.”*

## 3.7 CASE STUDY - Male carers

# Webster-Stratton workshops for Dads Grandpont Children's Centre



### Key findings:

- The Centre previously ran a daytime Webster-Stratton Dinosaur whole family programme with 4 fathers attending.
- The Dads Support Worker had previously facilitated The Family Caring Trust programme for dads and believed that other evidence based materials such as Webster-Stratton could be delivered in the same father-inclusive way.
- Believing that a more gendered delivery approach would lead to more fathers being reached and accessing parenting materials, the Webster-Stratton facilitator and Dads Support worker organised a pilot of 8 workshops just for male carers.
- The Centre used promotional strategies, a mailing list of 100+ local active fathers, distributing flyers to local Playgroups and Schools, signposting male carers receiving support for complex needs, signposting fathers from it's Saturdads group and mothers with partners not yet attending the Centre.
- These workshops were delivered once a month throughout 2012-2013 and were well attended. They 'reached' 34 different male carers with a maximum attendance of 14, lowest of 5 and an average of 8 per workshop. The total 'volume' of visits to the workshops was 67.
- Delivered by both male and female facilitators.
- Types of fathers attending included young fathers, BME fathers, separated fathers, fathers with complex needs, fathers with a disability.
- Most carers were signposted by the Centre and were in catchment, but the Centre also decided to cluster the offer to men so that additional target groups out of catchment and those signposted from other agencies could also attend. Social Care, other local Children's Centres, Early Intervention Hubs, the Family Information Service, the Quickplace County newsletter, the Dads Champion Network meetings or self referrals by men were all utilised.
- Sessions were made father-inclusive as the workshops were for male carers only, they were available in the evening, men had access to a male Dads support worker and the female facilitator had previous experience delivering services to male carers.
- The delivery of the evidence based materials was also done in a more effective father inclusive manner. The men were offered an introductory session based on celebrating positive fatherhood and parenting. Fathers were encouraged to provide their own 'Top Tips' for effective parenting. Films were shown of fathers discussing fatherhood and acknowledging different parenting skill styles. Handouts were

provided on the benefits of child development when fathers were positively involved in parenting and there was a final group discussion on masculinities and parenting.

- The male carers were also encouraged to come up with their own ‘topics’ to shape the upcoming workshops. This led to greater ownership and commitment by the men of the materials.
- Programme fidelity was reinforced by the facilitator making sure suggestions tied in with existing programme topics, such as choices and consequences, discipline, praise and rewards, giving positive attention etc.
- Programme fidelity was also maintained by the facilitator’s use of the same Webster-Stratton materials, activities, group discussions, handouts and assessment forms.

**34 Male carers attended the 8 different workshops, with an average of 8 men per session.**

Volume of ‘Target groups’ attending any workshop and whether they were from in catchment or referred from outside:

Male carer ‘Target group’	Volume of attendance by male carer type in Centre catchment	Volume of attendance by male carer type out of catchment	Total volume of attendance by male carer type to any workshop
Separated fathers	3	9	12
Teenage fathers	1	3	4
Workless fathers	6	6	12
BME fathers	10	7	17
Fathers with disability	5	0	5
Fathers with child with disability	1	0	1

## Key evaluations by male carers & their user satisfaction:

Male carers completed mid and end of course evaluations and all replied **EXCELLENT** or **GOOD** for:

*“How informative and useful was the session?”*

*“How relevant was the topic?”*

*“How suitable was the time, date and duration?”*

*“How suitable was the venue?”*

*“How would you rate the facilitation and presenter?”*



## Key comments by male carers at the end of the workshops:

*“I found it a very informative first session, particularly the videos about men and their style of play and parenting. Keen to return to the next one.”*

*“I have never used the Centre before but i am having issues with the older one now and the baby has arrived so i thought i would come to the workshop.”*

*“So far i have found all the sessions useful and i have really benefited from them.”*

*“I really like the simple tips that are easy to remember.”*

*“I really liked the discussions with other dads and the posters illustrating emotions.”*

*“The training was very helpful, i learnt new ways to communicate with my child.”*

*“Good group discussion and led well.”*

*“I learnt good strategies and techniques for managing behaviour.”*

## Follow up one to one work:

- The Dads Worker was aware that parenting interventions were seen as a ‘catch all’ approach by services targeting men and for the parenting intervention to be effective an offer of one to one support was also required for any men attending with complex needs.
- As the Dads Support Worker was based at the Centre meant male carers with complex needs could access one to one support.
- This led to 3 significant pieces of work, involving ‘solution focussed’ work and completion of Outcome Stars. A separated father completed a 27 week ‘Making Changes’ perpetrator programme, a separated BME carer gained mediation support and a qualification in an Adult Learning programme and a main carer with disabilities gained voluntary work and occupational therapy support.

## Follow up assessments 6 months later:

- Male carers who had continued to access dads services at the Centre following the workshops were then identified and tracked for 6 months and parenting outcomes assessed.
- This was done using a 1=poor to 5=excellent scale based on Webster-Stratton questions, with carers giving feedback on any 'point increases' in 6 areas of parenting, including:

*"the relationship with the child"*

*"asking the child to do something and seeing it through"*

*"not raising a voice to the child"*

*"time spent doing things with the child"*

*"listening and seeing the point of view of the child"*

*"improved stress management and seeing the funny side of life"*

**Carer 1:** replied a significant 3 point increase of 'never having to raise his voice to his child'.

**Carer 2:** replied point increases in 'when asking my child to do something, seeing it through' & 'listening to his child's point of view'.

**Carer 3:** replied a significant 4 point increase in his overall relationship with his child.

**Carer 4:** replied point increases in all aspects of the 6 areas.

**Carer 5:** replied point increases in all aspect of the 6 areas.

## Key comments by the male carers tracked 6 months after the workshops:

*"The power of positive praise has been so useful. I now feel that I can encourage my son's best behaviour rather than have confrontations."*

*"Mealtimes are now easier too and I feel prepared for tantrums when they start."*

*"I came away with new strategies that benefitted my parenting & i have had good conversations with my wife."*

*"I feel more in control and less stressed when spending time with my son doesn't go as I'd like. I feel that I have more tools, the time we spend together is less fractious."*

*“The sessions helped confirm what we were doing well as well as clarifying where we could improve especially around difficult issues like tantrums, discipline and meal time problems.”*

*“It gave us more strategies to deal with behaviours & especially food times.”*

### **Key comments by male carers tracked 6 months after the workshops, on ‘father inclusive’ interventions:**

*“The sessions were very father inclusive and were for all the fathers who attended. There is a different dynamic when a group is just for dads and it useful to know that there are other fathers out there.”*

*“By having it in an evening, with other dads and being invited by a dad’s worker was significant, i possibly would not have come otherwise.”*

*“The facilitators were successful in creating an open atmosphere. We respected each others privacy. It was easy to bring up anything.”*

*“It was targeted specifically for fathers, so i attended to get the information for both of us as parents.”*

*“It was valuable to learn about other dad’s experiences and get advice on the issues we face with our children.” “More discussion groups like these where dads get to go to and talk would be welcome.”*

### **Key comments from the facilitator:**

*“I have worked as a trained facilitator of Webster-Stratton for many years through both Parentline Plus and Oxfordshire Parenting Forum delivering The Whole Family Programme ‘Dinosaur School’ as well as the stand alone programme.”*

*“To be invited to work solely with dads/male carers was an exciting prospect for me as I had often found it challenging to engage men on a programme and this was a great opportunity to try to understand why this was as well as deliver some terrific material to them.”*



*“The pilot we delivered was a huge success with an average of eight men attending each session which more than doubled what I would expect from a mixed programme.”*

*“The men had a strong sense of ownership of the group and a real feeling around supporting each other week after week in exercises with valuable group discussions working towards building their confidence to take more responsibility in parenting.”*

*“We created a safe environment for the men to speak openly, to offer support to one another and at times disclose some real challenges, I believe this to be mainly due to the male only environment which proved to be very effective.”*

*“The men felt other male carers would like to attend in schools & Children’s Centres throughout the county.”*

*“This was a very successful pilot which I believe needs to be continued on a more permanent basis. I would like to see an increase in the availability of evidence based parenting programmes solely for male carers.”*

**Paula Evans, Programme Facilitator**

## 3.8 CASE STUDY - Male carers

# PEEP for Dads

## South Abingdon Children's Centre



### Key findings:

- The Peers Early Education Partnership is a birth to 5 years intervention programme that aims to build on the relationship between the carer and child.
- South Abingdon Children's Centre had previously delivered mixed PEEP programmes for 0-1 year olds and 2-3 year olds as part of its post-natal parenting offer but it had had only limited success in getting fathers with babies to attend.
- In response, this was a first time pilot for a male carer only group.
- Delivered by a female facilitator.
- The Centre surveyed mothers and male carers at antenatal sessions and the mixed PEEP programme and realised that more men would attend if an additional programme was offered as a male only group on a Saturday morning, similar to its popular Saturdads sessions.
- As the teacher at the Children's Centre, the facilitator was already aware of research demonstrating the additional developmental benefits to babies by including the father and was confident in delivering services to men.
- The Centre introduced a 6 week post-natal PEEP programme for dads in January 2014 and this was regularly attended by 5 male carers with babies from 0-1 years.
- When 2 further male carers attended, the Centre decided to develop this into a 2 and a half hour rolling post-natal session for dads every Saturday morning in term time.
- Programme fidelity was maintained with an hour dedicated to PEEP parenting materials, with additional materials available for male carers, focussing on singing times, story times, child development & bonding of baby and the father.
- Practical suggestions for home activities were provided and actioned by the men.
- Male carers gave positive feedback after attending the sessions with their babies and particularly the importance of having a shared space as a group of fathers with babies.
- Male carers went onto attend the Centre's other father-inclusive sessions.
- PEEP dads and babies go in to all the Saturday ante-natal sessions now to talk with prospective parents about their experiences and to promote PEEP sessions for dads.

