

Father Inclusive Practice Audit Report

November 2014

**Communities for Children Program -
East Gippsland**



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Overview

The Communities for Children (CfC) program begun in East Gippsland in 2004. It is funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS) to improve outcomes for children and families. UnitingCare Gippsland (UCG) facilitates the program in East Gippsland.

The program has four outcomes:

- Our children are healthy, developing well and safe and secure.
- Our families are able to meet the needs and promote the development of their children.
- Our communities are accepting and supportive of all families.
- Our services are cooperative, integrated, inclusive and deliver high quality programs.

This report utilises quantitative data collected from service data (Appendix 9: Audit report 1) and staff responses to the South Australian Children's Services Father Inclusive Practice (FIP) Audit Questionnaire (Appendix 10: Audit report 2) and the action plan that was developed as part of the Father Inclusive Practice process. Accompanying this discussion are some suggested policy ideas for implementation.

Facilitating Partner Activities (delivered by UnitingCare Gippsland)

1. Community Links

The Community Links activity has a key role in facilitating partnerships/networks and developing referral pathways across community service organisations that support children and families to access services easily. The Community Links activity promotes the services and funding opportunities that the Communities for Children Program have available, enabling opportunities to value add to existing services and identify gaps in services for children and families.

2. Local Initiative Program (LIP) Grants

LIP grants are small, one-off grants of up to \$5,000 to support local, grass root initiatives. This activity enables communities to respond to local needs and provides opportunities for communities to own and respond to issues for children and families at a local level.

3. Aboriginal Children & Family Grants

The Aboriginal Children and Families funding provides grants to community organisations to recognise and strengthen local activities that support East Gippsland Aboriginal children and families. Working & Learning Together – Professional Development & Training.

4. Working & Learning Together – Professional Development & Training

CfC offers a range of professional development and training opportunities to further develop the awareness and capacity of our community partners and broader service providers to embed inclusive practice into their programs, services and activities. Please visit the UnitingCare Gippsland website for further information about future professional development opportunities—www.ucgipps.org.au.

Community Partner Activities

1. Orbost and District Satellite Toddler Gym

This activity provides preschool children with an opportunity to engage in physical activity with their parents on a weekly basis. This activity is run at multiple locations across Orbost and surrounding towns. For more information contact Orbost Regional Health - 5154 6666.

2. Lorikeets Model

This activity identifies developmentally vulnerable children and provides intervention to increase their abilities for when they attend kindergarten, childcare or whilst in grade prep. The programs have therapy groups, home programs and a referral pathway for client's to access one to one intervention if required. For more information contact Gippsland Lakes Community Health - 5155 8370.

3. Volunteer Family Connect Program

The Volunteer Family Connect Program involves recruiting and training volunteers to visit and support families in their own homes within Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance, Buchan and Orbost. Volunteers are matched with a family with children between 0-6 years old, who have expressed a need for regular outreach visits to provide social and parenting support. For more information contact Good Beginnings Australia at their Bairnsdale Office - 0432 223 871 or 03 51537500.

4. Little Green Frog

The Little Green Frog is delivered by UnitingCare Gippsland and is a mobile children's resource service that provides occasional childcare, supported playgroups and other early childhood programs across remote and socially isolated communities of East Gippsland. For more information contact UnitingCare Gippsland – 5152 9600.

5. Schools as Hubs

The High Country Schools as Hubs is delivered across Omeo, Swifts Creek and surrounding districts. The program runs activities that draw parents together so they can socialise with other families, make links and learn skills to assist their child's development. For more information contact Rowena Turner, Program Coordinator - 51594323.

6. Engaging East Bairnsdale (Early Years Focus)

Through the delivery of a variety of activities, families in East Bairnsdale are provided with an opportunity to increase quality time spent together. The activity has a focus on bringing the community together, through ongoing activities that will build pride and ownership and will support families. For more information contact Jane Christie Gippsland Lakes Community Health – 51558308.

Method

Over a three-month period, Groupwork Solutions consulted with East Gippsland CfC to provide an audit process to improve father-inclusive practice. This involved the collection of audit data, the development of an initial report and the provision of consecutive training and planning days for staff from the six programs. The participating East Gippsland CfC programs were:

- Orbost and District Satellite Toddler Gym;
- Lorikeets Model;
- Volunteer Family Connect Program;
- Little Green Frog;
- Schools as Hubs; and
- Engaging East Bairnsdale (Early Years Focus).

*The vision for this project is
'Fathers are more actively
engaged with their children,
family and the broader
community'.*

In leading up to the 2-day process, each program provided summary data of relevant quantitative information (see Appendix 9). Also staff, from the six completed programs/ organisations, completed the audit tool 2 which is a checklist of 48 questions (see Appendix 10). This checklist was devised for the children's services sector in South Australia as a combination of several other checklists that had been available at the time. It was viewed as a relevant tool for the CfC programs in this region.

A 2-day process was facilitated over 26-27 November 2014 that explored issues about working with fathers along with a planning day to improve the provision of father-inclusive practice. Please see the following link for more information - <http://groupworksolutions.com.au/FatherInclusivePractice>.

Day 1: Engaging men in family based programs (1-day)

This workshop allowed workers, organisations or networks of services to explore issues that promote more effective service delivery to men and families. The workshop explored the importance of the fathers' role in family services and how programs can engage and support this opportunity.

The workshop focused on:

- understanding what fathers might want when accessing community services
- using strengths based approaches when working with men
- engaging men in child protection issues and family based programs
- exploring skills used to work with men in a non-threatening way and modelling effective, respectful and inclusive communication when working with men
- working with fathers to increase their engagement in their children's lives
- engaging fathers using the father inclusive practice and the generative framework
- effective ways for female workers to work with fathers.

