

**“INVOLVING FATHERS - IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR
CHILDREN”**

Strategic Framework for Men in Their Role as Fathers

Department for Child Protection

2007



Department for Child Protection
Government of Western Australia

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Introduction

The context of fatherhood continues to undergo considerable change. Historically, a father's connection to his children has often been measured by the economic contribution to the family and a child's access to resources continues to be an important part of their opportunities in life. There is growing recognition that societal changes including the increase in women's involvement in paid employment, has forced a broadening of parenting roles and conceptualisations of fatherhood. Optimising the involvement of fathers in the lives of children brings numerous benefits for all family members, particularly children. While raising children brings great rewards, it also poses many challenges for parents throughout the life cycle of a family. Supporting families to meet these challenges is crucial.

The Department for Child Protection is committed to supporting good outcomes for all children. The strategic framework for men in their role as fathers allows for a more consolidated approach to supporting fatherhood and recognises the important role that men have in providing safety, care and protection to children.

The Department for Child Protection

The Department for Child Protection's mission is to provide for the protection of and care for children and young people and to support at-risk individuals and families in resolving crises. The Department has a central role in supporting the care and protection of children and young people within Western Australia.

Through the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*, the Department:

- promotes the wellbeing of children, other individuals, families and communities;
- acknowledges the primary role of parents, families and communities in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children;
- encourages and support parents, families and communities in carrying out that role;
- provides for the protection and care of children in circumstances where their parents have not given, or are unlikely or unable to give, that protection and care.

Why is a strategic framework for men in their role as fathers required?

Strengthening the notion of fatherhood so it is explicitly valued and viewed as integral to achieving positive outcomes for children is a key aim of the framework. The Department for Child Protection has long recognised the importance of paternal investment in the healthy development of children. However, engaging men as fathers both in working towards providing safety for children and service provision can be difficult, particularly for those men

who contend with issues of identity and social and economic inclusion. Being able to better support men at all stages of the family life cycle will lead to greater opportunities for children and families.

There are six key factors that necessitate a strategic framework for men in their roles as fathers.

1. *The Department operates from a child-centred and family inclusive philosophy.*

The Department has as its central focus the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. All the resources available to children should be identified and acknowledged including men in their role as fathers and the extended paternal family. Focusing on improving the engagement of men in service provision could lead to better outcomes for children and greater entry points into their lives. A child centred philosophy must also accord that active and responsible fathering brings substantial benefits to children.

2. *Men as fathers represent a significant customer base of the Department and funded non government services.*

Men as fathers currently engage to varying extents in many of the different service areas within the Department and funded non government services. The Department's processes need to ensure that they are equitable, accessible and responsive to individuals and families and inclusive of fathers. An improved awareness of the needs and expectations of fathers, particularly in relation to best providing for the care, protection and wellbeing of their children, will facilitate more responsive service provision.

3. *Men as fathers are good for children and families.*

Men who are active and responsible as fathers provide numerous benefits to their children and the children's mother. Men in their role as fathers who are positively involved in their children's lives create greater opportunities and outcomes for those children as well as benefiting their own psychological and emotional well being¹.

4. *The changing roles, expectations and aspirations of men as fathers.*

The significant social and cultural changes that continue to occur have resulted in greater social expectations of men's family roles² and greater expectations of fathers themselves. Changes in the composition and structure of families require a commensurate change in the way the Department understands and supports families.

¹ See Palkovitz, R (2002) for more complete list of the psychological and emotional benefits to fathers.

² Yeung 2004

5. The changing policy, research and program development trends.

Considerable focus continues to emerge on the roles, obligations and effects of fathers on family life. Internationally, policy and research networks have examined the substantial role that fathers have on the healthy functioning of children, families and communities³. The development of the framework ensures that the Department remains progressive in its services and strategies.

6. Establishing male positive and father inclusive practices within a gender equity framework

Valuing the unique and important contribution of fathers to family and community life underpins the framework. The Department reaffirms the principles that explicitly value fathers and father inclusive practices. Additionally, engaging fathers in a greater proportion of child care and domestic life promotes greater gender equity to mothers both within and outside of the family.