**5 male carers with babies attended the initial 6 weeks programme**  
**A total of 15 dads and their babies attended since January 2014**

## The increases in Volume & Reach at PEEP sessions at the Centre from 2013 - 2014.

**Volume of attendance from March 2013 - June 2013 = 32**

**Volume of attendance from March 2014 - June 2014 = 90**

**Reach attendance from March 2013 - June 2013 = 24**

**Reach attendance from March 2014 - June 2014 = 42**

- The facilitator believes offering a male only group has increased the volume and reach attendance of male carers at the Centre and has made the Centre think more about the benefits of having effective father-inclusive practices in future.
- The facilitator would like to develop greater links with other agencies who may be able to refer vulnerable men with babies to the programme, including Health Visitors, Midwives and Social Care.
- The facilitator is planning on expanding the offer of an all male PEEP programme for fathers with babies older than 1 years old.
- It should be noted that it is now a requirement for qualified PEEP facilitators to demonstrate they are delivering the programme to men. More Centres with PEEP trained facilitators should be encouraged to develop their male inclusive offer.
- It is estimated that the introduction of 'Shared Paternal Leave' in April 2015, that allows male and female carers to negotiate up to 12 months leave between them, will lead to a 5-10% increase in demand for postnatal services for fathers. Expansion of male only PEEP parenting interventions would be ideally suited to meet this increased demand on early years services for postnatal parenting sessions for fathers.

### **Key comments from male carers about the programme:**

*“Coming to the PEEP programme has made a difference as my baby has become more interactive and interested in the objects around him, feeling the textures and seeing the colours of objects”*

*“The ideas being discussed have been widely implemented at home and have been effective. I have learnt some of the clues given off also the learning requirements of my baby.”*

*“It has helped with the things I do together with my child as we now interact better.”*

*“I feel as a dad, better educated about how to play and learn with my child.”*  
*“Useful information on child development that has helped.”*

### **Key comments about it being a male carer only group:**

*“It has been very useful to meet other dads who are going through the same experiences and the different approaches that they have undertaken as fathers.”*

*“It has been a useful opportunity to talk to other dads about parenting”*

*“It has made a difference seeing how other dads are with their children and seeing how other children play and being able to offer the same prompts to my child.”*

*“I find it brilliant to be able to meet other dads and talk about our kids, issues we have, offer support & advice.”*

### **Key comments about developing a bond with their child and supporting their partner:**

*“It enables me to spend quality time in a friendly environment without mum, which builds my confidence about looking after her and enables mum to have a break.”*

*“The regular saturday group is a nice way to ensure we spend time together without worrying what to do.”*

*“I have been learning something every week, spending time with my child without mum and interacting with the other dads with babies.”*

*“Very informative and it has given me a lot of confidence to take care of and play with my baby.”*

*“I felt my relationship has improved, it is more secure and more enjoyable for me to do things with my child.”*

*“I am more confident with the baby, more knowledgable about the children’s needs and more understanding of their behaviour.”*

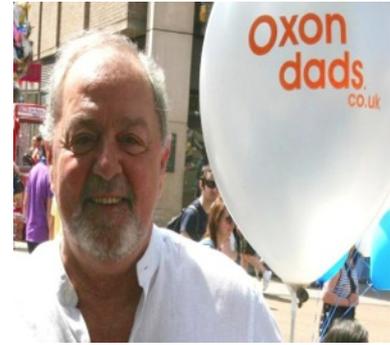
*“I can see the baby also relax with me and be happy.” “She is more comfortable with just me, without mum being there.”*

### **Key comment from the facilitator of the programme:**

*“The PEEP programme for dads has been a great way to get more dads with babies involved in the Centre.”*

## 3.9 CASE STUDY - Male carers

# Family Caring Trust for Dads, 'Man Enough'



### Background

Based on materials from the Family Caring Trust, the programme was originally set up in 1998 by the late Albert Ford. Initially the course was delivered in Bullingdon Prison, a Young Offender Institution and a drug rehabilitation centre. In 2007, Albert relaunched the programme at Elms Road Children's Centre as a response to the lack of parenting programmes for men being offered in the County.

Programmes were run for groups of up to 12 male carers from a range of backgrounds, including separated fathers, BME fathers, Young fathers & Grandfathers. The 7/8 week sessions, delivered in the evening by male practitioners been consistently well attended by fathers.

Men have arranged to keep in touch after the programme has completed and gone onto champion the course at 'taster' sessions run at other Sure Start Centres.

Albert continued to deliver the programme and champion fatherhood until his death in 2012. His loss created a challenge for those working with men who wanted to keep his work going but at the same time bring the father-inclusive practices that he had developed into mainstream early years and early intervention practice.

*"Albert was one of the earliest and probably the most powerful advocates for fathers in this county."*

*"For Albert it wasn't simply about fathers learning parenting skills, he wanted them to develop confidence and self-awareness in their role as fathers. Albert believed strongly that men simply do not appreciate how important they are—physically and emotionally—to their children, a misapprehension society underlines with its emphasis on motherhood as the prime parenting force. Not only was Albert a good practitioner, he was also a great visionary. He realised that there were thousands of other dads, together or separated, around the country feeling denied the chance to be involved in their children's lives. Albert wanted dads to feel they could bring up their children on an equal footing with their mothers, sharing the excitement of growing, playing and learning together." Chris Sewell, OPF*

## Man Enough - Present

As well as being the previous co-facilitator of the programme, **Mark Ginsburg** has been instrumental in ensuring there has been a continual availability of parenting interventions for men, with the delivery of Man Enough courses across the County since 2012.

The programme has continued to meet this service gap while other programmes fail to attract men. He has expanded this offer by co-facilitating at a number of settings, such as Marston Children's Centre, Blackbird Lees Children's Centre, Bicester Early intervention Hub, Elms Road Children's Centre and South Abingdon Children's Centre.

Some of these are included in the following case studies:

### 3.9.1 CASE STUDY - Male carers Family Caring Trust for Dads

#### Elms road Children's Centre



#### Key findings:

- The decision to openly target the course for men was based on the assumption that men have a different experience of parenting to women. They have a need to discuss issues in an environment with other men who may have the same experiences and are more likely to attend if it is an all male environment. It was called 'Man Enough' to target men.
- The decision to hold the course in the evening was based on the assumption that it would enable working men to attend.
- The sessions were advertised widely through Social Care and the other Children's Centres, with some participants referred, but most self-referrals and there were a range of male carers with different experiences.
- Attendance was good for those that completed the course.
- There were weekly evaluations and pre & post evaluations based on the course materials.
- The male carers liked the fact that it was a male only group and that it was facilitated by men.
- Most responded well to the materials, although a couple with literacy problems found the text of the material difficult to read and the DVD clips were a little dated.

- All of the dads who completed felt more confident about using a range of positive parenting strategies.
- Carers who were referred by Social Care and may have been under pressure to attend or reluctant to engage with the programme also gave positive feedback.

### Attendance of programmes at Elms Road Children's Centre.

*\*Figures up to Nov 2012*

Course 1 = 5 dads, with 4 completing

Course 2 = 9 dads, with 9 completing

Course 3 = 7 dads, with 2 completing

Course 4 = 15 dads, with 8 completing

Course 5 = 8 dads, with 5 completing

Course 6 = 11 dads, with 9 completing

Course 7 = 15 dads, with 12 completing

Total = 49 male carers completed the course

### Key comments by male carers attending the multiple programmes at Elms Road up to Nov 2012:

*“The programme was run brilliantly and my children are just a lot more happier. I feel a lot better in my self. Things about my childhood have made me see why the way I am I have seen what I have to improve on thanks to this course.”*

*“It has helped me massively and it has opened up my relationship with my children, which has become closer. I enjoyed the camaraderie and inspiring leaders. I think the course ought to be more widely available.”*

*“I appreciated the sharing experiences and being given new approaches to try.”*

*“I felt the course was well run, well planned and thought out and well delivered. It has helped me with keeping calmer in stressful situations and dealing with bad behaviour and tantrums.”*



*“I particularly enjoyed learning from other dads and their ways of dealing with problems.”*

*“Due to the course I spend more quality time with the kids and it has helped me to be stronger in myself as a father”*



*“Thanks for running the Man Enough course. For me combining the 2 sessions of ‘I’ messages and discipline have made a dramatic difference. I continue to read the manual to keep reinforcing the ideas. Just in the few weeks since the course I think the relationship with the child I look after has improved and I can see a happier future. I’ll recommend it to others.”*

**“The course is perfect the way it is, I’m sad it’s come to an end. I have learnt a lot about how children think and what they need from their dad.”**

## 3.9.2 CASE STUDY - Male carers

# The Family Caring Trust for Dads

## Bicester Early Intervention Hub

### Key Findings:



- The Centre believed offering a male only group was key to attracting dads to attend the programme.
- The first programme was co-facilitated between the Hub worker and a facilitator who had previously delivered the programme elsewhere. The second programme was facilitated entirely by the setting Hub workers.
- Delivered by male facilitators.
- Positive feedback from male carers about the male only group and the support from a male group dynamic.
- Some negative feedback about the dated video materials but this did not distract from their overall appreciation of the programme being inclusive for their needs.
- Male carers particularly appreciated the shorter length programme of 7/8 weeks and considered materials to be easy to understand and put into practice.
- Male carers were not concerned about whether other programmes were more evidence based and stated they would be unlikely to attend alternative programmes that were not being delivered in a father-inclusive way.
- Male carers benefitted from having access to Hub workers in the setting who offered them family support.
- Male carers have requested that the programme be run again.