Day 2: Facilitation of Father-Inclusive Practice planning workshop (1-day).

The second day involved the facilitation of a planning workshop for key staff to review how well their program targeted fathers in their community. A strengths based planning process was used to develop a basic action plan on how FIP can be further developed in the local region. Everyone reflected on the initial audit report and identified issues arising, a vision for change, strengths and challenges and the first steps of an action plan. A range of ways to improve FIP were identified and are reported on in the following action plan.

Results from the initial audit report

The initial audit involved the collection of program data for each of the Communities for Children (CfC) program programs and the completion of a FIP survey by staff (14 responses received) involved in the six community activity programs. The results were analysed and collated by Andrew King and Tara Hunt.

Overview of the initial audit 2 results

	Average Scale – 5 point scale	(Indicates GWS standard)
1. Service culture and environment	1.55 (3.98)	
2. Staff skills, knowledge and attitudes	1.84 (4.26)	
3. Service relevance and accessibility	1.04 (3.34)	
4. Strategic planning and accountability	0.94 (3.17)	

Degree of strength

4-5	>85%	Very strong
3-4	66%-84%	Significant and developing
2-3	45%-65%	Average
1-2	25%-54%	Infancy
0-1	0%-26%	Poor

The degree of strength for the scales is indicated above. The survey data indicated that most programs had commenced being father-inclusive, however they were still in their infancy.

The CfC Programs are strongest at applying FIP to their staff skills, knowledge and attitude and they have some strength in applying FIP in their service culture and environment. While all the results are lower than the industry standard, this baseline uses data from family relationship centres where they have a stronger focus to work with fathers. The CfC Programs are congratulated for their commitment to explore how fathers can be better engaged within its various programs.

There are many areas that require attention, however the upside is, any change will have a significant impact. It is recommended that the programs complete these two audit tools in another 12 months to observe the differences.

Possible practice issue to consider as highlighted:

- Where a range of values were provided, an average was made to simplify calculations. As a result, all values should be regarded as an estimate.
- Where less than half of the reports provided data, an average was not calculated.
- The organisations provided services for an average of 11.7 men, and 34.7 women. The length of wait time between initial contact to first contact was between 1 to 4 weeks.
- On average, more male children ($M=23.88$) were reported to be involved in the organisations than female children ($M=17.75$).
- Insufficient data was collected to report on male staffing of the organisations. There was an average of 2.4 female part time staff members and 6.7 female volunteers reported.
- The group outcomes indicated that an average of 43.5 women participated with groups, an average drop-out rate of 2.7, and average completion rate of 30.1. The average number of fathers who completed group programs was 4.2
- The gaps in the reporting data result in difficulty drawing conclusions from these figures.

Below is a summary of possible practice issue that need to be considered:

1. SERVICE CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

- 1.1 Staff/volunteers know and greet all fathers using their given names.
- 1.3 Staff/volunteers include fathers at the first point of contact with the family e.g. enrolment, service familiarisation.
- 1.5 Fathers are effectively informed about the service and programs.
- 1.8 The aesthetic environment is inviting for men (not over feminised).
- 1.9 Parenting programs that specifically target or engage fathers are provided.
- 1.12 There are positive and constructive images of fathers and children displayed in public areas.

2. STAFF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES

- 2.5 Staff/volunteers have developed my knowledge about father inclusive practices through participation in professional development events.
- 2.7 Staff/volunteers deliberately endeavour to engage fathers in programs and events through a range of effective strategies.
- 2.8 Staff/volunteers are knowledgeable about local services for fathers and can refer as appropriate.
- 2.9 Staff/volunteers critically reflect on my practice to ensure they are inclusive of fathers & constantly looking to improve their engagement of fathers.
- 2.12 New staff and volunteers are informed about the Engaging Fathers Policy through the induction process.

3. SERVICE RELEVANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY

- 3.1 Strategies are in place to seek fathers input into service planning and the provision of relevant programs and activities.
- 3.2 A range of programs are in place that are accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of fathers in the service catchment area including recreational, social, parenting etc.
- 3.3 Operational hours support the involvement of men i.e. events take place and key services are available after hours and on weekends.
- 3.5 Information & services for particular groups of men are provided e.g. new fathers, teenage fathers, cultural groups, toddler playgroups, separated fathers etc.
- 3.7 The service provides information to separated fathers.
- 3.8 Father focused events are held in both inside and outside environments.
- 3.11 Barriers to the participation of fathers are identified and addressed.

4. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 4.1 The service has an Engaging Fathers Policy.
- 4.2 Father inclusive practice is prioritised in the annual strategic plan.
- 4.3 Strategies and processes are in place to identify areas where a more father inclusive approach will be implemented.
- 4.5 Promotional material is specifically inclusive of men.
- 4.6 The service undertakes regular reviews to assess the involvement of fathers.
- 4.7 The services undertake regular reviews to assess the relevance of services in response to the diverse needs of fathers.
- 4.8 The services undertake regular reviews to assess staff skills and competence in father inclusive practices.
- 4.9 The services provide professional development to all staff about how to engage and work with men.
- 4.10 The services regularly report to governing bodies about fatherhood inclusivity.
- 4.11 The services report of progress made in relation to implementing father inclusive practices within the Annual Report.
- 4.12 The services raise public opinion and promote the important role of fathers within the community.