Men in their role as fathers and child protection systems

The complexities faced by child protection agencies in engaging men in their role as fathers are many and varied. Generally, child protection agencies have overlooked fathers in the dynamics of child abuse and neglect except in the context of them enacting violence or abuse against children⁴. The cumulative effects of attending to the negative behaviours that some men enact in the family can have workers viewing all fathers as either a danger, disinterested or incapable⁵. These differing constructions of fathers connect to broader cultural messages that situate fatherhood in a series of different ways. Similarly, beliefs and assumptions about fathers can influence whether they are even considered at all.

Involving men in their role as fathers in case management and service provision presents considerable challenges. Field workers sometimes have to engage with fathers who are angry, aggressive or distressed and externalising these emotional responses. Engaging with these men around the protection and care of children, particularly if they are being held accountable for maltreating or neglecting a child, can be emotionally charged. Just as it presents a challenge for workers, it also presents opportunities to invite the man to work with the Department to achieve the best outcomes and experiences for his child. Particularly if the man has identified the protection and care of his child as important to his own aims as a father.

³ National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (2003).

⁴ O'Hagan 1997 Pruet 2000

⁵ A danger to their children, partner and the worker, disinterested about their children and their family or incapable of providing adequate care or nurturing.

There are a series of challenges that field staff face when working with men in their role as fathers. Some of these include:

- Easier to engage with mothers as they are more 'visible' and are often seen as the primary caregiver⁶;
- Potential bias in assessment, case planning and intervention⁷;
- The threat of or actual violence or intimidation by male service users to Departmental staff⁸;
- The personal and professional complexities experienced when intervening in situations of sexual abuse against children;
- Finding the time and resources to be able to invest in engaging men in their role as fathers and the paucity of referral options;
- Family 'gate keeping' father involvement, particularly when mothers fear Departmental involvement as they believe that involving their partner/child's father may reflect poorly on them and lead to their children coming into care;
- Delineating between those men who pose considerable risk with little likelihood of change and those men who pose a risk but will respond to therapeutic and other interventions; and
- Looking beyond the presenting issue or person to gauge a clear understanding of all resources available to the child – particularly the paternal resources which have been historically over looked and under utilised.

There are times when excluding men in their role as fathers within the Department's processes is appropriate if not necessary. Encouraging the involvement of some fathers in the lives of their family exposes children and women to unacceptable risk. To facilitate or promote this without the appropriate processes in place, like supervised contact or through a formal contact centre, could place family members at risk. However, not all men who come into contact with the Department pose considerable or continual risk.

When fathers are suspected of maltreating their child a range of intrapersonal processes occur for that man including the primary emotional response of fear⁹ and shame¹⁰. For men however, these responses are not masculine and they attempt to respond from a more culturally endorsed emotion for men,

⁶ Mothers are often held accountable for children's safety and well being even when it is not their behaviour that is posing the risk. For example, when their partner is enacting violence or abuse within the family, they are seen as failing to protect their child/ren.

⁷ Rosenberg and Wilcox 2006

⁸ See Littlechild and Bourke 2005 for a more comprehensive discussion on violence against child protection workers.

⁹ Fear that the Department will remove the children, that he will lose his family, that he will be rejected by his familial and social networks, that he will be imprisoned and abandoned.

¹⁰ Shame around failing as a father, around being caught, around being accused, around having his behaviour exposed. Some men struggle with reconciling the role of 'protector' with the fact that they have hurt their child/ren

which is anger and aggression. This response has the added perceived benefit of producing some sense of control over the circumstances and situation. The worker rightly feels intimidated or distressed and may exclude the man from future case work or planning. Similarly, when fathers have had a child maltreated by another person, this can be seen as a staggering failure as a father as one of the key elements of the fathering role historically has been that of 'protector'. Workers need to link these experiences for male clients back to their understandings of gender and culture.