Course 1 = 5 dads completed the programme

Course 2 = 8 dads completed the programme

Attendance of programmes run at Bicester Hub. *\*Figures for Feb 2012 & Feb 2013*

## Key comments by male carers attending the programme:

*“It was clear, fun and informative. I enjoyed talking with other dads and noticing we all have similar problems.”*

*“I have achieved more quality time and more talking from my son.”*

*“The course was run superb, particularly the role play. It has made me and my child more confident.”*

*“The course was well run and organised and it was good for facilitators to share experiences. Things have changed for the better in my relationship with my daughter. We are working as a team and she’s becoming much more responsive and relaxed.”*

## Key comments by the Hub based facilitator:

*“There were some comments about the videos being a few years old, but the men seemed so pleased to be offered a male only group with workers who knew where they were coming from that this didn’t seem to be a big issue. The Family Caring Trust are currently updating their materials.”*

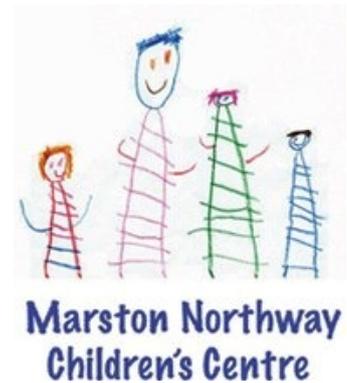
*“I think having a male only group does offer something that a mixed group doesn’t as the men seemed a lot more relaxed and willing to open up and they really appreciated the space to think about their parenting role without feeling judged. It was also a great way to get 2 hours a week for 8 weeks with some men who may otherwise be reluctant to engage and offer them some support.”*

*“I think as an introduction to getting dads into the Hub and getting them to think about changing their behaviours the programme is really accessible. It feels like a good preventative intervention.”*

*“There have been calls by dads and Social Care for us to run the programme again. I think it should be offered twice a year in the Hubs so it becomes readily available. The materials are inexpensive, but very effective.”*

### 3.9.3 CASE STUDY - Male carers

## Family Caring Trust for Dads Marston Children's Centre



Key comments by male carers who attended and completed the programme at Marston Children's Centre, June 2013:

*"I struggled a bit because I wasn't allowed to see my son. But I appreciated the help from everyone and their understanding. I now know more about parenting."*

*"I thought the circle approach and teaching model was very good and i am offering more choices to my son so he gets less tantrums."*

*"I have noticed my children now listen to me and enjoy rewards but understand consequences. When i'm playing with my children I get more hugs form them. I say words in a different tone so my children can listen and process what i'm saying to them easier. I look forward to coming home now to play with my children, i'm happy again."*

*"I thought it was very well run and i appreciated listening to others in the group deal with the same problems. Now i have been on the course l've noticed my child is more loving towards me as we play together. I have learned how to connect with my girl and understand her needs more."*

**5 Male carers attended and completed the programme**

### 3.9.4 CASE STUDY - Male carers

## Family Caring Trust

## for Dads

## South Abingdon Children's Centre



### Key findings:

- Delivered by male facilitators.
- All dads seem to have been referred due to perceived difficulties with their parenting, all having either limited contact with their child or having involvement with social services or CAFCASS.
- At least two had attended other parenting programmes (Family Links), albeit not in exclusively male settings.
- Ages and number of children ranged from just over a year up to 15; the younger dads had a single child, whilst others had up to five, with a range of special needs. Whilst the course was designed for 1-5 years old (“Pram to Primary”), extension materials from the course for older children (“What can a parent do”) were copied and provided to one parent when relevant.
- Enquiries from social workers seeking to refer and monitor their clients were handled by the principal course facilitator (also a practising Family Support Social Worker, out of area). This entailed in some cases considerable additional one to one family support to ensure appropriate liaison with other involved professionals.
- This was the course facilitators’ first experience of an interpreter assisting a BME dad with ESOL throughout the programme. Anticipated difficulties with the carers participation, group work and the presence of another female professional in the all male environment turned out to be unfounded and the involvement of the interpreter was very successful.
- The course did suffer from its reliance upon written texts, when at least two dads, in addition to the non-English speaker, struggled with literacy and comprehension, so had to have written exercises read out and explained by the two facilitators. However, the facilitator found this to be approximately the normal rate of poor literacy on a dad’s course when most participants have been referred.
- The facilitator believes the The Family Caring Trust has the “least written material to digest”, and it remained possible for participants to be fully involved simply from watching the course DVD, which was widely shared with participants in between sessions, to assist with catch-up, recap, and sharing with partners.
- Pre- and post- course evaluation questionnaires, devised to be used by the Family Caring Trust were administered and completed by all dads (apart from one late-

starter), supplemented by a card-writing exercise whereby all participants sent each other encouraging messages to take home.

- Follow up post-course ‘outcomes’ was evaluated by the referrers of the men onto the programme.
- Both written (from Webster-Stratton) and verbal in-course evaluation was also completed at the end of every session - to touch base: on one occasion in particular this led to considerable post-course support for one participant who had felt like dropping out.
- The co-facilitators felt there were limited reflection opportunities during the course due to late finish times in the evening and not seeing each at any other times in the week in the setting.
- Feedback regarding facilitation of the programme highlighted that a co-facilitator was not paid or given TOIL for teaching the course. Facilitators felt this reflected a lack of support by the manager and insufficient commitment to father-inclusive practice at the setting. This was compared to the setting paying staff to facilitate when delivering programmes to female carers.
- It was reported that there was a significant benefit of running the course by facilitators based ‘in house’ at a Children’s Centre as this gave the opportunity for 4 of the dads to access a Dads support worker at the Saturdads stay and play sessions at the same setting.
- Although all the dads ticked the box asking to be kept informed of future parenting sessions, none of them made any specific enquiries about additional courses or any other opportunity to continue to network.
- Three dads ticked a box stating they would like “information about volunteering to help with future programmes”, and another one has already been trained as a Parent Champion.
- During and since the course ended the facilitators have received many enquiries from both Social Care and Children’s Centre workers as to when it will be run again.
- The facilitator gave feedback that he believes courses for male carers need to be continued and coordinated across ‘sub-areas’ so that men can access courses at the ‘point of need’. At present he believes there are not enough individual settings willing to deliver male only programmes and there is a potential safeguarding risk if men with risky behaviours are not being engaged by services.

**8 dads, with 7 completing the programme**

## Facilitators assessment of outcomes for male carers attending:

MALE CARERS:	FACILITATORS ASSESSMENT:
MALE CARER 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The father who probably gained least from the programme was Dad 1, he had already attended several parenting programmes and had received considerable support. Nonetheless he was able to report “quite a bit” of improvement having “fun with my children”, and they were “more confident” and “less clingy”. Along with many of the dads, he was particularly interested in the development of his use of “I statements”.</li> </ul>
MALE CARER 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Another veteran of parenting courses, reported “quite a bit” of improvement in paying “more attention to my children”, and “less squabbling” and “a lot” of improvement in “tantrums”. We notably struggled however with getting dad 2 to express any feelings (as with other dads), so it was no surprise he most enjoyed “the learning of new skills”, “taking a different approach”. Nonetheless he compared this course favourable with the much longer Community Domestic Violence Programme.</li> </ul>
MALE CARER 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dad 3 was more realistic about the mild improvements wrought through the course, considering his improvements to be only “a little”, although he had noticed “quite a bit” of improvement in tantrums and felt the course helped “me think more about what I am doing”.</li> </ul>
MALE CARER 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to prohibition upon contact, Dad 4 could not provide any feedback on childrearing, although he felt he had “a lot” of improvement in his awareness of his “child’s thoughts, feelings and emotions” and felt “more confidence in less confrontational forms of discipline”.</li> </ul>
MALE CARER 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the limited time they had together, Dad 5 reported no difficulties in child-rearing, so the improvements were also all “a lot” in himself: to “provide best possible care and attention to my son”, and “feel more confident”.</li> </ul>

MALE CARERS:	FACILITATORS ASSESSMENT:
MALE CARER 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Despite the need for an interpreter, Dad 6 described greater changes than anyone, noticing that his daughter listens “quite a bit” better, and has “a little” “better temper”, but particularly that his daughter “is much more cuddly” and “wants more... physical bonding”, possibly reflecting how his own “stress level has really gone down; I’m much more relaxed”. However, this might also be because he attended the course under social services legal threats, which might have been mitigated due to his attendance.</li> </ul>
MALE CARER 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dad 7 struggled most to stick with the course, reflecting his own considerable difficulties (already his two younger children are on Care &amp; Placement Orders). Overall he noticed that as a result of the course he had “more confidence with children”, and considers there to have been improvements in “playing” and “spending time with the children”.</li> </ul>

### Key comments by the male carers attending the programme:

*“It’s helped a lot. I’m very grateful for the experience that I have had in the group. The programme was very good”.*

*“Although I didn’t like the role playing, I enjoyed the sharing of experiences amongst the group. I thought the programme was well paced, well run and sympathetic to everyone’s needs”.*

*“I liked the atmosphere, very well run, a friendly, easy place to learn”. “I want to compliment the whole group scenario, it was very good the way the guys presented the whole course. I enjoyed all of the programme”.*

## 3.10 CASE STUDY - Whole family programmes

### Webster-Stratton Dinosaur School Pre-School and School age programmes at various venues.

Paula Evans, the facilitator of the programme was able to provide an outline of male carers who have attended whole family programmes over the last two years in schools and Children's Centres in the Oxfordshire area.