This document includes some key documents and sample policies that assist in the development of father-inclusive practice:

- Appendix 1: Sample - Father Inclusive Practice Policy
- Appendix 2: Sample - Assessing safety/risk policy for involving fathers when domestic violence issues exist Policy
- Appendix 3: Tips for attracting and keeping fathers when children have special needs
- Appendix 4: The emotional world of men who have a child with a disability
- Appendix 5: Research overview - Involving fathers... Significant benefits for the whole family

Results from the Engaging men in family based programs workshop

The workshop was well attended with a very diverse range of programs and professions being represented. The end of workshop evaluation form summarised these following outcomes:

- 93% of participants thought the workshop achieved what they expected.
- 81% of the participants thought the workshop was pitched at the right level.
- 94% of participants reported the facilitator's attitude was very good to great.
- 100% of participants reported the facilitator's knowledge of the subject was very good to great.
- 80% of participants reported the way the course was run was very good to great.
- 44% of participants who completed evaluations reported the handouts were very useful (most people indicated they were still to read the documents).

The following issues were identified as key considerations for father-inclusive practice:

- Using pictures not clipart
- Genuinely welcoming
- Casualness
- Informality- use of structure
- Welcoming environment
- Clear purpose
- Skills = relevance; faith-builder; honest/direct
- Choices and consequences
- Safety
- Afterhours & weekends
- Know their name
- Support dads to see, feel and understand the important role they play in their children's lives
- Small core of fathers
- Suspicion
- Connection between safety and risk
- Importance of language
- Active
- Practical
- Generativity
- Men's role must be valued and acknowledged
- Family focus
- Importance of telling the birth story
- Validation
- Relationships
- Timing
- Feedback
- Ownership or change process?
- Activity based

For more information about evaluation results for the Engaging men in family based programs workshop, please see Appendix 8.

Staff comments arising from the initial report

One the second day, the staff discussed the initial Audit Report and made these following comments:

- The report was relevant to many contexts and programs.
- Programs already have some fathers attending.
- The audit process was very useful for staff to better understand how their program is going in engaging fathers.
- It was interesting to know how many male workers/volunteers were involved in programs.
- It is important to support staff by providing Father Inclusive Practice training and support current male staff/volunteers in the community services sector.
- Need to articulate the benefits of what fathering provides to children to most male clients.
- Need to articulate the benefits of what male workers provide to organisations (see men in childcare DVD and website).
- A good level of goodwill, recognition of challenges and opportunities for change already exists.

Key practice issues identified during the planning day

One the second day, the staff identified the following key practice issues:

Key practice issues	Examples of how the issue could be expressed in our practice
1. Recognise and acknowledge the important role of fathers in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying and including fathers in the families. ● Knowing the community in which you work, understanding the dad's role and staff ask questions to find out more information about the father.
2. Plan and allocate funding to deliver father inclusive practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding provided to allow for specific male engagement programs. ● Time is allocated, budget hours allowed and staff availability is given to prepare for program and, build more initial engagement with fathers. ● Regular reporting makes father involvement more transparent. ● Father inclusive practice is viewed as integral and planned for by programs. It is not just an add-on.
3. Skilled and appropriate staffing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Male staff and skilled staff are employed as appropriate. ● Increase male numbers in staffing children and community services.
4. Provide welcoming, relevant and practical programs that have a benefit to the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a welcoming environment for fathers. ● Improve the promotion of programs, locations used to advertise and language used. ● Better articulate the purpose of programs, describing what's involved using practical and active language. ● Improve the marketing of programs using names or descriptions that are not too feminine. ● Use straight-talking and strengths based language. ● Provide clear and direct guidelines. Also provide a clear understanding of what is required to be involved. ● Purpose: Product vs process. Be outcome focused. ● Improve the immediate environment and activities used when fathers first engage with the program.
5. Design and implement father inclusive strategies that increase father involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use innovative ideas to connect with fathers. ● Focus on use of dads-kids groups, use the idea of generativity, and improve the language and marketing of programs. ● Recognise and use 'windows of opportunity' and the right timing to engage fathers. ● Recognise the challenge of providing out of hours service delivery.

Key practice issues, program visions and existing strengths

One the second day, the staff identified the following program visions and existing strengths:

Key practice issues	Vision for the organisations. The programs have achieved...	Existing strengths across the programs to achieve this vision
<p>1. Recognise and acknowledge the important role of fathers in the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations are committed to reporting about FIP in their strategic plans. • Men have an increased pride and recognition in the role they play as a father. • The community recognises the value that fathers contribute to their families. • Fathers are recognised as ‘having a face’ in their children’s development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs already provide happy, joyful environments that celebrate success. • Organisations take on the responsibility to make further changes to be father inclusive.
<p>2. Plan and allocate funding to deliver father inclusive practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All relevant staff have time to build stronger relationship connections with fathers in the families in which they work. • Implementing a multi-stages plan to specifically engage fathers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resourceful use of existing funds across wide areas.
<p>3. Skilled and appropriate staffing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are benefiting from a dynamic and supportive male presence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs are reliable and follow-up on proposed activities and constantly ‘be there’ running programs. • Programs have skilful and talented staff with future possibility to utilise other resources within the organisation. • Staff are committed, relaxed, enthusiastic, warm and friendly.

<p>4. Provide welcoming, relevant and practical programs that have a benefit to the child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is less substance use and greater community involvement by the dads. • Improved connection between fathers, their children, partners and the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff use appropriate humour to create relaxing environments for mothers and fathers. • Agencies are driven by the desire to ‘help’ and provide programs that benefit dads and kids. • Programs have strong, co-operative collaboration with services/ agencies that involve warm, friendly and relaxed partnerships.
<p>5. Design and implement father inclusive strategies that increase father involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men have a greater confidence in their role as a father. • There are better health outcomes for dads. • Programs provide a united family approach. • A diverse range of fathers are increasingly involved and active in their child’s development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs are committed to the implementation of FIP. • Programs are good at thinking of creative, innovative ideas to bring men into the program. • Programs are adaptable to the immediate needs of fathers and their family.