Working effectively with men requires empathy, openness and clarity. Demonstrating empathy for the experiences of men is clearly different to displaying understanding for any inappropriate behaviour. Workers who connect with the experiences of men can often have greater influence over their behaviours and beliefs. Being open and clear around what is and is not negotiable within the case management process often invokes a greater sense of trust from men. Similarly, presenting men with 'facts' around why their positive involvement is important to their children can motivate men to reflect on their role and what changes may be required.

The purpose and objectives of the framework

Purpose

To outline a vision, principles and actions that will inform and guide policy and program development in the area of men in their role as fathers.

Objectives

- 1. The Department's capacity to work with men in their role as fathers for the care and protection of their children is strengthened.***

The framework provides a reference for the improved engagement and support of men in their role as fathers across all service areas of the Department – particularly in relation to the protection and care of children. Increasing the sector's knowledge and skills informed by evidence based practice is essential to achieving this.

- 2. To acknowledge and respond to the changing needs, expectations, aspirations and roles that men occupy in family life.***

Men in their role as fathers represent a diverse and ever changing part of the population. Understanding the diversity in the roles and differences among fathers is important in developing responses. Men who come into contact with the Department and funded non government services represent a significant variety in age, marital status, ethnicity, employment, sexuality and other characteristics.

3. The Department and funded non government services will be more inclusive and accessible for men as fathers.

Improved service responses will best promote the safe and nurturant functioning of families. Better engagement of men within the different service areas of the Department will encourage better use of supports to address parenting and family issues. The framework also aims for an increased number of men as fathers accessing the Department's internal and funded non government services.

Principles

The *Children and Community Services Act 2004* outlines a range of principles that must be observed and considered in the administration of functions under the Act. Within this the best interests of the child is paramount. This means that in performing a function or exercising a power under the Act relating to a child, the consideration of highest priority must be the best interests of the child.

The following principles for this framework are informed by the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*, Department for Child Protection *Strategic Plan 2007-09*, *Cultural Diversity Policy and Strategic Framework 2006-09*, *Capacity Building Strategic Framework to 2009*, *Extended Family Care Strategic Framework 2005*, and the *Indigenous Vision 2005-2009*, and the *National Father-Inclusive Practice Framework Website*.

Guiding principles

- Parents, family and the community have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the child's wellbeing;
- The preferred way of safeguarding and promoting a child's wellbeing is to support the child's parents, family and community in the care of the child;
- A child who is removed from his/her family should be given encouragement and support to maintain contact with the family and significant others, so far as is consistent with the child's best interests;
- Decisions about a child should be consistent with cultural, ethnic and religious values and traditions relevant to the child;

Specific Principles

- The Department recognises that fathers have expertise and knowledge in relation to fatherhood.
- Fathers should be enabled to participate and contribute to family and community life through positive actions of the Department.

- A child's father and extended family are the child's resources that should be available to the child.
- Most men in their role as fathers are not a risk to their family or are abusive. However, where men in their role as fathers maltreat or pose risk to their child/ren they must be held accountable. This accountability must give priority to the safety and wellbeing of children and secondarily be just to and respectful of men.
- Men in their role as fathers must be respected and afforded the same services and opportunities within the Department as other service users.
- Mother and father involvement is seen as equally important to children.
- Father's strengths and existing capacity should be acknowledged, respected and considered in all elements of the Department's work.
- The Department recognises that fathers and mothers contribute most significantly to children when they have a respectful and functioning relationship, including after separation.
- The Department acknowledges that men in their role as fathers represent a significantly diverse group of men. There are multiple ways of being a good and involved father.
- The existing strengths, capacity and knowledge of services and practitioners are recognised by the Department.

Appendix 1 - Background to the framework: the historical context

In 1999 the report *Family and Parent Support Services for Men* was tabled in State Parliament by the Hon Murray Nixon MLC. This report found that although there were a range of relevant services available for men they tended not to access these services even when experiencing severe and complex problems. If men did access services they did so once problems had escalated to the point where the chance of a satisfactory resolution was minimal. The report also found that men are often unaware of available services. Groups specifically identified as requiring particular support included men in isolated and rural communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, men in prison and men who experienced separation from their family. The committee's recommendations included supporting agencies to enable them to improve men's access to appropriate family and parent support services and to improve information about services for men. In response to the Nixon Report, the department increased the capacity of existing services to better engage men as service users through providing Men Too Grants on a one-off basis in addition to the funding of the men's resource and referral project¹¹.