#### Whole family programmes attended by male carers in Oxfordshire 2012-2014.

START DATE	VENUE	TYPE OF PROGRAMME	TOTAL NUMBER OF CARERS	TOTAL NUMBER OF MALE CARERS	TOTAL NUMBER OF MALE STAFF
JANUARY 2012	CUTTESLOWE SCHOOL	SCHOOL AGE	14	5	0
JANUARY 2012	MARSTON PRE-SCHOOL	SCHOOL AGE	13	2	0
SEPTEMBER 2012	GRANDPONT CHILDREN'S CENTRE	PRE-SCHOOL	10	4	0
SEPTEMBER 2012	MARSTON PRE-SCHOOL	PRE-SCHOOL	8	2	0
JANUARY 2013	NORTH OXFORD CHILDREN'S CENTRE	SCHOOL AGE	11	4	0
SEPTEMBER 2013	ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL, MARSTON	SCHOOL AGE	17	4	0
JANUARY 2014	EAST OXFORD SCHOOL	SCHOOL AGE	13	2	1
MARCH 2014	MILTON HEIGHTS SCHOOL	SCHOOL AGE	13	7	1
MAY 2014	CUTTESLOWE SCHOOL	SCHOOL AGE	11	3	0
SEPTEMBER 2014	THAMESIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL	SCHOOL AGE	12	3	1

## Facilitators key comments on strategies:

*“Two places are allocated per family in the adult’s room; we work hard to encourage the attendance of any person who is involved in the care of the child attending the group. This includes parents (currently living together or not) foster carers, grandparents, same sex couples, step parents, even close friends. When we (me and ideally a worker from the venue) make our initial visit to the family we spend an hour with them to assess their needs, this is the ideal opportunity to have the discussion around engagement.”*

*“We positively encourage men to attend. We first ask who they consider to be their family and secondly who is involved in caring for the child(ren). If the person is absent from the home I can offer them a visit too. Both parents/carers are equally important and deserve to be invited to attend a group.”*

*“I have also supported dads attending on their own, some self referred, and sometimes referred by Social care or probation. These men can be working towards spending time with their children in the near future. We work closely with these agencies to support them in completing the ten week programme.”*

*“Whenever possible I have men working supporting either the children’s or the adults group. This not only promotes the incredibly important value of a man’s role in the family, it also goes along way to support the men themselves in attending; a group mainly filled with women can be a daunting prospect for them. However working alongside each other in a friendly well supported group with safe boundaries can often help both parties to see as well as appreciate things from another point of view.”*

## Key comments on obstacles to men attending:

*“Obstacles for any attendee have been work commitments/transport/care of siblings; these are the same for both men and women. In my experience, men have not always been encouraged to attend groups if the other parent is attending. We strongly and actively believe that men have a valuable place in parenting programmes and will continue to our best to facilitate programmes they are able to attend.”*

*“The most obvious change I see in these men’s circumstances is the increasing confidence in their parenting abilities and the belief in the invaluable contribution they will go on to make to their families.”* Paula Evans, facilitator

## 3.11 CASE STUDY - Mixed carer programme

### Webster-Stratton mixed carer evening programme at Elms road Children's Centre

The centre manager provided data of a programme which used father-inclusive strategies of evening delivery times and the targeting of both male and female carers in the family.



March - May 2014 Elms road Children's Centre

10 participants  
4 male carers in total  
1 came to all sessions  
2 came to 9 sessions  
1 came to 4 sessions

#### Assessment of Outcomes:

Of the 3 dads who completed the before and after assessment ( i.e the 3 who came to all the sessions) all had either stayed the same or moved forward against 8 of the self assessment questions. All 3 dads had moved forward most on:

1. Allowing their child to take the lead in play
2. Listening to their child and trying to see things from their child's point of view.
3. Following through.

#### Key comments:

*“The dad who came to 4 sessions came with his partner because after the first 5 sessions she really wanted him to come so that they could be consistent.”*

*“I think in a mixed group there is a critical number of dads to make them keep coming and 3 was OK. There were 10 participants. 2 of the male carers in particular had parenting issues with their children, which we continue to work with.”*

Centre Manager, Elms Road Children's Centre.

## 3.12 CASE STUDY - Whole family programme

### Strengthening Families whole family programme at East Oxford Early Intervention Hub



Data was provided in July 2014 of a Strengthening Families programme run at East Oxford Early Intervention Hub.

The Strengthening Families programme is designed to be targeted at the whole family, specifically the principal carers and one child in the family. It should therefore be well placed to engage with both male carers and female carers. It also benefitted from being delivered in the evening time when men would more likely be able to attend.

Its delivery became principally to female carers and a child. The delivery of this programme provided limited outcomes for fathers. Of the 14 families that initially attended the programme only one family completed which contained a male carer.

**The course started with 14 families  
This consisted of 4 male carers & 14 female carers  
9 families completed most of the programme  
which included 1 was male carer and 9 female carers**

Disengagement with men by a whole family programmes may be explained by factors such as separated fathers not being considered for the programme, an ongoing believe by facilitators that a whole family programme's success is based on the engagement of the principal carer, (often the mother) or the programme materials are too prescriptive to allow for any variance in its delivery style to be inclusive of fathers.

It has been noted that other whole family programmes, delivered in other settings, in which facilitators employed a father-inclusive approach were successful in engaging with fathers. An example would be the work achieved using the Webster-Stratton Dino programmes at various venues across the county mentioned in a previous case study.

#### **Key factors for male drop out:**

*"We had 4 fathers initially. 2 dropped out due to family problems, not associated with the programme having stayed for 4 and 3 sessions - another dropped out after 2 sessions and we were unable to contact him for feedback and one attended most of the course."*

*"I wouldn't recommend such a large group again. I think that some of those we lost after the first couple of sessions just found it too hectic. The final group of 7 - 8 families was much more do-able and still felt dynamic."*

**Early Intervention Hub Worker**

*“I was invited to provide some practitioner support for the setting in its attempts to include fathers in its whole family programme. This included attending staff meetings leading up to the first session and speaking at the first session. I welcomed the fathers onto the course and I provided them with information on the impact fathers have on their child development. It was pleasing to see attempts had been made by workers to get 4 fathers to attend this first session. It was disappointing to hear that only 1 father completed the programme aimed at the whole family compared to 9 mothers.”*

*“I was sympathetic to the workers as it felt like the prescriptive nature of the programme may have stopped them from being able to engage with fathers as much as they had hoped. It appeared that the priority was for the Centre to get lots of families to start the programme rather than workers becoming father-inclusive. That would explain the drop out by the male carers. Other programmes I had been involved in focussed a lot more on father-inclusive strategies throughout and gained significant outcomes for fathers.”*

Dads Support Worker

### 3.14 CASE STUDY - Mixed carer programme

## Family Links mixed carer programme at Caldecott Primary school, Abingdon

Data was provided by the facilitator of a Family Links course which was delivered to a group of mixed gender carers. This was from January 2014 to March 2014 at a local Primary school in Oxfordshire.

This was delivered by female facilitators and attended by 2 male carers with their partners.

**14 participants took part**  
**2 male carers attended with their partner**

**Key comments by the facilitator:**

*“Both couples enjoyed being a part of the group. Their evaluations were positive.”*

*“One Dad took time off work to attend the group.”*

Lizzie Troup, Family Links

## **PART FOUR: A study of the effectiveness of parenting skills programmes targeted at men in Oxfordshire.**



### **4.1 What factors made these programmes more effective with men?**

In order to establish the factors that made a programme inclusive and effective this report analysed the feedback from men who attended the programmes and interviewed the facilitators that provided them.

The facilitators of the male only groups all agreed that the priority was for the men to access an evidence based programme which maintained fidelity to the materials, but which also delivered in a manner that was inclusive rather than excluding of men.

<b>THE FACTORS THAT MAKE A PROGRAMME FATHER-INCLUSIVE</b>	<b>THE BARRIERS TO A PROGRAMME BEING FATHER-INCLUSIVE</b>
Evidence based materials that are delivered with ‘fidelity’ and are also delivered using father-inclusive strategies.	When a programme relies solely on evidence based materials and fidelity but does not attempt to deliver these in a father-inclusive manner or use father inclusive strategies.
Delivered solely to an all male carer group.	Delivered to a majority of female carers.

Delivered at times that is suitable for men to attend, such as evening times or weekend mornings.	Delivered at times to suit workers needs and female carers, such as day times in the week.
Delivered by competent male facilitators sensitive to the needs and inclusion of men.	Delivered by male facilitators who are not sensitive to the needs and inclusion of men.
Delivered by competent female facilitators sensitive to the needs and inclusion of men.	Delivered by female facilitators who are not sensitive to the needs and inclusion of men.
An appropriate programme length for men, as infrequent users of services, that they can commit to without feeling pressure.	Programme length is too long for men to feel they can commit to, having had little experience of attending services previously.
Includes an acknowledgement of male parenting perspectives & concepts of fatherhood or masculinities.	Delivered in an overly female gendered environment and style and does not recognise concepts of fatherhood or masculinities.

Includes discussing hopes and fears, such as men feeling judged or inadequate for attending a programme	Does not include discussing hopes and fears, such as men feeling judged or inadequate for attending a programme
Offers an opportunity for male carer support in the group.	Does not offer an opportunity for male carer support in the group.
Simple enough to understand and flexible enough to be put into practice, such as supporting the needs of separated fathers who may not have regular contact with their child.	Overly complicated to understand and too rigid to be put into practice, such as not supporting the needs of separated fathers who may not have regular contact with their child.
Inclusive of a diversity of men, such as young fathers who may prefer parenting support or their own peer group programme.	Not delivered in a way that includes a diversity of men, such as young fathers who will abstain from regular group sessions.