Key practice issues, current challenges and action plan for the programs to address these issues

One the second day, the staff identified the following challenges for programs and steps for the programs to address the issues:

Key practice issues	Challenges for programs	Steps for the programs to address these issues
1. Recognise and acknowledge the important role of fathers in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieving the ultimate outcome of team work parenting. Inclusion of data about fathers' involvement in all levels of organisational reports. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Review current research and share with other staff regarding advantages of father involvement (see appendix 3, 4 & 5). Staff use curiosity to find out information about who the father is and his role. Explore links with local businesses for support with events and the use of their logo. Program data (intake sheets, family records, reports) accurately reports on the involvement of fathers.
2. Plan and allocate funding to deliver father inclusive practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimism in trying new programs that involve fathers in their development. Provide a 'step by step' plan to implement that involvement process. Increase resources for services who work with men at different key life stages e.g. birth of first child. Challenges to obtain secure funding that supports organisations to work with fathers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly report to funding bodies about the initiatives undertaken and developments in fatherhood inclusivity. By December 2015, programs will have 20% male participants increase from current baseline. Accurately record the time required to engage with fathers – link to outcomes measures of what difference this makes. Planning specifically identifies strategies for father inclusion. Priority is given in planning to be father inclusive. Where possible, organisations report on progress made in relation to implementing father inclusive practices within the Strategic Plan and the Annual Report. Develop a 'step by step' plan to develop fathers' involvement in new programs.
3. Skilled and appropriate staffing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise the need to develop certain skills by provision of training or bring in specific skills. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Both female and male staff actively engage and work with fathers in their family caseload. Commence discussions with tertiary institutions about supporting the development of male staff. Explore greater use of volunteers and peer support approaches.

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Look at utilising staff outside current staff pool. 5. Explore the development of a multi-organisation male-worker support group. 6. Staff value and acknowledge the experience, skills and knowledge fathers bring to fathering and how this increases the stability around children with special needs and child protection issues. 7. Each program develops a draft Engaging Fathers Policy for the program or whole organisation (see draft in Appendix 1). 8. Implement an FIP induction process and training for new staff in each program.
<p>4. Provide welcoming, relevant and practical programs that have a benefit to the child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting specifically to fathers and being in touch with their needs. • Working together across organisations and programs by using a team approach to achieve outcomes. • Development of environments/ opportunities that dads and kids can share quality time. • Implementation of appropriate fun and risk-taking programs. • Development of a relevant environment and space for fathers to be playful with their children. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide a range of relevant fathering programs that are regularly provided throughout the region. 2. Programs use male (fathers, men) and female (mothers, women) specific language in promotional materials and reports rather than gender neutral terms like ‘parents’. 3. Review program documents, posters and fliers and soften language – include a language statement, such as, ‘Our program is for mothers, fathers and other important care givers in children’s lives aged xxx years’. 4. Obtain feedback from fathers and other service users using telephone discussions and focus groups. This will ensure that fathers feel comfortable and welcomed in the service and that the program is responsive and relevant to their needs. 5. Provide operating hours that support the involvement of men i.e. events take place and key services are available after hours and on weekends 6. The service provides professional development to all staff about how to engage and work with men. 7. Make (phone) contact with the father within one week of the initial assessment interview if only the mother is present (consent obtained from the mother). 8. Maintain regular contact with the fathers during the case management involvement – be creative with use of mobile phone, email, face-to-face contact. 9. Explore the usefulness of developing a local Blokes Book to increase men’s knowledge about local services for fathers and can refer them appropriately. 10. Staff know and greet all fathers on their caseload using their given names. 11. All staff practice being more comfortable interacting with the fathers. Engage

		<p>them regarding feedback about their child and avoid complying with comments like “you better talk to the mother”?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Use the skills of creating relevance, being a faith builder and honest/directness to ensure fathers are effectively informed about the service and programs. 13. Advocate for the important role played by fathers involved in their children’s lives within the broader community. Significant research is available on this topic and needs to be appropriately distributed to the mothers, fathers and others. 14. Ensure centre opening hours support the involvement of men i.e. events take place and key services are available after hours or on weekends (as resources permit). 15. Staff talk directly to the men about how your programs are relevant, important and can make a difference to their situation. Support and inform fathers about the new evidence that values their role and the significance of their relationship with their children. 16. Display positive and constructive images/ posters of fathers and children in public areas where groups are held or on fliers and handouts. 17. Change language used on promotional materials and the images used. Use photos in promotional resources rather than clip-art images.
<p>5. Design and implement father inclusive strategies that increase father involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing for flexible and response ways to engage fathers as opportunities present themselves in the family. • Clearer articulation of how the involvement of fathers benefits the success of each program. • Include celebration within the design of each program. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement an information board just for dads. 2. Utilise the key themes in men’s lives – importance of being a protector (i.e. keeping children safe) and provider (i.e. balancing work/life balance). 3. Greater use of invitations coming from their children for special events. 4. Explore the use of photography to capture positive images of fathers’ involvements in family life. 5. Hold semi –regular regional events that support public awareness about fathering. 6. Support the development of more local media reports about the role fathers play in the community. 7. Programs review their current program delivery regarding: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Time, location, childcare b. Using language that promotes parenting teamwork c. Tailored programs to fathers’ needs

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">d. Having gender specific sub-groups to talk about key issues8. Programs hold family BBQ – provide an informal setting for engagement as a soft entry point for fathers.9. Sensitively explore the fears that inhibit men’s involvement with children.
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Appendix 1: Sample - Father Inclusive Practice Policy

Father-inclusive practice values and supports men in their role as fathers, actively encourages their participation in the program and ensures they are appropriately and equally considered in all aspects of service delivery.