In 2006 the State Government reaffirmed its commitment to raise greater awareness of the importance of involvement by fathers in the lives of their children and to ensure that policies and services are in place to promote greater awareness of men's needs, particularly in the areas of parenting and family support services. To assist in achieving this it was announced that the Department would develop a strategic framework for men in their role as fathers.

¹¹ Mensplace

Appendix 2 - Fatherhood today

Women's increased involvement in the paid labour market¹² and the changing expectations and aspirations of men in their role as fathers¹³ has necessitated significant changes in both family composition and structure. There has been a broadening of fathering roles and those men who identify or are identified as fathers. One of the significant challenges for men is to adapt to these changes in ways that provide positive meaning to their fathering role and identity, strengthen their relationships with their child/ren and partner and focus on fathering behaviours that are nurturant, supportive and protective. Men need to be confident in establishing their own fathering identity and not see their role as that of second parent. Men's changing contribution to family life broadens the opportunities available to children.

Australia has seen conflicting patterns of fatherhood in recent years with an increase in fathers becoming actively involved with their children and a growing number withdrawing or being excluded from paternal involvement¹⁴. Additionally, fathers in contemporary Australia face a series of challenges and opportunities including:

- An increase in the number of stepfamilies, blended families and step fathers and the impact on individual notions of fathering and the significant emotional, psychological, social and financial impact on both men and women during separation and divorce;
- More sole fathers having responsibilities for households and children¹⁵ and more men opting to stay at home as full time fathers;
- An increase in children who have little or no contact with their father;
- The casualisation of the labour market and the subsequent impact on parental roles and identity;
- The challenges faced in finding an appropriate family/work balance and the increasing number of fathers involved in fly in/fly out work and the impact this has on family life¹⁶;
- An increase in the number of grandparents providing the primary care for children and what this means for father involvement;
- Co-morbidity issues (ie substance use and mental health) in relation to the general population, with a particular concern around the prevalence in young men/fathers;

¹² Coltrane 2006

¹³ Yeung 2004

¹⁴ Flood 2003

¹⁵ The Australian Bureau of Statistics *Family Characteristics Survey* (2003) estimated that there were approximately 7500 sole father households with dependant children under the age of 15 in Western Australia.

¹⁶ See Gallegos 2006 for findings around the impact of fly in/fly out work on families.

- Continuing high representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers in prison and the impact this has on father/child relationships¹⁷;
- The challenges faced by CaLD fathers adapting to different cultural expectations of fathers and families;
- An increased awareness that fathering roles and behaviours change in relation to the life cycle of the family and the requirement of fathers to be adaptive and flexible; and
- A general lack of services and supports for men in their role as fathers in rural and remote areas.

Men's ability to adapt positively to their changing social and familial contexts has far reaching implications for children. Positively integrating the ever present changes in life circumstances provides children with continuity and predictability which are essential to their psychological and emotional wellbeing. Men and women who address these challenges in responsible and considered ways offer their children the greatest likelihood of also adapting positively to changes in the family. While most men as fathers adapt to these changes and the social and personal expectations, some struggle to adjust to the changing circumstances. These men should be strongly encouraged to access appropriate social and professional supports.

The challenge for fathers is to develop fathering identities that embrace the complexity of the role and the values that they hold. There are many ways of being a good father. Men are becoming increasingly confident in their role as fathers and recognise that being positively engaged in the lives of their children provides the greatest likelihood of having safe, capable and confident children.