<p>Able to support men with limited literacy skills with video clips etc &amp; offers bilingual translations for BME male carers</p>	<p>Unable to support men with limited literacy skills with video clips etc &amp; offer bilingual translations for BME male carers.</p>
<p>Pro-active encouragement of male participation and discussion in the group.</p>	<p>Does not ask for male participation and is delivered in an overly standardised way, so men feel ‘talked at’.</p>
<p>Made available regularly and at the ‘time of need’. Men can access support when required either at their own local setting or another setting that has ‘clustered’ its services. This ensures the maximum amount of men can attend the limited services that are available to them.</p>	<p>Not made regularly available and at the ‘time of need’. Men are signposted to a non father-inclusive programme they do not want and are reluctant to attend as it is the only option made available to them.</p>
<p>Made available locally in accessible venues within easy travelling distance. This ensures men are included in their own local settings.</p>	<p>Not made available within reasonable travelling distance so men feel excluded from their local setting. This perpetuates a setting being unable to offer father-inclusive services.</p>

## 4.2 An examination of the ‘father-inclusive factors’ found in the case studies



This report was asked to examine some of the key father-inclusive factors highlighted in the table. This was done by initiating discussions with programme facilitators and Centre Managers and by taking feedback from male carers who attended the programmes included in this report.

## 4.3 Male carer groups vs mixed groups

### Male carer groups:

Facilitators involved in the case studies who worked with all types of men believed providing a *‘male carer only’* group was the most important factor for creating the most effective model for men to develop their parenting skills.

It provided a specific group dynamic where men felt more comfortable discussing and challenging their own behaviours, building trust with other men in the group and feeling valued and validated as fathers. They felt unlikely to experience this at programmes delivered in mixed-gender groups.

Male carers gave high levels of user satisfaction with male only groups. This is repeated in positive written and verbal feedback, which state their relief at finding a place they can take ownership and feel included by services they felt are built around the needs of mothers.

Social services who’s focus is often on the safeguarding needs of the child and the parenting needs of a male carer with complex needs, such as mental wellbeing, substance misuse and abusive behaviours will often request the availability of a *‘male carer only group’*, believing these to be more effective for the man’s needs.

Men have given feedback that they feel more willing to engage in the materials when attending all male groups with other men experiencing similar circumstances and they are more likely to be motivated to complete the programme.

An important observation from a case study was that a facilitator new to working with men had commented that they held previous assumptions that they were not sure it was necessary for services to provide all male group programmes. Having been involved in a male only programme and witnessed the effectiveness of engaging men in this way, she stated these beliefs have now been reversed.

This report champions the use of male only groups as they have been the most effective intervention for male carers, as they have been better attended, provided a wider diversity of men, have received more positive male user and facilitator satisfaction, supported more men with complex needs and had more men signposted to them by Social Care than programmes delivered in mixed or whole family groups.

However, this report is realistic that delivering male only groups not only depends on maintaining the delivery of existing male only programmes, but the further training of male or female workers to deliver interventions with men and would require a shift in

motivation by the County to champion the increased availability of male only programmes across settings in Oxfordshire.

### **Mixed carer groups:**

Historically, the delivery of mixed gender carer groups of parenting programmes in the County have in reality meant ‘mothers groups’, such has been the low take up by men and their ineffectiveness in meeting men’s parenting needs. It is therefore important when referring to mixed carer groups to realise they have not been particularly gender mixed, or successful in engaging both male and female carers. This term is merely used as a distinction from the single male gender groups found in the case studies of this report.

Men who had attended these groups stated they were predominantly attended by female carers, tended to be delivered in an overly feminized environment, delivered by female facilitators who overly focussed on delivering a standardised longer programme and they didn't feel it offered them a space for to contribute as fathers.

The men in the case studies of male only groups who gave feedback also stated it would have been unlikely that they would have attended a different programme if it had been a ‘*mixed group*’. Whilst delivery in the daytime, when often mixed group programmes are run, would also have made it unlikely for them to be able to attend.

Some men who had attended mixed-carer groups without a partner gave feedback that confirmed they had their basic parenting needs met, but seem to have not experienced the same level of pastoral support that a male only group can provide.

Some men with complex needs who had attended ‘*mixed groups*’ reported this was the only programme offered to them at the time and felt obliged to attend to placate services.

Facilitators who had delivered both types of groups and knew men who had attended both male carer only and mixed groups reported that men had an overall preference for the male only groups.

### **Whole family programmes:**

These are becoming more common in the County and services are attempting to include fathers by encouraging them to attend with their partner and child to reinforce the known learning and improved outcomes for the child if both carers attend.

This is seen as an important development in engaging more men around parenting interventions and is seen as a progressive strategy following the County’s previous use of ‘*mixed groups*’ that have previously largely been attended by mothers.

This report supports settings having a ‘whole family approach’, however, it appears the delivery in itself of a whole family programme is unlikely to meet the needs of all types of fathers, such as separated fathers or men with complex needs and this report would encourage services to use these programmes alongside male only programmes to be most effective.

Whole family programmes are more likely to have more men attending than mixed carer groups as they can be delivered in the evening, facilitators are motivated to deliver

materials to both carers and the ratio of men is higher so they feel less excluded.

These programmes also offer an improvement in enabling workers to meet with male carers and delivery father-inclusive interventions in their own setting than previous groups attended largely by mothers. These programmes have received some positive feedback and satisfaction with men.

However, the men who attended whole-family interventions did not give the same level of positive verbal feedback about the programmes offering additional peer to peer support between the men seen in the male carer only groups. Separated fathers and men with complex needs who have attended whole-family programmes have reported a disconnect with the other carers who have been present with their partners and hearing them describing having regular contact with their children.

## 4.4 Suitable delivery times, daytime vs evenings

Facilitators working with men in the case studies believed it was much more effective to deliver a programme at a time when the most number and most types of male carers can access it.

Historically programmes have not been organised around the needs of fathers, but instead around the needs of the workers at the setting or the female carers that the programme was primarily aimed at. This has meant daytime delivery is common.

Examples are provided in the case studies when men were able to access parenting support at programmes delivered in twilight, evening and Saturday morning sessions. This increased the likelihood of working fathers being able to attend as well as separated fathers who without regular contact with their children would not normally access settings in the daytime.

This was evidenced by far greater numbers of men attending programmes in the evening rather than the daytime and was reflected in the positive survey scores completed by male carers when father inclusive programmes were delivered around 7-9pm.

This report is aware that the County may need to challenge its current workforce to commit to hours beyond 9-5pm, as it appears there is an institutionalised service model built around the needs of female staff and female users.

It has been noted that the practice of Early Intervention Hub workers delivering whole family programmes in the evening is now beginning to grow as services recognise the benefits of attracting fathers. The delivery of evening 'whole family' programmes has the potential to engage both the male carer and an older child.

However, this inclusive option is not yet being used by Children's Centres delivering whole family programmes for babies and younger children of 0-5 years. By ignoring Saturday morning or twilight times Children's Centres may be continuing to exclude male carers with younger children as a result.

## 4.5 Male facilitators vs female facilitators

Fathers attending the programmes in the case studies gave their most positive feedback where there had been access to a male facilitator, but were also appreciative of competent female facilitation.

Most men expressed a desire for a 'complete male only environment' where they felt more relaxed to explore their parenting capabilities. This was particularly relevant if they had more complex needs and needed time to become self-aware before committing to change. It was helpful if facilitators were experienced in working with men and sensitive to this process.

This report appreciates male facilitation is limited by a finite number of men working in the County. Although male workers are already involved in delivering male only groups to meet the preference by fathers there remains a need by the County to offer greater support and training for female workers in how to work with men so that they can deliver more male only groups.

Feedback from fathers was also positive about female facilitation. It should be noted that this was most positive when female facilitation was within the context of delivering to all male groups. Men felt more comfortable being led by female facilitators when a safe male only environment had been established. Female facilitators were valued highly by male carers if they were confident in delivering the materials, sensitive to the needs of the male group dynamic & valued men's contributions.

Male carers also appreciated it when either the female or male facilitator was able to reassure them about their fears of being judged as incompetent or inferior as men for attending a programme.

Feedback from fathers attending non father-inclusive programmes was that they felt least engaged by female facilitators when there were a culmination of other factors that appeared to exclude them. This included female facilitators delivering a standardised programme, without any acknowledgement of concepts of fatherhood or masculinities and the programme was largely attended by mothers.

## 4.6 Length of inclusive programmes

Male carers do not use services as regularly as female carers do and as such view a programme's length as an exclusion to attending.

Whilst it is common practice that workers recognise this issue when working with other target groups, such as young carers etc, who are initially reluctant to engage with service not designed for them, men are often expected to fit into the one model fits all approach when seeking parenting skills support.

In contrast female carers, who may have already accessed numerous services before attending a parenting programme may feel more comfortable committing to longer programmes, which can be up to 12 weeks long.

This has been confirmed by facilitators working with men who believe that shorter length programmes, such as those around 8 weeks appeal more to men. Feedback by male carers attending shorter programmes also stated that they preferred this length of initial commitment "when offered the choice by services".

However, potential disengagement with longer courses of 10 and 12 weeks has been averted in situations where programmes were delivered to all male groups.

This is due to workers ensuring they had created a welcoming and sustained male environment. Male carers attending the father inclusive programmes in the case studies gave feedback that they felt an '*all male group*' was key in allowing them to take ownership of the group and committing to the extra weeks of the course in order to complete it.

It should be noted that longer evidence based courses may provide a more substantial offer to men, than say a one of workshop, and if delivered in a way that engages men should not automatically be seen as a deterrent for participation.

However, there appears to be a combined excluding effect when a programme is considered too long by men and other father-inclusive strategies are not offered by facilitators to offset this factor. Fathers who had attended both longer and shorter programmes provided verbal feedback that they were least satisfied when attending longer standardised programmes, delivered to groups of mainly mothers, by female facilitators who were unaware of this length factor.

## 4.7 Assessments of Outcomes and Impact

Facilitators confirmed that they used the same pre and post assessment tools that are provided with each evidence based programme regardless of whether they were delivered to male carer only or mixed carer groups. This would imply a neutral gender response to the assessment of outcomes

There are some challenges to gathering a body of evidence of long term outcomes for male carers and their children as it may be harder to track men over time than female carers who attend programmes. This is because female carers are the main users of early years settings and parenting programmes and female carers are most likely to continue to access other services following the completion of a course.