The role of the father is defined as the significant male role model who has an ongoing relationship with the child. It may include the biological, step, uncle, grandfather, separated father or other significant male who provides a significant and safe role in the child's life.

Father inclusive practice includes, but is not limited to, the development of father specific programs and resources, the facilitation of short groups and workshops, inclusion of mothers and fathers in the same group (depending on child care availability), the attitudes and skills of staff members that impact on their engagement with men, the language used in promotional materials, provision of flexible opening hours and the maximisation of suitable physical environments.

The benefits of father inclusive practice includes:

- Greater cooperation and sharing of responsibilities by both parents
- Increased respect of the role that both parents play in the family
- Increased responsibility and accountability as exercised by both parents
- greater understanding of their child's development and needs
- creation of a closer bond with their child
- improve communication skills
- more positive father-child interaction
- increased confidence in parenting
- decreased feelings of isolation
- development of a peer networks with other fathers with similar life experiences
- greater sense of self-worth and commitment to their family
- greater likelihood of increased interaction and involvement with their community.

Father inclusive practice is best expressed as child-centred practice, where the fathers' energy is channelled proactively into ways they can best support and care for their children regardless of the amount of time they spend directly caring for their children. When fathers are child-centred they are more likely to make the most use of community supports and be less reactive and defensive to changes in their family.

The participation and inclusion of fathers in services provided by organisations is not only beneficial for the fathers themselves but it also could have positive implications for other members of the family (the mother) and most importantly for their children.

Positive and consistent father-child interaction brings the support and protection needed to increase social, emotional and cognitive development for children. Children often have an increased sense of wellbeing, a clearer sense of their identity and greater resilience to adversity.

Father-inclusive practice strengthens child, individual, family and the broader community connections and has benefits for improving cooperative parenting, mother respect and benefits for mothers, fathers and the children.

When working with a family, staff members attend to the following...

When a referral is received:

1. Actively enquire about the involvement of the father except for when domestic violence is occurring. This occurs initially when the referring organisation makes the referral and also when contact is made with the mother (depending on appropriate timing).
2. Ask questions about the level of involvement of the father and consider how they can be best engaged.

When the family is engaged:

3. Staff use the skills of creating relevance, being a faith builder and being honest/direct with their communication in supporting both parents' role in their child's life.
4. Staff use gendered language by directly referring to the 'mother' and 'father' in documents (letters, reports and promotional materials) rather than the word 'parents'.
5. When the father lives at the house but is not part of the program, staff regularly attempt to engage him and provide feedback about the program and the difference they notice in their family.
6. If the father is not present, staff regularly call the father within five working days of a home visit and provide some feedback about the program and the difference they notice regarding their family. A variety of ways are used to maintain the contact such as mobile phone, email and face-to-face contact.
7. Staff deliberately endeavour to engage fathers into the program and events through the use of a range of effective strategies. Staff talk directly to the fathers about how the program is relevant, important and can make a difference to their situation. Staff support and inform fathers about the new evidence that values their role and the significance of their relationship with their children (see appendix 5).
8. Staff value and acknowledge the experience, skills and knowledge fathers bring to fathering and how this increases the stability around children with special needs and child protection issues.
9. Staff advocate for the important role played by fathers involved in their children's lives within the broader community and community services sector at interagency meetings. Significant research is available on this topic and needs to be appropriately distributed to the mothers, fathers and other family members.
10. Staff ensure some appointment times are offered opening hours that support the involvement of men i.e. events take place and key services are available after hours (as resources permit).

When groups/workshops are provided:

11. Develop more 1-day workshops and psychoeducational groups that specifically target or engage fathers and build on ideas introduced at the parenting workshops. A range of accessible programs are provided that respond to the diverse needs of fathers including 1-day workshops and short psychoeducational groups. These programs can be jointly provided with a partner program that specialises in areas of interest.
12. Father inclusive language is used in all fliers i.e. 'Our program is for mothers, fathers and other important care givers in children's lives aged 0-8 years'. Use male (fathers, men) and female (mothers, women) specific language in promotional materials and reports rather than gender neutral terms like 'parents'.
13. All attempts are made to promote teamwork parenting with greater accessing and involvement of men and women in parenting groups/workshops (unless they are gender specific).
14. In co-gender groups, gender specific sub-groups are regularly used for some group discussions to deepen the understanding and expression of how mothers and fathers may respond to some issues in similar or different ways (when enough male participants are attending).
15. A range of mother and father images are used on handouts with clip-art being avoided.

At an organisational level:

16. By December 2015, the six programs will have 20% male participants attending group programs compared to the baseline data.
17. Reports to funding bodies identify the initiatives undertaken and developments in fatherhood inclusivity.
18. FIP progress and outcomes are reported on in the Strategic Plan and the Annual Report.

Appendix 2: Sample - Assessing safety/risk policy for involving fathers when domestic violence issues exist Policy

Although domestic violence is a very important factor to consider when making parenting or safety plans, capacities of perpetrators and victims to parent adequately are likely to vary greatly depending upon the nature of the violence. Other than providing clinical descriptive criteria, tools to reliably differentiate between types of violence and how they might relate to parenting are still in their infancy.