The importance of men in their role as fathers

There is increasing evidence which identifies the importance of positive father involvement to good outcomes for children including improved weight gain in pre-term infants, improved breast feeding rates, higher receptive language skills, greater academic achievement, higher self-esteem, lower depression and anxiety and less anti-social behaviour¹⁸. Additionally, some research has found that father involvement and nurturance are positively associated with children's intellectual development, social competence, internal locus of control and the ability to empathize¹⁹. There is also some evidence that disadvantaged children are in greater need than other children of ongoing positive relationships with their father²⁰.

Research findings suggest that fathers more typically involve themselves in play and tactile interactions, while mothers carry out more everyday care

¹⁷ *Aboriginal Men's Health Implementation Plan*, 2003, Aboriginal Medical Health and Research Council of New South Wales, NSW Health.

¹⁸ Garfield and Isacco 2006

¹⁹ Fagan and Iglesias 1999

²⁰ Dunn et al 2004

giving tasks²¹. However in most roles there is considerable overlap with mothers and fathers performing similar functions but sometimes doing so in different ways.

Some studies show that five year olds who described secure attachment with their fathers are more independent and socially competent with peers, less anxious and withdrawn, and better adjusted to school stresses than children with insecure representations of attachments to their fathers²². High levels of father involvement protect against adult experience of homelessness in the sons of manual workers and against later mental health problems in children in separated families. Some research has found that fathers' care and involvement with pre-schoolers with behavioural challenges is related to fewer problems in these children later²³. Studies with adults have also demonstrated some positive affects. 'Closeness' to fathers during childhood has been found to be positively related to adult daughters' and sons' educational and occupational mobility²⁴.

In terms of father's involvement there is a growing acceptance that it is the quality of father's involvement that is more important than the quantity²⁵. Parenting styles, degrees of affection and stimulus, and the relationship between family members generally appear to influence the affects of father involvement more so than time alone. It is clear that mothers and fathers are equally important in the lives of children in largely similar ways.

Understanding fatherhood and its benefits to children requires an awareness of its multi dimensional functions. While a father's economic contribution positively impacts on child outcomes²⁶, longer hours spent at work clearly diminishes father availability. Broadening understandings of fatherhood so that they value and promote the nurturing and care giving capacities of fathers is crucial.

The context of the relationship between mothers and fathers is of central importance to child outcomes²⁷. All family members influence the psychological, emotional and sometimes physical²⁸ well being of each other. A conflicted relationship between adult parents has a significantly adverse affect on children²⁹. Being part of a strong, emotionally satisfying partnership enables fathers and mothers to develop better quality relationships with their children³⁰.

²¹ Pruett 1998

²² Verscheuren and Marcoen 1999

²³ Aldous and Mulligan 2002

²⁴ Amato 1994

²⁵ Halle 1999, Garfield and Isacco 2006, Pruett 1998

²⁶ A key indicator of negative outcomes to children is poverty – see Hetherington and Parke 2003 for a discussion on the importance of father's financial contribution to children.

²⁷ Pruett 2000

²⁸ In the case of abusive, violent or neglectful behaviours.

²⁹ Lamb and Lewis 2004

³⁰ Gutterman and Lee 2005

Men in their role as fathers – diverse and complex

With the increasing changes in family structure and composition, there has been a greater focus on men who may not be the biological father of a child and who perform the functions and responsibilities of the fathering role. Men are now more likely to father children outside of marriage and to live away from their children. Additionally, many men experience fatherhood as a sequence of relationships with children with some being biologically theirs, while others come into their lives through other relationships³¹.

Men sometimes appear reticent to engage in discussions around their role, behaviours and relationships with their children. Collective fathering is beginning to be seen as essential in strengthening the bonds between men in their role as fathers and endorsing the importance of fatherhood to male identities. It also invites all men to invest in the well being of children. Grandfathers, friends, uncles and extended paternal family networks all have an important function in providing support, love, mentoring and safety to children.