However, it appears that programmes that are being delivered exclusively to male carers are beginning to enable practitioners to focus their efforts to track outcomes for men and their children over time.

One of the case studies, the Webster-Stratton pilot workshops for dads demonstrated this tracking process with facilitators asking men to scale their parenting skills 6 months later. This demonstrated that male carers were continuing to use the parenting techniques learnt on the course and positive gains in their child's behaviour were still being recorded in the home. This also gave the facilitators an opportunity to offer some of the male carers additional parenting advice and support now that their child was at a different developmental stage.

In another case study, The Family Links for dads programme, facilitators helped the men who had previously completed the programme to organise a reunion several months later. This enabled fathers to reflect on gains made, continue peer to peer support and report positive feedback to the setting.

It was noted that in these situations where the facilitators were based in the setting and also had a role offering family support, it was more likely that they would be able to track, record and assess ongoing outcomes for the men and their families.

This was opposed to facilitators who were only involved in delivering the programme and were not based at the setting and did not track outcomes other than gathering end of course evaluations and feedback. This was a concern if male carers did not continue to engage with the setting, the facilitator no longer had a role to play at the setting and other support workers did not continue to engage with the male participants.

Oxfordshire County Council has an important role in ensuring interventions are being evaluated and this report is aware of its ongoing attempts to provide its workers assessment tools for parenting interventions. The increasing use of the Outcome Star tool by Children's Centres workers enables them to offer men one-to-one support and track their outcomes over time following their completion of a parenting intervention.

The recent request in the Early Intervention Hubs Directory for the use of the TOPSE tool also offers a definite means to assess impact with men attending programmes in these settings.

## 4.8 The availability of programmes for men in Oxfordshire - An Equality and Safeguarding issue

***“Across the UK, Government policy and legislation require providers to engage with fathers. There is evidence that failure to engage with fathers compromises service delivery to mothers and children, at times putting them at risk.”***<sup>27</sup>

(The Fatherhood Institute's guidance on effective parenting interventions with fathers, 2009)



This report believes that the current decision to reduce the availability of 'Man Enough', an effective Oxfordshire parenting intervention for men is a safeguarding concern. This is due to the removal of The Family Caring Trust programme, upon which Man Enough is based, from the list of approved evidence based parenting programmes. There is no evidence of settings planning to deliver approved programmes to fathers or in a father-inclusive manner. This lack of availability has the potential for creating a safeguarding issue for children of male carers with risky behaviours who are not being offered parenting support.

There is another programme, 'Making Changes' which is an effective 27 week perpetrator programme for abusive behaviours. This does not address the parenting needs of fathers except in relation to their abusive behaviours. It would therefore be inappropriate to automatically refer men with parenting needs to this programme.

The repeated concerns by professionals working with men is that there is currently an inadequate availability of programmes targeted specifically at male carers and

mainstream interventions are not yet being delivered in a father-inclusive manner in order for them to be effective for vulnerable men with complex needs or risky behaviours.

This report has been made aware of this current safeguarding issue from feedback gathered from a range of sources. These include fathers with complex needs seeking to attend male only courses, Children's Centre and Early Intervention Hub workers seeking to deliver father-inclusive programmes, Social Workers involved in Child Protection seeking to signpost men to more effective male only interventions and CAFCASS, who work with separated fathers, seeking reassurances of the ongoing availability of programmes for men.

Whilst niche intervention work for vulnerable fathers, young fathers and separated fathers has been developed and championed by support workers on the margins, this has not been replicated by mainstream services in the County. This means services continue to exclude male carers and their children.

Of the 5 case studies in this report identified as delivering father-inclusive practice, only the Family Caring Trust programme can be regarded as having offered a sustainable model over several years.

Each of the other evidenced based programmes can only claim to be at an early pilot stage when it comes to being delivered solely to male carers. It is hoped that service commissioners will ensure these initiatives will be developed into sustainable practice across the County, by instructing Children's Centres and Early Intervention Hubs to deliver a wider range of evidence based programmes in a father-inclusive manner, to all male groups and by facilitators trained to work effectively with men.

This report believes a potential safeguarding issue can be avoided by ensuring programme availability for men. This would require settings to deliver both a clustered model so men could access support at the time of need in any setting and settings delivering interventions individually to ensure men could access support at their own setting and location.

## 4.9 Evidence based material 'fidelity' vs father inclusive practices and gendered approaches

Evidence based parenting programmes are underpinned by sound theoretical principles that have been supported by a substantial amount of research in the field of child development.

Facilitators of programmes delivered to men in the County all used evidence based materials and attempted to adhere to the materials, methodology and programme fidelity, but their opinions differed regarding how programmes could be most effective with men. This appears to depend on the balance between fidelity to materials and the use of father-inclusive delivery. This highlights that facilitators are attempting to balance to need to deliver proven effective materials with the need to engage men with these materials effectively, so that they could maximise attendance, engagement and improved outcomes for men and their families.

In some cases, facilitators felt that if a programme was evidence based, but did not employ father-inclusive practice it would not be as effective for male carers. In other

cases, facilitators felt if a programme was delivered in a father-inclusive manner but lacked fidelity to an approved programme it would not be as effective for male carers.

**This report looked at each of the male carer group case studies and evaluated the relationship between the attempts to maintain fidelity and the attempts to be father-inclusive.**

Some facilitators delivered programmes in a flexible way, such as the Webster-Stratton workshops, which produced a very higher volume of men but may have diluted the programme offer as some men did not attend all the workshops.

Other facilitators delivered materials in a very father-inclusive manner, such as the Family Caring Trust programmes. The County Council has not included these particular materials in its streamlined approved list of evidence based programmes.

Service commissioners believe some materials are based on more rigorous research. Facilitators have felt obliged, or have been instructed by senior management, to prioritise the delivery of the County's approved programmes.

The evidence based programmes that have been included in the County Council's approved list have so far had limited impact with men.

This may be due to the fact they are not yet being delivered in a father-inclusive manner, with an over-emphasis on fidelity of a programme as the only benchmark of effective practice. This has led to inflexible approaches, deterring men from attending and providing limited or no outcomes for male carers. This has been demonstrated by the significant absence of data provided by settings for this report of male carers attending these approved evidence based programmes. It has also reflected in the fact men continue to report dissatisfaction with evidence based programmes that do not attempt to use father-inclusive strategies and practice.

However, in another case, such as the Family Links for Dads programme, facilitators were able to demonstrate it was possible to maintain fidelity of an approved evidence based programme and introduce father-inclusive delivery. This report was impressed by its success. This report believes that this model could be replicated in settings across the County in order for programmes to be delivered to men in the most effective way.

**Please note that the length of these following summaries is due to the very informative discussions held with the providers. It does not reflect on the effectiveness of their programmes.**

### **The Family Caring Trust for dads**

Our research found that the programme most often used in a father inclusive way was the The Family Caring Trust programme. Some centre workers used it as a programme to targeting fathers in their settings through group work or one to one support. Others commissioned the Man Enough programme that is based on these materials.

Evidence provided by these programmes show that it has consistently delivered positive outcomes for male carers. No other programme was able to provide as effective practice with fathers in the County for this report.

This report was asked specifically to re-evaluate the evidence base of this programme in

light of the decision to remove it from the streamlined approved list of evidence based programmes to be delivered by settings in the County.

- These resources have been among the most popular universal parenting materials in Britain and Ireland - over half a million parents have experienced at least one of the low-cost community based courses.
- We understand that at the time it was removed from the list of approved programmes it was judged as having the same level of evidence base as other evidence based programmes, such as Family Links.
- The Family Caring Trust programme has been known to be used effectively with BME male carers in the County and has been translated into Afrikaans, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Icelandic, Japanese, Latvian, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Urdu, Welsh and Xhosa.
- National Academy for Parenting Research confirmed that: *“the ‘Noughts to Sixes’ material is underpinned by an evaluation demonstrating significant improvements in parent and child behaviours. The pre/post use of standardised measures suggested significant improvements in child behaviour, parental well being and parental stress.”*
- 2011 analysis of pre-post evaluations from five regions in the UK showed that the programme is: *“an effective preventative strategy providing parents with support in managing their children’s emotions and behaviour. Parents were positive about the impact the programme had, valuing its informality, flexibility, encouraging examination of parenting styles.”*

This report looked at the specific delivery of this programme in Oxfordshire.

In the case studies, the programme stuck to fidelity, with 8 weekly sections, use of video, use of role play & use of homework tasks. It also offered flexibility for male group reflection time and discussion creating a strong male peer to peer supportive environment. Children's Centres, Early Intervention Hubs, Action For Children and Social Care continue to seek to use it across the County as more co-facilitators have become involved in its delivery over time. Each programme was delivered in numerous settings by different facilitators, averaging 5-10 dads each time run.

Men attending this programme gave very high satisfaction rates with the facilitation of the sessions, the materials and exercises used, its shorter length of 8 weeks appealed, the ease of the exercises to understand and replicate at home, its use of video to overcome literacy issues and its use of translator and translated materials for BME carers. There were no concerns from men about programme fidelity.

The only concern by men was with the use of dated videos, which are currently being updated by the programme makers.

Facilitators also recognised the lack of information provided on attachment theory issues and corresponding child brain development. It is yet to be seen whether the current revision of the programme by the Family Caring Trust will include these topics.

Facilitators felt men accessing the Family Caring Trust programme did like to know some of the theory behind the materials but overall the men were far more satisfied that the programme was inclusive and had managed to get them to attend a programme.

Feedback from some men stated they would not have attended alternative programmes, such as mixed groups or whole family groups as they felt they solely focussed on material fidelity and did not offer additional opportunities for men to discuss fatherhood, male parenting styles or provide access to male peer to peer support. Men also reported that they felt they would be in a minority and feel excluded by a female dominated ethos.