Five basic factors should be consideredⁱ:

1. Potency of violence
2. Pattern of violence
3. Primary perpetrator violence
4. Parenting problems
5. Fathers' perspective of the child/ren

See table 2ⁱⁱ for an outline of considerations for supporting:

- Co-parenting
- Parallel parenting
- Supervised exchange
- Supervised contact
- Suspended contact

1. Potency of violence

The degree of severity, dangerousness, and potential risk of serious injury and lethality is the foremost dimension that needs to be assessed and monitored so that protective orders can be issued and other immediate safety measures taken and maintained. Prior incidents of severe abuse and injuries inflicted on victims are an important indicator of the capacity of an individual to explode or escalate to dangerous levels. In some cases, explosive or deadly violence can erupt with little or no history of abuse, but other warning signs are often evident.

2. Pattern of violence

The extent to which the violence is part of a pattern of coercive control and domination (rather than a relatively isolated incident) is a crucial indicator of the extent of stress and trauma suffered by the child and family and the potential for future violence. It also suggests what kind of protective, corrective, and rehabilitative measures to take (e.g., high-security supervision of visits, substance abuse or psychiatric treatment). The pattern of violence is the best predictor for future violence and helps you to understand the degree of traumatic stress, potential for future violence and the need for longer term restraints on abuser.

3. Primary perpetrator violence

Assess whether there is a primary perpetrator of the violence (rather than it being mutually instigated or initiated by one or the other party on different occasions) will indicate whose contact needs to be restricted. Accounts of the violent incident(s) by the participants themselves should be assessed with caution, because victims may tend to assume more blame, and abusers usually minimize or deny their conduct. Moreover, the motivation to conceal or admit violent behaviour

varies depending upon the aggressor's views of the consequences of doing so (i.e., he is unlikely to admit abusive behaviour to a court, but may do so in an appropriate therapeutic intervention). Nevertheless, it is helpful to obtain a detailed account of the violent incidents—within the context of the relationship—from each party separately.

4. Parenting problems

How is the domestic violence issues reflected in the child's behaviour? What safety plan needs to be in place to ensure this requirement?

5. Fathers' perspective of the child/ren

Does the father appreciate the vulnerability of his child/ren? Is he clearly able to appreciate his child's vulnerability (as needs) that are separate to his own need to be right, validated or get his own way?

Does that insight impact on how he responds to the domestic violence issues?

Useful questions to ask:

1. Who or how do you protect others in your life?
2. Who do you keep safe?
3. What happens when the protection of others is misused?
4. What is the difference between keeping someone safe and controlling them?
5. When does protecting someone become abusive?
6. How do you keep yourself safe?

Caution

Professionals need to be wary of differentiating the abuser from the victim based on who claims to be the victim; who is more charming, charismatic, and likeable; who appears more organized, reasonable, and sensible; and who feels more entitled and morally outraged. Sociopaths, narcissists, and chauvinists—who use violence for interpersonal control—can make a very smooth presentation whereas the victim can appear emotionally distraught and disorganized.

Appendix 3: Tips for attracting and keeping fathers when children have special needs

Important: In developing the Hey Dad, for fathers who have a child with a disability program, 70% of the fathers at a focus group, indicated that having phone contact with the caseworker or group leader was essential for them in deciding to attend the first session. This process enables them to clarify questions and build a connection with the caseworker or group leader.

It is important to portray a welcoming impression:

- Ring all the participants and speak to them individually before the program commences (very important)
- Allow families where they are a high level of needs, it may be useful to offer the opportunity to meet other members before the group starts
- Provide a map to make finding the venue simple
- Provide details about transport, parking etc
- Welcome new fathers, find out what they would like from the group, explain what will happen in the meeting and introduce the new members to other members
- Arrange seats in a circle
- Allow time for talking and listening to each other
- Avoid jargon and don't refer to people without explaining who they are
- Remember and use people's names.

Groups need members who will share in the workload of the group. For example:

- Everyone should help decide on the group's activities
- Members views should be heard
- Members should identify roles or activities they are happy to help with
- Rotate jobs regularly and involve new members
- Sharing information and making use of people's networks is important
- Give everyone a chance to contribute where their skills lie
- Do not let older members dominate (Contact a Family, 2006a).

Successful groups have the following features:

- A positive group climate stressing the strengths of children
- Focus on what can be accomplished, rather than obstacles
- The group meets the needs of members, whether that be emotional support, information, education and/or advocacy.

Appendix 4: The emotional world of men who have a child with a disability

Hornby reviewed existing accounts of fathers' experiences of parenting children with disabilities. Issues identified by fathers included:

- Feelings of self-blame
- Denial of the extent of disability
- Effects on the marriage/ relationship
- Uncertainty over the diagnosis
- Constant strain of caring
- Benefits of meeting other families in similar situations
- Restrictions on family life
- Difficulty telling other people about the disability
- Feeling guilty about having negative feelings about their child
- Negative experiences of service provision
- Dealing with negative reactions in the community (Hornby, 1992).

Forty eight dads of children with chronic illnesses completed the Family Perception Inventory and identified concerns they had. Concerns included:

- Child's health (98% identified as a concern)
- Feeling worn out (73%)
- Doing enough family activities together (96%)
- Making the family comfortable and happy (94%)
- The responsibility of caring for the family (81%)
- Extra demands on time (88%)
- Sexual relationship with spouse/partner (87%)
- Having enough fun and relaxation (85%)
- Enough time alone with spouse/ partner (83%) (Hovey, 2005).

Understanding the emotional world of men as fathers is integral to the successful facilitation of this program. The reflection below, of one of the fathers involved in the development of this program, highlights what many men think about as parents, and may rarely express to other people:

“the single greatest challenge I faced as a father to a child with a disability was trying to accept the reality that I cannot "fix" the "problem". All parents wish to shield their children from all harm in the world, but parents (and particularly fathers) feel like they have 'failed' to live up to this”

“The feeling is: ‘Not only does my child have a disability, but I'm ‘useless, helpless etc because I could not stop it and now I can't do anything to fix it either’”.