Increasingly grandparents are taking on the responsibility of bringing up children as a result of family crisis or dysfunction. Many grandparents are assuming this primary care role outside of any formal statutory child protection arrangements. This allows for greater family continuity, more consistent contact with parents and assists in maintaining a sense of family identity and history. However, challenges faced by grandparents can impact on the healthy development of children particularly if there are financial changes related to supporting a child/ren with additional needs. The inability of grandfathers to provide financial security can impact on their relationship with the children and their partner.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in their role as fathers

Previous policies have had a deleterious effect on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people resulting in trauma and disadvantage being experienced intergenerationally. There has also been significant blurring and in some cases erosion of the traditional roles and responsibilities of Aboriginal fathers and mothers. In a contemporary context, the high percentage of Aboriginal males in prison has served to disconnect some Aboriginal fathers from their children.

The challenges to ensure positive paternal investment in children and families remain. The historical complexities surrounding child protection systems and Aboriginal people sometimes inhibit greater use of the Department's resources in a preventive and supportive manner. Like many other groups, the impact of drug and alcohol abuse in some areas has heavily impeded the positive engagement with children of some men and fathers. Lack of adequate housing, entry points into the economy and employment and access to services and supports that are culturally appropriate accentuate the challenges faced by Aboriginal men in their role as fathers.

³¹ Bachrach and Sonenstein 1998

Supporting the complex kinship systems that underpin Indigenous cultures allows for a continuity of paternal investment in children when a father is absent. Assisting Indigenous communities to strengthen the role of men as fathers through discussion, decision and action is important. Continuing to highlight the many Aboriginal fathers that perform their roles and responsibilities admirably, often under challenging circumstances, is essential. The growth of Aboriginal men's groups throughout the state continues to facilitate the 'healing' of Aboriginal men and encourage dialogue around the importance of Aboriginal fathers to families and communities. The support of men's groups is central in providing a medium for Aboriginal men to voice their needs and aspirations in relation to the outcomes they desire for their children.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse men in their role as fathers

Fathers from a CaLD background are often viewed as a homogenous group, however it is important to recognise that there are a number of other factors that impact on their role. These may be related to: their experience of migration; education; religion; number of years in Australia; age; socio-economic status in the country of origin; and, their own family of origin experience. All these factors interact with the reality of the adopted country and in turn determine their experience of fathering.

Fathers from CALD backgrounds often feel undermined due to the different expectations in relation to norms, values and beliefs in the new country. A number of barriers may inhibit men in their role as fathers accessing services and seeking out support during times of difficulty including: language; appropriateness of services, or lack of knowledge of available services; and, discrimination. Personal barriers that may impede seeking assistance for themselves or their family are: social isolation; understanding of gender roles in the family and within the wider society; socio-economic disadvantage; past experiences of torture/trauma; and their sense of identity or belonging to the new culture.

Some strategies to assist fathers and families within CaLD communities are: identifying the strengths within communities; promoting local level networks; involving men and other extended family members and developing relationships with religious and community leaders.

Men in their role as fathers in rural and remote areas

One of the greatest challenges facing men in rural and remote areas is the availability of services and supports. While some larger rural centres provide a series of services for individuals and families, communities outside of these areas often have limited access to services. The distance required to access services can act as an additional barrier to many men; however, even when

there are services in towns and communities men are sometimes reticent to access them as they are concerned about the attached stigma.

Supporting men in their role as fathers in rural and remote areas requires promoting and supporting locally driven actions. More generally, encouraging men to use the internet to access resources and supports is one way of assisting. Similarly, promoting the use of telephone counselling and support³² provides men in their role as fathers with professional and anonymous service access

Men in their role as fathers – deficit and non deficit based service models

Services to men in their role as fathers are based on two broad models. The deficit based model³³ seeks to address a behaviour or belief that is creating a risk or impeding the appropriate functioning of individuals or families. The deficit model assumes that there is a flaw or 'deficit' within some men and the ways in which they engage in aspects of their familial and social worlds³⁴. While most men engage with their family and children in safe and equitable ways, it is clear that some men do not. Providing an intervention that attempts to address the inappropriate behaviour as part of a range of responses is important when attempting to maximise the provision of safety and the likelihood of change.