It must be a concern that the programme that has been produced the most evidence of father engagement and has been consistently delivered in a father inclusive manner is no longer approved to be used by settings.

This report recognises that there are weaknesses in the limited range of content, e.g little reference to attachment, brain development and wider child development.

However, despite the popularity and use of the programme it has been removed without any thought of an alternative or attempts to ensure that father-inclusive practices are incorporated into the approved programmes.

The researcher asked for feedback from facilitators regarding the removal of the Family Caring Trust materials from the latest approved list of evidence based programmes. Facilitators from Children Centres, Early Intervention Hub and Social Care who have all delivered this programme stated their universal disapproval of this decision and in particular their dismay at the lack of consultation with them by Oxfordshire County Council. They also were surprised that this decision was made without the County providing any evidence or data of which programmes are most effective in providing outcomes for men and their families. They also stated that to remove an effective intervention for men without any attempts to support workers to deliver the approved programmes in a more effective and inclusive manner demonstrated a lack of commitment to the needs of fathers across the County by both service commissioners and senior management. Some stated that this amounted to institutionalised bias.

## **Webster-Stratton for dads - Workshops**

This programme involved 8 sessions of Webster-Stratton evidence based materials and these were delivered as workshops to a male only group. The workshops used the same materials, handouts, exercises and assessment tools but were structured differently to appeal particularly to men. The introductory workshops encouraged men to take ownership of the future topics covered by asking them to suggest themes to cover.

Although the men were given this opportunity to come up with the topics, these matched the same evidence based materials which were then delivered in the following 8 workshops, covering positive praise, discipline, avoiding negative attention, time out, emotional flooding, making meal times fun etc.

The use of an extra introductory session allowed the men to provide their own 'top tips' on useful parenting skills for fathers and also used video clips and a group discussions to question what good male parenting looked like, the diversity of different men's caring roles such as separated fathers and the benefits to children's outcomes from including fathers in services.

The workshops were co-facilitated by the Webster-Stratton trained worker and the Centre's dads support worker and the group developed as a strong peer to peer support network. It included local fathers and fathers referred with complex needs.

This programme attracting a significant number of men, with 34 in total attending. This was in contrast to 4 who had previously attended the regular mixed group Webster-Stratton programme at the Centre, which had not been primarily targeted at male carers.

It could be argued that the weakness in this approach was in its lack of fidelity to a structured course. However, the programme was advertised and delivered as a series of workshop topics specifically as a 'gateway' for as many men to engage with the Centre. A programme attended by all participants is bound to have more significant outcomes than when attendance at workshops is less regular. However, such workshops can be used as a useful gateway into longer programmes for fathers for whom the workshops were significant icebreaker and motivators to learn more. A range of men completed all 8 workshops and another then went on to complete a further full parenting programme.

It was also an attempt to demonstrate how inclusion strategies could vastly increase engagement of men who may previously been reluctant to attend other mixed group programmes offered to them.

The workshops enabled the Centre to reach young fathers, separated fathers, BME fathers and fathers with complex needs and several accessed separate one to one support with the dads worker with significant positive outcomes.

Assessments using the Webster-Stratton evaluations were taken and these demonstrated improved outcomes for fathers, who were then tracked and 6 months later assessed with their children's positive outcomes evidenced.

The facilitators' next steps are to deliver the complete Webster-Stratton programme just for dads but as a 'closed' group of men from start to finish. This would ensure fidelity to the materials yet keeping it targeted at male carers and delivered in an evening by male and female co-facilitators.

## Family Links for Dads

This programme's aim was to repeat the use of its existing evidence based materials which had been delivered previously to a mixed group, but deliver them to a group of male carers only. This ensured programme fidelity but gave the setting an opportunity to develop its father-inclusive practice.

The programme was co facilitated by female practitioners and the male carers responded very positively to the facilitation and the programme.

The facilitators also encouraged the male carers to meet up for a follow up session after the initial programme had been completed.

There was effective joint working process between the Hub and the Children's Centre.

At this meet up, the male carers agreed that following their positive involvement in a parenting programme they thought it would be useful for partners to attend a course to reaffirm the learning in the family.

In their experiences of this programme, the men felt that in future a separate male carer programme would still be better suited for other men to learn skills than couples coming on the same one. The overall opinion was that the fathers didn't feel they would have contributed much as much if they had attended a mixed group, stating:

*"if it's a mixed group, men might sit back and let women come forward with ideas"*

This pilot could be used as a blueprint for other settings to mainstream their parenting offer to men using their approved programmes and the success of this programme has effectively demonstrated that all settings across the county should be capable of delivering a male only group programme.

Settings seeking to replicate this approach would still require to think in father-inclusive ways, to be able to target men to attend and have facilitators prepared to work in the evenings who would be competent in delivering the materials with father's needs and concerns in mind.

### **Take 3 for Dads**

This programme's aim was also to repeat the use of its existing evidence based materials which had been delivered previously to a mixed group, but deliver them to a group of male carers only.

Programme fidelity was ensured and there was also an opportunity for the setting to undergo a process of reflection of its father-inclusive practice particularly with the feedback from a colleague who felt the element of the male carer only group was instrumental in its success.

In terms of inclusiveness, the facilitator commented that he was keen to reassure the male carers they would not be judged as inadequate for attending a parenting programme and they should be praised for seeking to learn skills to improve their circumstances. This programme again highlighted how existing materials could easily and effectively be turned into a male inclusive offer, if the motivations of the workers and setting's Manager were in place to do so.

### **PEEP for Dads**

This programme's aim was to repeat the use of existing PEEP materials the setting had already used with female carers and deliver them to an all male carer only group.

The fidelity of the programme was ensured through the initial delivery of a 6 week programme, using the same materials and activities with the men who attended.

This programme's success at inclusiveness was driven by the willingness of the worker to include fathers with babies in the Centres' post-natal services and the fathers who attended being willing to champion the service to other prospective ante-natal fathers.

This could be replicated across the county in Children's Centres seeking to adopt a whole family approach.

This particular programme has now expanded and operates on a rolling basis so that new dads with babies are able to continually access services.

The facilitator is keen to expand the offer to include male carers of 1 year olds as well as under 1 year old babies.

## **PART FIVE: Initial consultations with practitioners**

### **5.1 Summary of Feedback**

We have taken earlier drafts of this report to representatives of services. These have included:

**Oxfordshire Parenting Forum meetings**

**Oxfordshire Fathers Champion Network meetings**

**City Children's Centre Leads meetings**

**The Early Intervention Service Thematic Group for parenting programmes meetings**

We are grateful to our colleagues for their frank and honest expression of their views and experiences. Feedback from these groups has led us to review and refine some of our recommendations. We see this report as the start of an organic process of discussion and action towards best practice. We hope that further consultations and discussions based on this report will continue to enlighten and challenge practice and that the recommendations that follow will be used as a road map to moving father-inclusive parenting programmes from the margins to the mainstream.

### **5.2 Early Intervention Service Directory 2014**

It is encouraging to see some common ground developing in the advice given to Early Intervention Hubs over making parenting programmes father inclusive:

*"We recognise that the programme across the year has biased a particular gender group to the detriment of a whole family approach."*

*"EIS must be proactive about making their programmes accessible to targeted groups (including male carers and other carers who are underrepresented in accessing programmes), and to refining the delivery of the programme accordingly without undermining programme fidelity."*

*"Some services are already exploring use of single gendered groups and using additional introduction taster sessions geared toward particular people to encourage participation."*



## Recommendations from the Early Intervention Service Directory 2014:

1. Programmes to be delivered twice a year at each setting.
2. Programmes to be delivered in evening times.
3. Programmes to be whole-family focussed, so possibly including fathers.
4. Programmes to be clustered where this can be more effective.
5. Programmes to be offered to single gendered groups.
6. Pro-active refining of the delivery of programmes to encourage participation

### 5.3 Useful discussion energisers

The following discussion topics were found to be useful in developing thought and discussion and are recommended to colleagues wishing to set up discussions based on this report:

- ❖ Do elected members and stakeholders in fathers work believe there are more gains than losses in making the delivery of parenting programmes more father inclusive?
- ❖ Do Centre Managers, Senior managers and service commissioners believe there are more gains than losses in making parenting programmes more father inclusive?

- ❖ Do Area Managers and Centre Managers believe that they are required to include fathers in parenting programmes?
- ❖ If they are required to do this to meet the County's Key performance Indicators, how successfully are they currently doing this?
- ❖ What are the next steps needed to help Centre Managers meet their parenting KPI's by including more fathers in their parenting programmes?

- ❖ Are service commissioners aware of the possible safeguarding issue that will develop if Social Services and CAFCASS cannot refer men to programmes that are being delivered in a father-inclusive manner?
- ❖ What evidence do service commissioners have that the current approved evidence based programmes are being delivered effectively with men?
- ❖ What next steps are Oxfordshire County Council prepared to take to ensure that their approved evidence based programmes will be delivered more effectively with fathers in the future?

- ❖ What can services in Oxfordshire learn from national research and inclusion strategies with men?
- ❖ What are the next steps services in Oxfordshire can take to incorporate national best practices in fathers work?
- ❖ What next steps could be taken by Oxfordshire County Council to provide more father inclusive training to its settings?
- ❖ Should Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Parenting Forum work together to take this work forward?