“There was nothing more painful in my life than watching my child have seizures in my arms and being completely helpless to do anything at all about them. It was not until I had professional counselling that I could focus on something other than blaming myself and acknowledge that my daughter wasn't blaming me either, nor holding it against me, that these things were happening to her”.

Appendix 5: Research overview - Involving fathers...

Significant benefits for the whole family

Involving fathers improves support for the mothers

Benefits for mothers when involving fathers in child birth are summarisedⁱⁱⁱ as being:

- Women whose husbands were present and supportive during labour were less distressed^{iv&v}.
- Labouring women benefit when they feel 'in control' of the birth process^{vi}. A key component of feeling in control is experiencing support from their partner during the birth.
- Support during delivery provided by a 'close support person' (who can be, and often is, the baby's father) creates a more positive childbirth experience for the mother, with a shorter duration of delivery and less pain experienced^{vii}.
- When the support person (including fathers) knows a lot about pain control, women have shorter labours and are less likely to have epidurals^{viii}.
- When women are more supported during child birth, they develop more positive attitudes to motherhood^{ix}.

Men need education about labour and childbirth processes so that they are aware of what to expect when they accompany their partners for childbirth. This understanding will enable them to better support their partners emotionally throughout the birthing process. This practice could enhance a positive birthing experience for both women and their partners^x.

Ways to improve the support of the fathers^{xi} are:

- In childbirth classes, have a short time where the mothers and support people can have separate small group discussions about how they can respond to the challenges of child birth and the theme or issue currently being discussed.
- Provide for the information needs of male partners. Distribute easy-to-read handout and materials.
- Use practical examples in how men can be supportive. It is important to provide active examples for how they can support their partner through the birth process.
- Encourage the reflection and involvement of fathers in child birth classes. Fathers who have been prepared well to participate productively in the labour process tend to be more active participants, and their partners' birth-experiences tend to be better.
- Use the personal testimony of a mother and father who recently had a child, to talk to the next class about their reflections and experiences.
- Recognise the psychological boost the fathers can provide as a support person. Medical professionals greatly underestimate the psychological boost fathers give to their partners during delivery – as well as the practical support the men provide during labour, and afterwards.

Involving fathers to support mothers with post-natal depression

When mothers have post-natal depression, the father's functioning as a support person is critical as the women often receive more support from their partner than from any other individual, including medical staff^{xii}. Some studies have shown that:

- A Canadian randomised control study found that involving partners in support programs for the mothers with postnatal depression. When the women's partner participated in 4 out of 7 psycho-educational visits, the women displayed a significant decrease in depressive symptoms and other psychiatric conditions^{xiii}. When only the women (and not their partner) received the intervention the general health of the depressed women's partners deteriorated. This effect was not found where the men were included in the intervention^{xiv}.
- A shorter length of hospital stay among women with pre/post-partal psychiatric disorders is strongly and positively correlated with supportiveness by their (male) partners. However, only 30% of these men are categorized by the researchers as supportive^{xv}.
- A brief and inexpensive US intervention (one prenatal session, in separate gender groups focusing on psychosocial issues related to becoming first-time parents) was associated with reduced distress in some mothers at six-weeks postpartum^{xvi}.

Making the most of parent leave opportunities

Even though the Commonwealth Government have provided legislation that supports men having parental leave (2 weeks of paid leave at the minimum wage), many men still cannot utilise this opportunity as they are casual workers, self-employed or work in a context where employers are less supportive.

However parental leave should be encouraged by health professionals as it can have significant consequences for the whole family. The new parental leave legislation reflects the positive effects that occur when avail themselves of this opportunity^{xvii}:

- Develop more stable couple relationships.
- Maintain higher levels of contact with children, should mothers and fathers subsequently separate.
- Adopt healthier lifestyle (by the father) and reduced mortality risk. There is a decreased risk of "all-cause mortality" among men who take between 30 and 135 days of parental leave.
- Increase in the father's role in caretaking throughout the child's life.
- Women less likely to smoke or become depressed and more likely to breastfeed.

Benefits for children's development

Due to the ethical challenges of conducting a study that measures children's outcomes, most studies have looked at improvements in fathers' skills or father-and-child interactions as 'proxies' for benefits to children^{xviii}.

Programs that involve fathers have observed the following benefits to children, have found^{xix}:

- Improved social competence
- Reduced anxiety
- Higher self-esteem with the children
- Better health outcomes and reduction in obesity
- Increased cognitive benefits
- Healthier relationships with peers.

“Supportive, positive play interactions between fathers and their young children have also been associated with enhanced cognitive development and reduced delay among disadvantaged children. Research also suggests positive effects are ongoing throughout childhood and adolescence”^{xx}.

Importance of involving separated fathers

A 2009 longitudinal study of a group US of adolescents explored what impact closeness to their father had on their life^{xxi}. The study was well designed. The study controlled for the difference in age and how adolescents may respond differently to either the mother or father. It found that:

1. Adolescents who are close to their non-resident fathers report higher self-esteem, less delinquency, and fewer depressive symptoms than adolescents who live with a father with whom they are not close.
2. There was no difference between the two groups with respect to school grades, being involved in violent activities or substance use.
3. Adolescents living with a father with whom they are not close have better grades and engage in and less substance use than those having a non-resident father who is not close. At the same time, however, not being close to a resident father is associated with lower self-esteem compared to having a non-resident father who is not close.
4. Adolescents do best of all when they have close ties to resident fathers. A central conclusion of this study is that it is important to consider the quality of father–child relations among those who have a resident father when assessing the impact of non-resident fathers on their children.
5. Closeness to fathers reduces violence similarly in resident-father families and non-resident-father families.