The non deficit based model works from the belief that most men do not harm or impose themselves on others and that most fathers already possess a range of strengths and skills. The non deficit based model is seen as constructing fatherhood in enabling and positive ways that emphasise the belief that most men place considerable importance on their relationships with their children³⁵. It offers a more engaging and male positive way of framing services to men. It also acknowledges the many good things men in their role as fathers do with and for children.

There are difficulties and tensions that exist within attempting to balance these models. Child protection systems routinely are notified of men who have enacted violence or abuse within the family. Engaging with these men in ways that have as the central focus their accountability for their behaviours and the care and protection of children is fundamental. This requires that the model is based on addressing the cognitive or behavioural deficits that may be the antecedents to their behaviour. Conversely, where men are attempting to become better fathers and pose no risk to their family, a deficit model is inappropriate. Valuing their positive intentions and strong connection to the family provides the greatest likelihood of men using services.

³² Like Mensline Australia which provides 24 hour 7 day a week telephone support to men who are experiencing relationship problems, fathering issues, isolation etc.

³³ Other examples of deficit based programs would be programs for men who have sexually assaulted other individuals, programs to address dangerous parenting practices, programs that attempt to address offending behaviours more generally.

³⁴ See King 2000 for a more detailed explanation of the deficit based models assumptions.

³⁵ For a more comprehensive explanation of the non-deficit based model and its framings see King et al 2004 ' A checklist for organisations- working with men using the non-deficit approach'.

Appendix 3 - The barriers and facilitators to involving men in their role as fathers

Involving fathers in early intervention, prevention, support or crisis interventions within the community services sector promotes the opportunity of ameliorating the issues and challenges that children and families experience. While men as fathers appear to have slowly increased their use of services and supports there still remains considerable barriers to greater involvement. The issue of men's poor help seeking behaviour is connected to the ways in which men generally are discouraged through socialisation to ask for help. Men erroneously believe that asking for help is a sign of weakness and vulnerability. While many men recognise these unhelpful and limiting patterns, there still exists a pervasive influence which needs to be understood in terms of improving the involvement of men.

Organisational practices and assumptions do much more than impede or facilitate father involvement. They are actively constructing messages about either the importance or irrelevance of fatherhood³⁶. Valuing and promoting the accessibility, responsibility and involvement of fathers requires the continuing promotion of male positive and father inclusive messages within society.

There are a series of factors that positively influence and encourage men in their role as fathers to use support services. A summary of these factors include:

- Providing training to staff around gender, the relationships between fathers and children³⁷;
- Providing services and programs at male friendly venues³⁸ and times³⁹;
- Making it clear that their participation will have a positive impact on their child/ren;
- Focusing on particular life cycle stages or life events (eg birth of a child⁴⁰, separation etc);
- Providing services that are task orientated and solution focused; and
- Having a male presence on staff⁴¹.

Recognition of the changing needs of fathers commensurate with their family's life cycle and their own life circumstances must underpin program and policy development. Men in their role as fathers need to play their part in informing these strategies. Their involvement in the planning and design of policies and services should be sought. While there will be commonalities among men in their role as fathers, there will also often be considerable differences. Programs and services to support fathers who have recently separated will need to have a different emphasis to those targeting men commencing a step

³⁶ Burgess 2004

³⁷ Training focuses on the importance of fathers to child outcomes, the construction of gender and gender patterns, how to understand men's help seeking behaviours, what factors best promote father involvement etc.

³⁸ Park, beach, sporting club, place of employment, etc.

³⁹ After work hours or on the weekend.

⁴⁰ Birth is seen as a particular event when men typically espouse a strong commitment to their child and the role of father. However, it can also be a time of conflict and strain on both parents.

⁴¹ Although it is important to note that having female staff work with men in their role as fathers is crucial. Encouraging a male presence does not diminish the important contribution of female staff.

fathering role. Young expectant fathers are required to be supported in different ways to those in conflict with their adolescent children. While promoting the connectedness between men in their role as fathers is an important element of the framework it also acknowledges the unique experience and circumstances of every father.

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