# PART SIX: Conclusions and Recommendations

## 6.1 Conclusions

**The top 10 reasons why Oxfordshire should give greater priority to father-inclusive parenting programmes:**



1. Greater father involvement enhances children's life chances in many ways and safeguards them from harm. See part two.
2. A whole family approach to vulnerable children requires the engagement of both mothers and fathers.
3. Practitioners who learn father-inclusive practice find that it works and enhances their practice and outcomes.
4. Involving fathers in parenting programmes helps the county to meet its Key Performance Indicators in relation to the inclusion of target groups in services.
5. Current national frameworks and key government policy and legislative documents e.g The Healthy Child Programme, require services to engage with fathers.
6. Father-inclusive parenting programmes help to close a service gap in the availability of programmes for vulnerable men and their children.
7. This report provides a sustainable mainstreamed model of effective parenting programmes for men by offering a clustered and individual setting approach.
8. Oxfordshire can enhance its reputation and image of excellence by delivering best practices, e.g moving beyond an 'agnostic' approach to a more 'gender differentiated' approach.
9. Oxfordshire can meet its value for money objectives by getting more outcomes with fathers through effective practice.
10. Changing attitudes and improving practice do not require additional funds.

## 6.2 Recommendations

**What ‘Next Steps’ do services in Oxfordshire need to take in order to provide sustainable and effective parenting skills support for male carers?**



1. For evidence based programmes to be most effective for men, they should be delivered in either male carer only groups or mixed groups where the settings have used father-inclusive strategies as detailed in this report.
2. Fathers should be entitled to choose between a male carer only group and a mixed group and settings should provide both of these.
3. County approval for evidence based programmes should require evidence that they have been delivered to and been effective with men or male carer only groups.
4. When selecting group facilitators for parenting programmes attended by men, facilitators should have to show evidence of their experience of working effectively with men.
5. Father-inclusive training should be provided by the County to enable facilitators to deliver evidence based programmes in more father-inclusive ways.
6. In order to ensure that parenting programmes are delivered at times when fathers are most likely to attend, Centre managers should be reminded of the requirements for staff to be available for work in evening and weekend times.
7. Workers should be paid for their labour or made an offer of toil if they are asked to deliver parenting interventions for male carers outside normal working hours.
8. Children’s Centres should follow Early Intervention Hubs lead in committing to the delivery of at least one and preferably two male carer only group interventions per year, as outlined in the latest EIHub directory on parenting programmes.
9. The County should audit its current use of mixed-group and whole-family programmes in Children Centres and Early Intervention Hubs. Evidence needs to be gathered on their effectiveness in engaging fathers.
10. Since settings are already likely to have one-to-one support available for female carers through their ‘normal’ service offer, settings should also ensure they make an offer of one-to-one support to men attending parenting programmes. This would consolidate any gains achieved on the programme and support male carers’ needs.
11. Once a setting has delivered a parenting programme ‘for Dads’ it should offer progression by delivering other services ‘for Dads’. E.g ‘First Aid for Dads’, ‘HENRY for dads’, ‘Baby Massage sessions for Dads’, ‘Mental Wellbeing sessions for Dads’ etc. This can ensure settings are extending their gender differentiated approach.
12. This report recognising the successful work achieved by The Family Nurse Partnership in supporting young carers. However, as outlined in a previous Spurgeons report, a multi-agency forum and pathway of early intervention work for young male carers still needs to be developed in the county. Given the experience of the Youth Offending Service and the Early Intervention Hubs in youth work they are both in a

position to assist the development of parenting education to young fathers. Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board are developing training for work with young men and fathers. The delivery of the nationally recognised 'Hit the Ground Crawling' programme would use useful materials. This process would require greater joint working and agreed protocols for information and data sharing between Teenage Pregnancy Strategy groups, The Family Nurse Partnership, Youth workers and Hubs in order to identify and signpost young fathers to this support.

13. Children's Centres should also have a greater role in supporting young fathers through their post-natal services. In cases where young fathers separate from their child's mother (who is likely to continue to be supported by The Family Nurse Partnership), young fathers are more likely to disengage from the FNP intervention. Without data to identify, contact or engage with these fathers, Children's Centres have little way to promote their services to them. Separated fathers quickly disappear from services completely. Creating a data protocol and joint working links between Children's Centres and The Family Nurse Partnership would ensure separated young fathers continue to benefit from the county's post-natal services.
14. The County should consider the delivery of a relevant SEND evidence based parenting programme, such as previously delivered by Barnados, to meet the need of fathers with children with SEN or a disability who are reluctant to engage in mainstream parenting support. Collaboration with SCOPE, who are currently developing their offer of a support group for fathers with children with additional needs would be advisable.
15. Since male only groups have been shown to be more effective in increasing male participation levels, Centre Managers obliged to meet their Key Performance Indicators 2 & 7, should consider delivering parenting interventions solely at male carers in addition to any existing mixed group or whole group programmes.

1. *PI # 2 "Increase the numbers and % of the following target groups living in the children's centre catchment that are reached by any centre: workless families, BME, lone parents, fathers"*
2. *KPI # 7 "Increase number and % of families that have a positive outcome from an intervention that promotes early child/parent interaction and communication e.g PEEP, Webster Stratton Incredible Years, Family Links."*
3. *KPI # 7 "Centres will need to record the numbers of parents attending courses, Centres will need to collate evaluations to show the difference made from pre course evaluations to end of course evaluations"*

16. Centre Managers hoping to meet their Key Performance Indicator 7, should use appropriate evaluation methods and be able to demonstrate impact with fathers. If this is not happening it is recommended that area managers both challenge centres that are not evaluating outcomes for fathers and provide them with appropriate evaluation tools. Children's Centres should follow the lead of the EiHub directory that recommends the use of TOPSE as an appropriate tool to evaluate impact of parenting programmes.

17. A greater emphasis needs to be put on the assessment of outcomes and impact on male carers and their children. This is particularly relevant if facilitators delivering the programmes are not based at the setting and do not provide this. In these situations it is important that joint work with support staff in the setting is organised, so that assessments are carried out with carers by centre workers. This should be done both at the time of the intervention and at future sessions to track impact.
18. Settings wanting to increase their reach to fathers should consider the use of parenting workshops targeted at male carers, which can act as initial 'gateways' for men to access full parenting programmes or one-to-one support.
19. Once The Family Caring Trust's materials have been updated and released, Oxfordshire County Council should initiate a father-inclusive pilot to evaluate them & make a longer term decision on its use in the County.
20. In order to avoid a service gap for fathers, following the removal of the Family Caring Trust from the approved list, the methodology unique to Man Enough should be preserved, disseminated and embedded in the approved programmes.
21. In order to demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding children, the county should ensure they make greater attempts to deliver evidence based programmes in a father-inclusive manner. Availability of such programmes should be communicated to social care and CAFCASS so they are able to signpost men with risky behaviours to these services.
22. Following the introduction of up to 12 month shared paternal leave from April 2015, services should prepare themselves for the expected increase of 5-10% in demand by male carers seeking to access postnatal services.
23. The county should expand its post and antenatal parenting offers to vulnerable fathers, e.g through PEEP and the new 8 weeks Family Links antenatal parenting programme, 'Welcome to the World'. This focusses on topics including empathy, infant brain development, healthy choices, managing stress and promoting self-esteem and confidence, and effective communication. These intervention would offer a greater focus on early intervention and safeguarding as opposed to practical birth preparation that the current one off 'Parent Craft' session is built on.
24. With 'restorative' programmes now being delivered in the Early Intervention Hubs, consideration should be given to the evaluation of them for father-inclusiveness. Attendance and outcomes for fathers and their children should be included in the evaluation process. Settings should continue to encourage staff to attend training the trainer sessions so this offer can be expanded across services and reach more families.
25. Services should refrain from referring male carers to parenting programmes as a catch-all process when it may be more effective to signpost them to specific support that is available for men in the County. Settings should ensure that support workers are capable of providing a 'solution focussed' needs assessment with male carers before signposting them to specialist support.
26. In cases such as signposting men with abusive behaviours, settings should be aware it is more appropriate for men to self-refer themselves to the 27 week community

based domestic violence programme, 'Making Changes', rather than being referred to a parenting programme.

27. Male carers should be able to access male inclusive parenting programmes at the 'time of need' by all settings offering programmes throughout the year.
28. Services should offer a 'clustered' approach to the availability of male inclusive parenting programmes. This would ensure that men would be able to access a programme at the 'time of need'. Settings should be able to offer support to men outside their immediate catchment if they have space on programmes not filled by men within their catchment. This has been demonstrated by the multiple delivery of the Family Caring Trust programmes that used to ensure a widespread programme is readily available for men throughout the year.
29. In addition to a clustered approach it remains important that all individual settings should still become more father-inclusive, rather than signposting men to another setting and avoiding the need to commit to this work themselves. This would widen access and ensure that programmes are available in the 'area of need' for all men in the County.
30. Settings and agencies should make a greater effort to communicate between themselves about start dates of parenting programmes so that men can be signposted to them, including informing Oxfordshire Family Information Service with specific dates. Programmes need to be more openly promoted publicly and between inter agencies to ensure start and end dates tally and gaps in service delivery are avoided.
31. Senior managers, service commissioners and members of Oxfordshire Parenting Forum involved in this report should agree to meet to disseminate the findings, in order that suitable changes to policy with regards to father-inclusive practice can be actioned.
32. In order to make parenting programmes become more father-inclusive the wider issue of driving father-inclusive practice from the margins to the mainstream of all services needs to be addressed. The county now needs to commit to a sustained period of championing of father-inclusive practices across all its services and settings and at all levels of management. A multi-disciplinary 'Fathers Champions' Forum is required to be set up at county level, attended by relevant senior managers and stakeholders, who can oversee the wider context of father-inclusive services.
33. Bath & North East Somerset Council's offer of meeting with senior managers and service commissioners of Oxfordshire County Council should now be taken up. This would allow shared learning and enable them to demonstrate the increased outcomes for families that were achieved following their year long campaign of father-inclusive practice, 'Celebrating Fatherhood'. ([www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cf-booklet\\_130610\\_web\\_0.pdf](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cf-booklet_130610_web_0.pdf))