Childhood obesity

The obesity of the father is associated with a four-fold increase in the risk of obesity of sons and daughters. Using data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, a strong link between father and child weight problems in over 3,000 families across a four-year period was found^{xxii}.

Similar to USA research in 2000, the father’s BMI (Body Mass Index) is a better predictor of the sons’ and daughters’ BMI independent of the offspring’s alcohol intake, smoking, physical fitness and father’s education^{xxiii}. The fathers, (not the mothers) total and percentage body fat was the best predictor of changes in daughter’s total and percentage body fat as well as the father’s diet and enjoyment of physical activity.

This finding echoes other research that found that fathers' inactivity was a strong predictor of children's inactivity and has led to the significant focus on rough-and-tumble play. The research indicates that to successfully tackle obesity in children, fathers need to be part of the solution.

Details of complaints

Brief details	Response	Was the outcome successful?

Does your organisation have an analysis of the demographics of men in the community you service (e.g. ethnicity, age, needs, employment, etc)?

Yes No NA

If yes, what are the demographic characteristics?

Appendix 10: Audit Tool 2 – Father-Inclusive Practice

POSITION:	DATE:
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Without thinking too much about each statement, please write your immediate response using the scale below.

INDICATORS OF FATHERHOOD INCLUSIVE PRACTICES		Scale: 5 (Agree) – 0 (Disagree)
	1. SERVICE CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT	
1.1	I knew & greeted all fathers using their given names	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.2	I was comfortable in interacting with fathers	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.3	I included fathers at the first point of contact with the family eg enrolment, service familiarisation	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.4	Fathers were as equally represented in governance as mothers e.g. Governing Council, Management Committee etc	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.5	Fathers were effectively informed about the service and programs	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.6	Male staff were actively sought through selection processes	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.7	Male volunteers were actively sought through recruitment processes	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.8	The aesthetic environment was inviting for men (not over feminised)	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.9	Parenting programs that specifically target or engage fathers were provided	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.10	Fathers felt comfortable and welcomed in the service	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.11	There was a team commitment to increasing involvement of fathers	5 4 3 2 1 0
1.12	There were positive and constructive images of fathers and children displayed in public areas	5 4 3 2 1 0
	TOTAL:	
	2. STAFF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES	
2.1	I understood and valued the importance of fathers in the lives of their children	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.1	I applied this knowledge in service delivery	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.3	I understood the array of father figures i.e. biological and social; biological father, step father, foster father, grand fathers, carers etc, and acknowledged the important role they played in the lives of children	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.4	I understood the demographic characteristics of fathers in the community i.e. ethnicity, employment, age, family composition, special needs, religion, health, economic circumstances etc	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.5	7. I developed my knowledge about father inclusive practices through participation in professional development events	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.6	8. I modelled effective & respectful communication i.e. verbal, non-verbal, humour, listening, empathy, tact, sensitivity etc when interacting with fathers	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.7	9. I deliberately endeavoured to engage fathers in programs and events through a range of effective strategies	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.8	I was knowledgeable about local services for fathers and referred as appropriate	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.9	I critically reflected on my practice to ensure I was inclusive of fathers & constantly looking to improve my engagement of fathers	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.10	Staff operated from a strengths based perspective when working with men	5 4 3 2 1 0

2.11	Staff valued and acknowledged the experience, skills and knowledge fathers brought to fathering	5 4 3 2 1 0
2.12	New staff and volunteers were informed about the Engaging Fathers Policy through the induction process	5 4 3 2 1 0
		TOTAL:
3. SERVICE RELEVANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY		
3.1	Strategies were in place to seek fathers input into service planning and the provision of relevant programs and activities	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.2	A range of programs were in place that were accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of fathers in the service catchment area including recreational, social, parenting etc	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.3	Operational hours supported the involvement of men ie events took place and key services were available after hours and on weekends	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.4	The service provided outreach programs for fathers from different locations	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.5	Information & services for particular groups of men were provided eg new fathers, teenage fathers, cultural groups, toddler playgroups, separated fathers etc	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.6	The service supported fathers to connect with other fathers	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.7	The service provided information to separated fathers	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.8	Father focussed events were held in both inside and outside environments	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.9	Programs and activities were designed to support <i>all</i> fathers incorporating intervention and prevention approaches	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.10	Interactions with fathers were child focussed in recognition that fathers were more likely to engage in services that supported the parent-child relationship	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.11	Barriers to the participation of fathers were identified and addressed	5 4 3 2 1 0
3.12	The service was easily accessible to fathers eg location, transport, cost	5 4 3 2 1 0
		TOTAL:
4. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY		
4.1	The service has an <i>Engaging Fathers Policy</i>	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.2	Father inclusive practice was prioritised in the annual strategic plan	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.3	Strategies and processes were in place to identify areas where a more father inclusive approach would be implemented	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.4	The service itemised father inclusivity as a regular topic for reflection and planning at staff meetings	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.5	Promotional material was specifically inclusive of men	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.6	The service undertook regular reviews to assess the involvement of fathers	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.7	The services undertook regular reviews to assess the relevance of services in response to the diverse needs of fathers	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.8	The service undertook regular reviews to assess staff skills and competence in father inclusive practices	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.9	The service provided professional development to all staff about how to engage and work with men	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.10	The service regularly reported to governing bodies about fatherhood inclusivity	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.11	The service reported of progress made in relation to implementing father inclusive practices within the Annual Report	5 4 3 2 1 0
4.12	The service raised public opinion and promoted the important role of fathers within the community	5 4 3 2 1 0
		TOTAL:

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